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**Provisional Liberations, Fragments of Salvation
The Practical-Critical Soteriology of Edward Schillebeeckx**

by

Derek Simon

**A dissertation submitted
to the Faculty of Theology, Saint Paul University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degrees of
Doctor of Philosophy in Theology
and Doctor of Theology**

**Ottawa, Canada
Thursday April 12 2001**



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ABSTRACT

“Provisional Liberations, Fragments of Salvation: The Practical-Critical Soteriology of Edward Schillebeeckx.”

This dissertation examines how the practical-critical soteriology of Edward Schillebeeckx constructs its interpretation of the connection between emancipation and salvation. I elaborate the extent and manner in which sociopolitical emancipation is intrinsic to and constitutive for salvation in Schillebeeckx’ practical-critical soteriology. I then pursue the different mediations Schillebeeckx assigns to practical-critical soteriology in sustaining a progressive political praxis. How are emancipation and salvation related to each other, and how is their interaction constructed by the practical-critical soteriology of Schillebeeckx? In the introduction, I delineate the body of primary literature which forms the basis for this study of Schillebeeckx’ practical-critical soteriology. I also indicate why this study is pertinent in relation to existing commentary on Schillebeeckx’ soteriology.

In chapter one, I establish the practical-critical definition of Schillebeeckx’ soteriology. Practical-critical soteriology identifies the kind of discourse Schillebeeckx endorses in drawing out the repercussions of the connection between salvation and emancipation. Schillebeeckx differentiates between soteriology and christology in order to accentuate the distinctness of practical-critical soteriology. Soteriology focuses on the experiences of salvation in relationships of solidarity and struggle with the disadvantaged which are sustained by the life and death of the resurrected Jesus. Christology, by contrast, turns to an explicit questioning of the personal identity of Jesus as the eschatological advocate of God’s divine solidarity with those who suffer. Schillebeeckx proposes a schema of three types of soteriology which conflict with each other on the basis of their religious interpretation of the political. He himself advocates the

third type: an interactive soteriology, namely, which maintains a productive interdependence between salvation and emancipation in the orientation of a progressive socio-political praxis. Finally, in this chapter I canvass the multiple languages of salvation and emancipation in order to delineate the semantic resources that Schillebeeckx brings to the dialectic between emancipation and salvation.

In chapter two, I examine the intrinsic and constitutive connection between emancipation and salvation in Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology. Schillebeeckx establishes the basis for their constitutive interdependence based on an extensive consideration of biblical resources. The most significant resource, in this regard, is his reading of the lifepraxis, death and resurrection of Jesus. It is the interdependence between the lifepraxis and the resurrection of Jesus that animates the dialectic between emancipation and salvation. Schillebeeckx develops a soteriological interpretation of liberating emancipation: liberating emancipations render the experience of salvation available, meaningful, believable and therefore communicable within society. Their soteriological significance notwithstanding, liberating emancipations remain provisional and partial experiences of salvation. Just as with the death of Jesus, they are liable to disruption, disintegration and the fragilities of finitude. Liberating emancipations are necessary but insufficient for a holistic salvation within the history of suffering. While such liberations validate the promises of a definitive salvation, they remain only a partial response to the history of suffering and fail to bring justice to the dead. The horizon of this definitive salvation acts as both a surplus which radicalizes and a proviso which qualifies the imperatives of liberating emancipations in society. The relationship of identity and difference between emancipation and salvation is an interdependent relationship of fragmented identity and productive difference.

In chapter three, I explore the role of social theory as a mediation which is central to practical-critical soteriology in its effort to orient the communication of love through a liberating political praxis. Soteriology has recourse to the mediation of critical analysis and interpretation in order to articulate its initiatives in socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological contexts. This raises the question of interdisciplinarity and the autonomy of practical-critical soteriology as a discourse. Schillebeeckx identifies three models of interdisciplinarity, and advocates for a correlation between practical-critical soteriology and critical social theories. The correlation with dialectical and semiotic social theories is an indispensable procedure for any soteriology that seeks to be practical and critical.

In chapter four, I examine the mediation of the sociopolitical imagination in assisting practical-critical soteriology to articulate the repercussions of eschatological faith for a liberating political praxis. This imagination is construed in terms of a political ethos and utopia situated in the legitimation of power in a sociopolitical system. Schillebeeckx proposes an eschatological utopia that, grounded in the regnocentric praxis of solidarity enacted by Jesus, articulates an alternative justice and reconciliation to deconstruct the dominant sociopolitical system and the suffering it inflicts. This chapter also looks at the critiques of utopia and ideologies that pervade the account of the sociopolitical imagination in practical-critical soteriology.

In chapter five, I examine the account of sociopolitical institutions at work in Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology. This chapter on sociopolitical agencies attempts to delineate two independent yet complementary lines of institutional agency capable of sustaining a progressive political praxis. The agency of political parties and churches is presented by Schillebeeckx in terms of contesting and legitimating the distribution of power and resources in a

sociopolitical system. Schillebeeckx proposes that the real issue for a critical political praxis under the eschatological surplus and proviso, whether in partisan or ecclesial initiatives, is not simply the *exertion* of power, but its *purpose*. In proposing that the real purpose of the legitimation and management of power is not efficacy but making possible what is necessary for salvation, Schillebeeckx is insisting on orienting political praxis towards the realization of a preferential justice and unrestricted reconciliation.

In the conclusion, I advance some elements towards a critique of Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology. There are critiques that devastate a position. There are also critiques that encourage a critical retrieval and hence extend a position. While some styles of critique devastate by paralyzing a position in its limits, other styles of critique not only preserve the limits but extend the possibilities and therefore enhance a position. In the conclusion, I formulate some critiques that preserve the limits and thereby extend the possibilities of Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology.

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INTRODUCTION

Provisional Liberations, Fragments of Salvation

Provisional liberations, fragments of salvation: the purpose of this study is to examine how the practical-critical soteriology of Edward Schillebeeckx constructs its interpretation of the connection between emancipation and salvation.

Schillebeeckx deliberately develops his soteriology with a practical and critical intent. My examination of sociopolitical liberation in Schillebeeckx' soteriology therefore involves several tasks. I establish the practical and critical articulation of Schillebeeckx' soteriology with its orientation towards a progressive political praxis (ch. 1). I elaborate the extent and manner in which sociopolitical emancipation is intrinsic to and constitutive for salvation in Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology (ch. 2), and describe their interdependent relationship as a relationship of fragmented identity amidst productive difference. I then elaborate the different mediations engaged by practical-critical soteriology in its effort to sustain a progressive political praxis. Practical-critical soteriology takes up the mediation of social theory (ch. 3) and the mediation of the sociopolitical imagination (ch. 4). Finally, I inquire into the kinds of institutional agencies that Schillebeeckx delineates within his practical-critical soteriology towards sustaining a progressive politics (ch. 5). I conclude with an assessment of some elements towards a critique of practical-critical soteriology.

0.I. The Schillebeeckx Texts

The trilogy in christology formed by *Jezus, het verhaal van een levende* / *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*,¹ *Gerechtigheid en liefde: genade en bevrijding* / *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*² and *Mensen als verhaal van God* / *Church: The Human Story of God*³ provides the primary body of textual materials which set forth the development of Schillebeeckx' soteriology. They form the primary basis for evaluating the interaction between emancipation and salvation in his soteriology. Schillebeeckx notes a direct relationship between these three texts and binds them into a unified oeuvre. This primary material is complemented by the two transitional books: *Tussentijds verhaal over twee Jezusboeken* / *Interim Report on the Books Jesus and Christ*⁴ and *Als politiek niet alles is: Jezus in onze westerse cultuur* / *On Christian*

¹ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jezus, het verhaal van een levende*, (Bloemendaal: Nelissen, 1974) / *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, (New York, NY: Seabury, 1977). After a text is cited for the first time in the dissertation, all subsequent references will abbreviate the title by citing it without its subtitle, i.e. *Jezus* / *Jesus*, unless stated otherwise.

² Edward Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde: genade en bevrijding*, (Bloemendaal: Nelissen, 1977) / *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1979).

³ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Mensen als verhaal van God*, (Baarn: Nelissen, 1989) / *Church: The Human Story of God*, (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1990). Hereafter cited as *Mensen* / *Church*.

⁴ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Tussentijds verhaal over twee Jezusboeken*, (Bloemendaal: Nelissen, 1978) / *Interim Report on the Books Jesus and Christ*, (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1980). Hereafter cited as *Tussentijds verhaal* / *Interim Report*.

Faith: The Spiritual, Ethical and Political Dimensions (1987).⁵ Published between the second and third volumes of the trilogy, these books consolidate and accentuate important developments in the trilogy. The literary and conceptual materials of these two strata of texts, the trilogy and the transitional books, are further supplemented by numerous articles dating from the late 1960s onwards that bear directly on the theme and topics of my dissertation. Important emphases, qualifications and contexts are sometimes only registered in these numerous articles.⁶ In referencing and quotation practices, originals (mostly Dutch, infrequently French or German) are cited prior to translations.^{7,8}

⁵ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Als politiek niet alles is. Jezus in onze westerse cultuur*, (Baarn: Ten Have, 1986) / *On Christian Faith: the Spiritual, Ethical and Political Dimensions*, (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1987). Hereafter cited as *Als politiek* / *On Christian Faith*.

⁶ Some of these articles have been collected in anthologies such as *God the Future of Man*, (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, 1968); *Geloofsverstaan: interpretatie en kritiek*, (Bloemendaal: Nelissen, 1972) / *The Understanding of Faith: Interpretation and Criticism*, (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, 1974); and *The Language of Faith: Jesus, Theology, and the Church*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995). Many of them, however, remain published individually and are not always available in translation to Anglophone or Francophone readers.

⁷ Where translations of Dutch texts do not exist or can be amended, I provide original translations in the footnotes. In the absence of a unified translated oeuvre, and with widely fluctuating degrees in the quality of existing translations, I have undertaken to translate into English all Dutch, French or German original texts by Schillebeeckx quoted in the body of the dissertation. Regarding the desirable canons of inclusive language, it deserves to be noted that in Dutch “mens” and “mensen” are not gender specific or liable to gender specificity the same way the English words “man” and “men” are. The terms “mens” and “mensen” are most accurately translated as “human being” and “human beings/ humans” with no specific gender or gender difference in its connotation. This linguistic issue of translation is quite separate, however, from the theological issue of Schillebeeckx’ interaction with feminist theologies and gender theories, which remains scant despite some evidence in his later writings of a growing awareness. Most existing translations of Schillebeeckx’ work regrettably tend to translate the gender neutral terms “mens,” “mensen” and “mensheid” as “man”, “men” and “mankind”. This is another reason why I am introducing new translations more consonant with the original

0.II. Review of Relevant Secondary Literature

Schillebeeckx' alignment of practical-critical soteriology with sociopolitical liberation and emancipative political praxis has received minimal development in the reception of his christology. In order to articulate the salient features of Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology, my thesis examines the relationship of identity and difference, or unity in diversity, between salvation and emancipation in an effort to represent the mediations he proposes between eschatological faith and a progressive political praxis.

In its widest framework, the reception of Schillebeeckx' christology has generated significant debates concerning: i) biblical theology grounded in historical Jesus research; ii) the multiple repercussions of historical-critical and literary-critical research methods in biblical exegesis for systematic and contextual christologies; and iii) the hermeneutical operations which facilitate recontextualizing the biblically mediated witness to Jesus the Christ in contemporary contexts of post-Enlightenment modernity. The discussion of his christology has more recently entered into the

Dutch. Italicized phrases represent italicizing in the original text, unless stated otherwise.

⁸ In those sections of the dissertation involving a more direct study of Schillebeeckx' soteriology in the christology-trilogy formed by *Jezus - Gerechtigheid en liefde - Mensen*, these three texts are cited in succession as needed, followed by references to the two transitional books, followed finally by references to additional materials from relevant articles. Otherwise, a diachronic succession of references to relevant materials, regardless of genre or venue of publication is presented.

challenges resulting from the recognition of the salvific integrity of other religious traditions in the context of post-colonial cultural pluralism and the ensuing tasks involved in reinterpreting the uniqueness and universality of Jesus the Christ. There is very little evidence in the literature in general that a comprehensive discussion of the practical-critical orientation of Schillebeeckx' soteriology has taken place, especially with respect to its alignment with emancipative praxis and structural transformation as sociopolitical dimensions of salvation.

The approach to Schillebeeckx' soteriology through its practical and critical priorities is marginal in the reception of Schillebeeckx' oeuvre. Generally evident in this reception is an overly diachronic tendency to separate his espousal of critical theology, undertaken with the reorientation of his theological hermeneutics in the late 1960s and early 1970s, from the prevalent concerns determining his christology from the mid 1970s to the late 1980s. This separation reflects a double bias in the reception of his work: first, the bias that construes his interaction with critical theory as a philosophical propaedeutic which has no discernible significance for the subsequent development of his christology; and second, to the reception of his soteriology as if it sets aside the directions connected to his critical theological values. My dissertation seeks to overcome these restrictions in the interpretation of Schillebeeckx' soteriology. Such a diachronic rift underestimates the extent to which his soteriology actually integrates and carries his earlier espousal of critical theology forward. While a collective fallacy cannot be imputed to individual discursive practices or their authors,

splitting the correlationist mediations and liberationist soteriology which are inseparably constitutive for his christology into a critical theology, on the one hand, and a theoretical hermeneutical christology, on the other, represents a restriction of interpretation that can only misconstrue his efforts.

Such a diachronic division further contributes to the evident preoccupation with epistemic and methodological issues in his christology. Issues such as integrating the findings of historical- and literary-critical biblical exegesis into contemporary contextual christology, or relating the proportional hermeneutics of recontextualizing scripture and tradition to the questions of continuity and innovation in christian identity, or considering the foundational cognitive interaction between experience, interpretation and theoretical models -- issues such as these find ample consideration and debate in the reception of his christology. While these concerns merit the serious theological attention they abundantly continue to receive, the practical and critical intent directing his renewal of christology is often relegated to the margins and minimized. It is precisely this practical-critical orientation of his soteriology, however, that motivates his forays into biblical exegesis, the hermeneutics of recontextualization, as well as foundational issues in epistemology. Schillebeeckx repeatedly draws our attention to several aspects of the many histories of suffering in order to intensify the urgent imperative of this practical-critical engagement. The phenomenology of afflicted faces, the narratives of violation, the ethical responsibilities arising from negative experiences of contrast, and in a particular way the empowering witness of the life-praxis of Jesus in

solidarity with the violated: these aspects of the histories of suffering converge to subordinate more epistemological issues to the practical-critical intent of his soteriology. Whereas the functional specialization of these forays is intellectually necessary and legitimate, the practical-critical intent identifies the phenomenology of human suffering as the departure and constant reference point for christological discourse.

While the recognition of the influence of the critical theories of the Frankfurt School on Schillebeeckx' theological hermeneutics during the late 1960s and early 1970s is common,⁹ the comprehensive representation of the practical-critical and liberationist approaches to the interpretation of salvation in Schillebeeckx' soteriology remains incidental.¹⁰ Some representations of Schillebeeckx describe his theology as political without making any connections with christology, while others take up his

⁹ As instances of this, see the articles by William I. Portier, "Schillebeeckx' Dialogue with Critical Theory," *Ecumenist* 21 (Jan-Feb 1983) 20-27; and "Edward Schillebeeckx as Critical Theorist: The Impact of Neo-Marxist Social Thought on his Recent Theology," *The Thomist* 48 (July 1984) 341-367; and "Interpretation and Method," in *The Praxis of Christian Experience: An Introduction to the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx*, ed. C.M. Hilkert and R.J. Schreiter, (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1989), 18-34.

¹⁰ For instance, while Leo Scheffczyk, "Christology in the Context of Experience: On the Interpretation of Christ by E. Schillebeeckx," *The Thomist* 48 (July 1984) 383-408, acknowledges Schillebeeckx' engagement with critical theory in an early section of his study, the subsequent discussion of Schillebeeckx' christology leaves the extent of this engagement and its pivotal contributions to his soteriology unexamined. This remains equally true of his later study "Hertaling van het Christus-gebeuren: een onmogelijke opgave?" in *Volgens Edward Schillebeeckx*, ed. E. Kuypers, (Leuven-Apeldoorn: Garant, 1991), 53-90. This is also the case with the full-length study of Tadahiko Iwashima, *Menschheitsgeschichte und Heilserfahrung*, (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1982), which, while taking stock of Schillebeeckx' engagement of critical theory (pp. 141-158), presents his soteriology (pp. 334-362) within a predominantly anthropocentric and transcendental hermeneutic that leaves the practical-critical theological intention behind.

christology but leave its sociopolitical dimensions both under- and even un-determined.

Both tendencies impede the creative appropriation of the initiatives emerging from Schillebeeckx' christology. I concur with William Portier when he writes that "Schillebeeckx has handed us not just another topical essay on narrative as subversive memory but the first full-scale attempt to do a critical Christology. We need to discuss the viability of this conception as a whole."¹¹ My dissertation seeks to advance the discussion of Schillebeeckx' soteriology regarding its dialectical approach to the interaction between salvation and emancipation and its procedural mediations in support of a liberating sociopolitical praxis. For purposes of clarity, the secondary literature can be distinguished on the basis of literary genre between article-length studies, whether in the form of individual or collected chapters, and monograph-length studies. The review will be limited to considering those literatures which hint at but do not pursue the sociopolitical dimension of Schillebeeckx' soteriology.

0.II.1. Article-length Studies

The article length-studies confirm the need for developing a comprehensive account of the principal features of Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology. In a

¹¹ William I. Portier, "Schillebeeckx' Dialogue with Critical Theory," *The Ecumenist* 21 (1983) 26. While Portier is ground-breaking in his effort to maintain Schillebeeckx' organic links between critical theology and christology, he states that "This essay, then, is not about Schillebeeckx' Christology as such but about the Frankfurt School's impact on it," *ibid.*, 20.

synthesis of Schillebeeckx' theological project up until the early 1980s, Bowden claims in a late chapter of his book that Schillebeeckx' thinking subsequent to the publication of *Jezus* in 1974 can be best characterized as a political theology.¹² While refraining from explicitly describing what how political functions in his theology, let alone christology, this minimal sketch at least doesn't dissociate the critical political intent and the christological prolegomena from each other.

The effort represented by *Meedenken met Edward Schillebeeckx* does not collectively convey the liberationist orientation of Schillebeeckx' christology.¹³ While one contribution identifies how the contextual and orthopractic turn of Schillebeeckx' thinking positions it within the movement of political theology, it prescinds from any discussion of his christology. The articles on his christology tend to be depoliticized and more concerned with hermeneutical, intertextual, and anthropological issues.

The recognition of the sociopolitical implications of Schillebeeckx' christology are recognized but minimally elaborated in some of the contributions to the landmark English retrospective on Schillebeeckx' theology edited by Hilkert and Schreiter,

¹² John Bowden, *Edward Schillebeeckx: Portrait of a Theologian*, (London: SCM Press, 1983), 117-129.

¹³ H. Häring, T. Schoof, and A. Willams (eds.), *Meedenken met Edward Schillebeeckx*, (Baarn: Nelissen, 1983).

entitled *The Praxis of Christian Experience*.¹⁴ While the articles of Callewaert¹⁵ and Goergen¹⁶ recognize a connection between salvation and sociopolitical liberation, they do not articulate the specifically christological basis for this nor examine the mediations between them. While the connection is noted, an extensive discussion of these salient features in Schillebeeckx' soteriology is not pursued. In his contribution to the same volume, Hinze includes the structural and institutional dimensions of oppression and liberation in his framing of an eschatological ethic.¹⁷ While he appreciates the role of utopias as an ethical force, the connections between Schillebeeckx' soteriology, utopia, and human action remain minimal.

While Schreiter recognizes political contextuality "not as a by-product of theology but as central to the theological enterprise" of Schillebeeckx in his first of two essays reviewing Schillebeeckx' achievement, this nonetheless remains marginal to his

¹⁴ Mary Catherine Hilker and Robert J. Schreiter (eds.), *The Praxis of Christian Experience: An Introduction to the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx*, (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1989).

¹⁵ Janet M. Callewaert, "Salvation from God in Jesus the Christ: Soteriology," in *The Praxis of Christian Experience*, ed. C.M. Hilker and R.J. Schreiter, (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1989), 77-80.

¹⁶ Donald J. Goergen, "Presence to God, Presence to the World," in *The Praxis of Christian Experience*, ed. C.M. Hilker and R.J. Schreiter, (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1989), 94-96.

¹⁷ Bradford E. Hinze, "A Prophetic Vision: Eschatology and Ethics," in *The Praxis of Christian Experience*, ed. C.M. Hilker and R.J. Schreiter, (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1989), 131-146.

discussion of the salient features of his christology.¹⁸ This obtains also in his second, more recent review essay. The sociopolitical contextuality of Schillebeeckx' christology is left without any extensive representation.¹⁹ These partial efforts suggest a false dilemma, either between critical theology or contextual christology, which is foreign to Schillebeeckx' liberationist project and correlationist procedure. During a chapter of his recent introduction to Schillebeeckx' theology, Kennedy takes note of the constitutive political orientation of Schillebeeckx' theology, yet leaves the christological resources determining the sociopolitical features of such action unexplored.²⁰ In sum, while these articles identify the connection between salvation and sociopolitical liberation, they do not address the full range of Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology.

0.II.2. Monograph-length Studies

The monograph-length studies of Schillebeeckx do not necessarily change this state of the research. One study that stands on its own as far as articulating the soteriological aspects of Schillebeeckx' theology of salvation history is Tadahiko

¹⁸ Robert Schreiter, "Edward Schillebeeckx," in *A Handbook of Christian Theologians*, ed. D.G. Peerman and M.E. Marty, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1984), 625-638.

¹⁹ Robert Schreiter, "Edward Schillebeeckx," in *The Modern Theologians*, ed. D.F. Ford, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 152-161.

²⁰ Philip Edward, *Schillebeeckx*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 111, 126-127.

Iwashima's *Menschheitsgeschichte und Heilserfahrung*, published in 1982.²¹ The development of the connection between salvation and liberation, however, remains very transcendental in its presentation. This transcendental presentation diminishes the practical and correlationist methodological commitments pursued by Schillebeeckx. Originally a doctoral thesis, the diachronic style of presentation governing the bulk of the study summarizes, in consecutive fashion, the chronological developments marked by the publication of *Geloofsverstaan: Interpretatie en Kritiek* (1972) ; *Jezus* (1974) ; and *Gerechtigheid en liefde* (1977). This entirely diachronic approach undermines the attempt at a meaningful synthesis of recurrent themes and prevalent conceptual clusters across the texts. While Iwashima repeats the relation between redemption and liberation proposed in *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, there is no development of the complex interaction between them and certainly no consideration of the productive mediations towards a progressive political praxis which defines Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology. Preferring to describe Schillebeeckx' soteriology as a "methodisch reflektierte Soteriologie,"²² this methodically reflective soteriology remains theoretically hermeneutical to the neglect of any practical-critical intent and accompanying mediations.

In fact, the entire interaction between salvation and sociopolitical liberation remains suspect in Iwashima's representation of Schillebeeckx' soteriology. Iwashima

²¹ Tadahiko Iwashima, *Menschheitsgeschichte und Heilserfahrung*, (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1982), especially 317-361.

²² *Ibid.*, 401.

injects a considerable distance between emancipation and the liberation of human freedom. This leaves the concept of liberation somewhat depoliticized in a transcendental anthropology of human freedom.²³ Thus the mediations of liberation through a correlation with sociocritical analysis and the critiques of ideologies and utopias are never articulated in relation to soteriology. He further posits a circular exchange between historical salvation and eschatological salvation: “Dabei vermittelt die weltliche Heilspraxis die Dimension des irdischen Heils und die die Geschichte übersteigende religiöse Praxis die Dimension des eschatologischen Heils.”²⁴ This introduces a split, however, between historical salvation and eschatological salvation which is difficult to corroborate in the position of Schillebeeckx. For Schillebeeckx, it is precisely the historical which mediates the eschatological, as his reading of the profound connection between the resurrection and the lifepraxis of Jesus indicates. As a consequence of his dualistic conception of two different kinds of salvation, the eschatological significance of emancipation is minimized and the language of liberation depoliticized in Iwashima’s study. There is, as we shall see, a distinction between definitive salvation and liberating emancipation that Schillebeeckx maintains, but both definitive salvation and liberating emancipation are eschatologically interdependent. Indeed, Schillebeeckx expressly takes issue with this modification of his position in his

²³ See *Ibid.*, 337 ff.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 360: “Worldly salvation praxis thus mediates the dimension of earthly salvation and the history-transcending religious praxis [mediates] the dimension of eschatological salvation.”

introduction to Iwashima's work, and his comments remain a direct inspiration for the work of this dissertation: "Meines Erachtens zu Unrecht sieht er darin eine 'zirkuläre Struktur', wo ich eher eine dialektische Struktur für gegeben ansehe ... Trotzdem will ich in *Christus und die Christen* keineswegs sagen, daß die weltliche Praxis die Dimension des irdischen Reichs und die religiöse Praxis die Dimension des eschatologischen Heils vermittele. Im Gegenteil, die religiöse und die politische Praxis sind konstitutiv eins (...)." ²⁵ In pursuit of this constitutive unity, my thesis proposes that Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology rests on the dialectic between salvation and emancipation. It remains fair to say of Iwashima's work that his reconstruction of Schillebeeckx' entry into critical theology and his subsequent christology remain disconnected due to an overly genetic repetition of the chronology of the production of Schillebeeckx' texts. This chronological repetition underrates the level of integration

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 17: "In my view, he inaccurately sees therein a 'circular structure,' whereas I see a dialectical structure indicated ... I nonetheless do not want to say in *Christus und die Christen* that worldly praxis mediates the dimension of the earthly realm and religious praxis the dimension of eschatological salvation. To the contrary, religious and political praxis are constitutively one (...)." This dialectical structure and constitutive unity needs to be articulated in terms of what Schillebeeckx develops at the level of the connection between salvation and emancipation, but the implications are clear. *Christus und die Christen* refers to the German edition of *Gerechtigheid en liefde: genade en bevrijding*. Schillebeeckx goes on to emphasize in his introduction that Iwashima does not have the benefit of his upcoming third volume in christology (which did not appear until 1989), which he says will emphasize the socio-cultural historical mediations which more clearly articulate the relation between salvation and liberation. He also indicates that Iwashima does not have the benefit of his recent course work in "dialectical hermeneutics" as well as "hermeneutical as well as socio-analytic mediations of theology" available to him which is "soon to appear." I suspect that Schillebeeckx is here referring to *Theologisch Geloofsverstaan anno 1983*, (Baarn: Nelissen, 1983) for the former, while "Theologie als bevrijdingskunde," *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 24 (1984) 388-402 is the only text in which Schillebeeckx publishes his thinking on the latter in those very same terms.

and cohesion operative in the practical-critical soteriology. It deserves to be noted that Iwashima's study was conducted when Schillebeeckx' christology was only partly available, thereby missing out on the consolidation of the practical and critical aspects of his soteriology in *Als politiek niet alles is* (1986), in the concluding volume of the christological trilogy *Mensen als verhaal van God* (1989) and in several significant articles. These exclusions thoroughly date his study.

The book *Sporen van de bevrijdende God* by Erik Borgman draws a contrast between theologies of emancipation and university theologies.²⁶ His purpose in doing so is to show that university theologies can learn a great deal from theologies of emancipation, especially in the area of the collaboration between various kinds of social analyses and theological hermeneutics. While the theologies of emancipation (primarily denoting, as the title indicates, Latin American liberation theologies, but also including Black and feminist theologies) and their representatives are clearly identified, the university theologies are diffusely and sporadically referred to. It is therefore unclear in his book which type of paradigm Schillebeeckx' work falls under, such that Borgman's references suggest that at times Schillebeeckx falls within both. His arguments and conclusions remain valid for the paradigm under discussion, but it would be fallacious to make conclusive inferences to the individual work of particular representatives identified with this paradigm without more extensive investigations and interpretations

²⁶ Erik Borgman, *Sporen van de bevrijdende God: universitaire theologie in aansluiting op latijnsamerikaanse bevrijdingstheologie, zwarte theologie en feministische theologie*, (Kampen: Kok, 1990).

of their respective positions. It is in this regard that the sporadic references to Schillebeeckx, while sometimes expressing a definite judgment on the direction of his work, imply identifications of his theology with aspects of either emancipation theologies or university theologies. While reference is made to Schillebeeckx' christology, no comprehensive treatment of practical-critical soteriology or its related procedural mediations towards a progressive political praxis is advanced. While themes parallel to my dissertation can be noted, Borgman's discussion is paradigmatic and not particular to the work of Schillebeeckx in any sustained and systematic way. Thus, while Borgman more or less writes with a constant eye on Schillebeeckx' work, there is no full account of the latter's positions in this book.

In light of this monograph, however, two article-length studies by Borgman on the theology of Schillebeeckx deserve to be mentioned. These articles directly treat his work and take the paradigmatic conclusions of the book in the direction of particular evaluations of the work of Schillebeeckx.²⁷ In the first article, Borgman clearly identifies Schillebeeckx's work as a university theology in dialogue with and influenced by emancipation theologies.²⁸ This categorization is based on considerations of the epistemic location and primary plausibility context of the theologian.²⁹ It might be

²⁷ Erik Borgman, "Theologie tussen universiteit en emancipatie: De weg van Edward Schillebeeckx," *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 26 (1986) 240-258; and "Van cultuurtheologie naar theologie als onderdeel van de cultuur: de toekomst van het theologisch project van Edward Schillebeeckx," *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 34 (1994) 335-360.

²⁸ Borgman, "Theologie tussen universiteit en emancipatie," 241-245.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 252-255.

possible, however, to argue that Schillebeeckx' theology, including his christology, is emancipative rather than academic. These articles exhibit a refreshing critical distance with the work of Schillebeeckx while appreciating its basic orientations and creative achievements. Borgman's assessment claims that Schillebeeckx' work, while it sets forth with an aim that it does not fully realize, provides a worthwhile path to pursue.³⁰ The work of Borgman and of my current dissertation may be complementary and convergent, but are worked out at different levels of particularity and with different accents. Borgman's work does not investigate the interaction between salvation and emancipation and does not directly examine the procedural mediations animating Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology.

The dissertation by Brian D. Berry entitled "Fundamental Liberationist Ethics: The Contribution of the Later Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx" can also be mentioned for its complementary elements to my dissertation.³¹ While touching on themes and materials that parallel the current dissertation, his diachronic method in studying Schillebeeckx' ethics is set forth in terms of an archeology excavating multiple theoretical influences. The overriding concern organizing his reading and presentation

³⁰ Borgman, "Van cultuurtheologie naar theologie als onderdeel van de cultuur," 358: "En in al zijn brede aandacht voor de menselijke geschiedenis, dringt Schillebeeckx' theologie toch niet door dit niveau van het menselijk bestaan. Zodat hij er ook niet in slaagt de christelijke overlevering, de concrete verhalen en theoriën, op dit niveau voor eigentijdse lezers relevant te maken ... Ik meen dat dit anders kan en dat het ook in de lijn ligt van Schillebeeckx' cultuurtheologisch project om het anders te doen Zo opgevat heeft Schillebeeckx' cultuurtheologische project nog een belangrijke toekomst voor zich."

³¹ Brian D. Berry, "Fundamental Liberationist Ethics: The Contribution of the Later Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx," (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Boston College, 1995).

of Schillebeeckx is to line up the meta-ethical resources (theological hermeneutics, anthropology and christology) for a liberationist ethics of political justice that responds to debates in the North American reception of liberation theology and contested issues of foundationalism in fundamental ethics. The strength of this study lies in grounding fundamental ethics in the framework of a regnocentric praxis. While this study briefly touches on social theory, ideology criticism and the biblical theologies of Jesus and grace for the sake of advancing a theological foundation for social ethics, it doesn't explicitly thematize practical-critical soteriology, the dialectic between emancipation and salvation or the mediations of social theory and the sociopolitical imagination with any prolonged coverage.

Finally, the recent appearance of a yet untranslated doctoral dissertation by Bo Claesson, entitled "Experience, Faith, Action: A Contextual Study of the Concept of Society in the Later Christology of Edward Schillebeeckx" needs to be signaled.³² A recent report indicates that the thesis is concerned with "the cultural integration of the believer, elaborated in the later Christology of Schillebeeckx, as a necessary quality of the process of sustaining a living human society with its tensions between suffering, liberation and freedom. Such an analysis is impossible if there is not a systematic

³² Bo Claesson, "Efarenhet, tro, handling. En kontextuell studie av samhällsuppfattningen i Edward Schillebeeckx senare kristologi," (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation: Universiteit van Göteborg, 2000). According to Stan P.A. Gipman's brief report ("Schillebeeckx' werk slaat aan in Scandinavië," *Nieuws brief Stichting Edward Schillebeeckx* 19 [Sept 2000] 4) this dissertation was defended on April 6, 2000 in Göteborg, Sweden.

understanding of the human person in the context of society.”³³ Apparently concerned with theological anthropology and the theology of culture, the focus of this thesis remains different from my current undertaking.

0.II.3. Summary

In sum, the available discussion of sociopolitical liberation and emancipative political praxis in the practical- critical soteriology of Edward Schillebeeckx is provisional and sporadic. Existing commentary usually leaves the themes central to this discussion in a vague and diffuse state of juxtaposition and nowhere demonstrates a sustained attempt at comprehensive analysis or synthesis. The one exception of Borgman’s work, which problematizes only a few partially or broadly related aspects of the salient features of Schillebeeckx’ practical-critical soteriology, remains schematic, except for generalizing claims. This thesis attempts a comprehensive analysis and synthesis of the connections between sociopolitical liberation and practical-critical soteriology in the christology-trilogy and directly related works.

³³ As reported by Gipman, in *ibid.*, 4.

0.III. Chapter Summaries

This dissertation examines how the practical-critical soteriology of Edward Schillebeeckx constructs its interpretation of the connection between emancipation and salvation. I elaborate the extent and manner in which sociopolitical emancipation is intrinsic to and constitutive for salvation in Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology. I then pursue the different mediations Schillebeeckx assigns to practical-critical soteriology in sustaining a progressive political praxis. How are emancipation and salvation related to each other, and how is their interaction constructed by the practical-critical soteriology of Schillebeeckx? In the introduction, I delineate the body of primary literature which forms the basis for this study of Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology. I also indicate why this study is pertinent in relation to existing commentary on Schillebeeckx' soteriology.

In chapter one, I establish the practical-critical definition of Schillebeeckx' soteriology. Practical-critical soteriology identifies the kind of discourse Schillebeeckx endorses in drawing out the repercussions of the connection between salvation and emancipation. Schillebeeckx differentiates between soteriology and christology in order to accentuate the distinctness of practical-critical soteriology. Soteriology focuses on the experiences of salvation in relationships of solidarity and struggle with the disadvantaged which are sustained by the life and death of the resurrected Jesus. Christology, by contrast, turns to an explicit questioning of the

personal identity of Jesus as the eschatological advocate of God's divine solidarity with those who suffer. Schillebeeckx proposes a schema of three types of soteriology which conflict with each other on the basis of their religious interpretation of the political. He himself advocates the third type: an interactive soteriology, namely, which maintains a productive interdependence between salvation and emancipation in the orientation of a progressive socio-political praxis. Finally, in this chapter I canvass the multiple languages of salvation and emancipation in order to delineate the semantic resources that Schillebeeckx brings to the dialectic between emancipation and salvation.

In chapter two, I examine the intrinsic and constitutive connection between emancipation and salvation in Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology. Schillebeeckx establishes the basis for their constitutive interdependence based on an extensive consideration of biblical resources. The most significant resource, in this regard, is his reading of the lifepraxis, death and resurrection of Jesus. It is the interdependence between the lifepraxis and the resurrection of Jesus that animates the dialectic between emancipation and salvation. Schillebeeckx develops a soteriological interpretation of liberating emancipation: liberating emancipations render the experience of salvation available, meaningful, believable and therefore communicable within society. Their soteriological significance notwithstanding, liberating emancipations remain provisional and partial experiences of salvation. Just as with the death of Jesus, they are liable to disruption, disintegration and the fragilities of finitude. Liberating emancipations are necessary but insufficient for a holistic salvation within the history of

suffering. While such liberations validate the promises of a definitive salvation, they remain only a partial response to the history of suffering and fail to bring justice to the dead. The horizon of this definitive salvation acts as both a surplus which radicalizes and a proviso which qualifies the imperatives of liberating emancipations in society. The relationship of identity and difference between emancipation and salvation is an interdependent relationship of fragmented identity and productive difference.

In chapter three, I explore the role of social theory as a mediation which is central to practical-critical soteriology in its effort to orient the communication of love through a liberating political praxis. Soteriology has recourse to the mediation of critical analysis and interpretation in order to articulate its initiatives in socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological contexts. This raises the question of interdisciplinarity and the autonomy of practical-critical soteriology as a discourse. Schillebeeckx identifies three models of interdisciplinarity, and advocates for a correlation between practical-critical soteriology and critical social theories. The correlation with dialectical and semiotic social theories is an indispensable procedure for any soteriology that seeks to be practical and critical. Schillebeeckx is concerned to legitimate the role of critical social theory within practical-critical soteriology in order to be consistent with theological criteria and grounded in existing social contexts of oppression and alienation. He maintains the autonomy of theology as a distinct discourse among the social and human sciences.

In chapter four, I examine the mediation of the sociopolitical imagination in assisting practical-critical soteriology to articulate the repercussions of eschatological faith for a liberating political praxis. This imagination is construed in terms of a political ethos and utopia situated in the legitimation of power in a sociopolitical system. Schillebeeckx proposes an eschatological utopia that, grounded in the regnocentric praxis of solidarity enacted by Jesus, articulates an alternative justice and reconciliation to deconstruct the dominant sociopolitical system and the suffering it inflicts. This chapter also looks at the critiques of utopias and ideologies that pervade the account of the sociopolitical imagination in practical-critical soteriology. While they are both functions of the sociopolitical imagination, Schillebeeckx does not interpret utopia and ideology in relationship to each other. They function quite separately and without reference to each other. A wholly negative definition of the category pervades his use of the language of ideology, while Schillebeeckx grants both deviant and constructive capabilities to the category of utopia.

In chapter five, I examine the account of sociopolitical institutions at work in Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology. This chapter on sociopolitical agencies attempts to delineate two independent yet complementary lines of institutional agency capable of sustaining a progressive political praxis. The agency of political parties and churches is presented by Schillebeeckx in terms of contesting and legitimating the distribution of power and resources in a sociopolitical system. The public mandates of practical-critical soteriology insist on indirectly sustaining the development of a political

consensus through partisan and ecclesial political agencies. Such a consensus de- and reconstructs the legitimation of power and the distribution of social goods in society. Schillebeeckx proposes that the real issue for a critical political praxis under the eschatological surplus and proviso, whether in partisan or ecclesial initiatives, is not simply the *exertion* of power, but its *purpose*. In proposing that the real purpose of the legitimation and management of power is not efficacy but making possible what is necessary for salvation, Schillebeeckx is insisting on orienting political praxis towards the realization of a preferential justice and unrestricted reconciliation.

In the conclusion, I advance some elements towards a critique of Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology. There are critiques that devastate a position. There are also critiques that encourage a critical retrieval and hence extend a position. While some styles of critique devastate by paralyzing a position in its limits, other styles of critique not only preserve the limits but extend the possibilities and therefore enhance a position. I seek to formulate some critiques that preserve the limits and thereby extend the possibilities of Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology.

CHAPTER ONE

Towards a Practical-Critical Soteriology

In 1952, Schillebeeckx issued “De broederlijke liefde als heilswerkelijkheid,” a theological reflection on caritative love as the breakthrough of God’s redemptive love in interpersonal relationships.¹ Reflecting on the first Johannine epistle, this text offers a pastoral and pertinent starting point for discerning the outlines of Schillebeeckx’ later interest in soteriology and the role of liberation in realizing fragments of redemption. He writes that “broederlijke liefde *is*, in de sterke zin van dit woord, Gods verlossings-liefde zelf als gerealiseerd in ons.”² The expression of caritative love, embodied and shared as a tangible reality between human beings, arises from initiatives of the divine self dwelling within the capacities for human action and entrusted to human beings. Whenever the love entrusted to humans is embodied and communicated between them, a redemptive event takes place, for it is a divine event intimately expressing the gift of God’s self among humans:

Het wezen zelf van God, die liefde is, openbaren of zichtbaar maken in onze positieve levenshouding, kan immers niet anders als een heilig gebeuren zijn, een religieus verschijnsel: inzet van het komen van het Rijk Gods op deze wereld, voltooiing van verlossing.³

¹ Edward Schillebeeckx, “De broederlijke liefde als heilswerkelijkheid,” *Tijdschrift voor Geestelijk Leven* 8 (1952) 600-619.

² *Ibid.*, 602: “brotherly love is, in the strongest sense of the word, God’s redemptive love itself as realized in us.”

³ *Ibid.*, 611: “To reveal or make visible in our positive stance in life the very being of God, which is love, can always only be a holy event, a religious phenomenon: approach of the

The breakthrough of God's reign into human interactions is divinely initiated yet entrusted to human beings in their relations with one another. This divinely initiated and humanly mediated breakthrough is redemptive for human beings.

By the time Schillebeeckx is preparing the publication of the last volume of his christology-trilogy in the mid-1980s, his understanding of this love between humans includes structural implications for socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological contexts. Drawing a contrast between two different kinds of love on the basis of its interpersonal or sociopolitical focus, Schillebeeckx insists on the urgent imperatives of political love.

In een moderne tijd, waarin we tot het besef zijn gekomen dat maatschappelijk-politieke structuren (die mensen vaak knechten) ook veranderbaar zijn, krijgt de naastenliefde naast haar andere, oudere verschijningsvormen ook de gestalte van *politieke liefde* ... Gezien de huidige, nu algemeen bewust geworden *situatie van het lijdende mensdom* kan politieke liefde wel eens de historisch urgente gestalte van hedendaagse heiligheid worden, de historische imperatief van het ogenblik ... een waarlijk-menselijke bevrijding die door de politieke liefde wordt gedragen, is, in haar emancipatie, tegelijk (door metanoia heen) een brok verlossing-van-godswege.⁴

coming of God's reign in this world, the realization of redemption." This connection between the being of God as love and the inbreaking of God's reign as a redemptive intervention is still evident in Schillebeeckx's writing during the mid-1980s at a time when he is synthesizing his christology. See Edward Schillebeeckx, *Als politiek*, 24 / *On Christian Faith*, 19; and "De levensweg van Jezus, beleden als de Christus," in *Religie als levende ervaring*, ed. M. Messing, (Assen / Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1988) 141. This is summarized, in his final volume concluding the christology-trilogy, as follows: "*Rijk van God*, sleutelwoord in Jezus' boodschap, is de bijbelse uitdrukking voor het wezen van God: onvoorwaardelijke en bevrijdende soevereine liefde," *Mensen*, 130 / *Church*, 111.

⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Als politiek*, 69-71 / *Christian Faith*, 71-73: "In a modern age, in which we have come to realize that social and political structures (which often enslave people) can also be changed, the love of neighbour also takes the form of *political love* alongside its other older manifestations ... Given the present *situation of suffering humanity* which has now

Given the spiraling levels of ecological instability as well as the vast dimensions of socio-cultural and political-economic oppression experienced by most children, women and men on earth, the efforts to embody and communicate love involve securing the political conditions that alleviate systemic injustice while renewing the basic elements of dignified living. This political love seeks to exert a liberating influence in global and regional contexts of suffering. The expression of sociopolitical love through liberating praxes continues to be described in terms of divinely engendered and humanly mediated movements. Such movements reverse the conditions and legacies of suffering through healing and empowerment for the sake of renewed solidarities.

This development in the understanding of love, amidst an underlying continuity, provokes my current interest in Schillebeeckx' soteriology and serves to establish the contours of my investigation. Where love is previously described as caritative and interpersonal, love is recently described as emancipative and public. If the range of this shift is striking, the continuity between the two texts spanning the literary career of Schillebeeckx is equally remarkable. In both readings, divine activity and human agency, the gift of salvation and human responsibility are mutually implicated in the

been generally recognized, political love can become the historically urgent form of contemporary holiness, the historical imperative of the moment ... a praxis of liberation which is supported by political love is, in its emancipation, at the same time (through metanoia) a fragment of redemption through God's initiatives." Schillebeeckx briefly notes in *Gerechtigheid en liefde, / Christ*, 812, that a reconciled community "cannot just be realized in benevolent interpersonal relationships; it is equally necessary in the anonymous forms of sociopolitical institutions and structures ... for they are the modern political form of specifically christian *caritas*." This distinction between interpersonal and sociopolitical forms of love is further developed in the last volume of the trilogy in the distinction he draws between caritative and political *diakonia* or service (*Mensen*, 188 / *Church*, 169).

unified yet complex reality of communicating and embodying the shared renewal of ecohuman life. Human beings are involved in and responsible for engendering redemptive movements that transform not only personal interactions but the broader landscapes of socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological relationships. It is noteworthy that Schillebeeckx identifies any dilemma as false that unnecessarily places interpersonal and sociopolitical forms of love in competition with each other.⁵ While interpersonal love is no substitute for sociopolitical love, the urgent demands on sociopolitical love do not justify trivializing on principle the responsibilities of interpersonal love.

Schillebeeckx consistently asserts throughout the development of his soteriology that the experience of salvation from oppression and suffering, communicated by Jesus in his identification with God's inbreaking reign and its solidarity with the vulnerable, entails extensive public repercussions for sociopolitical living.⁶ It is only an abstract and contested personalism that limits the redemptive initiatives of God's reign to a private interiority or segregated enclosure of intimate relations.⁷ This kind of sectarian

⁵ Schillebeeckx, "Kritische theorieën en politiek engagement van de christelijke gemeente," *Concilium* 9 (1973) 59-60 / "Critical Theories and Christian Political Commitment," in *The Language of Faith: Jesus, Theology, and the Church*, ed. Robert J. Schreiter, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 80.

⁶ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 508 / *Jesus*, 619; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 516, 536-537, 547 / *Christ*, 563, 585-586, 597; *Mensen*, 130-131, 135, 151 / *Church*, 111-112, 116, 132. See also *Tussentijds verhaal*, 68 / *Interim Report*, 58; and *Als politiek*, 25 / *Christian Faith*, 19-20.

⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 512 / *Jesus*, 623-624; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 516, 684, 747 / *Christ*, 563, 744, 809. See also *Tussentijds verhaal*, 68-69 / *Interim Report*, 58-59; *Als politiek*, 72 / *Christian Faith*, 75. For a larger perspective, consult "Kritische beschouwingen over het 'secularisatie'-begrip in verband met allerlei thema's van het pastoraal concilie," in *Pastoraal concilie van de Nederlandse kerkprovincie, V*, (Amersfoort: De Horstink: 1969),

withdrawal is illusory and liable to political manipulation.⁸ The gift of salvation from oppression and suffering entails possibilities of love through justice and reconciliation that sustain a variety of liberating sociopolitical struggles.⁹ These struggles seek to reorient the structures of a sociopolitical system in order to mitigate alienation and generate communicative relations. At the heart of the structural transformation of society looms the question of how the political communication of love might be mediated.

The development of Schillebeeckx' soteriology is set within, perhaps even conditions, this telling shift in the understanding of love from a restricted location in

133-134 (hereafter cited as "Kritische beschouwingen over het 'secularisatie' - begrip"); "Godsdienstige herleving in conflict met sociale inzet," in *Politiek of Mystiek? Peilingen naar de verhouding tussen religieuze ervaring en sociale inzet*, ed. E. Schillebeeckx et.al., (Brugge / Utrecht: Emmaus / Desclée de Brouwer, 1972), 24-26; "Stilte gevuld met parabels," in *Politiek of Mystiek? Peilingen naar de verhouding tussen religieuze ervaring en sociale inzet*, ed. E. Schillebeeckx et.al., (Brugge / Utrecht: Emmaus / Desclée de Brouwer, 1972), 75-77; "God, Society and Human Salvation," in *Faith and Society: Acta Congressus internationalis theologici lovaniensis*, ed. M. Caudron, (Gembloux: Ducolot, 1978), 90; "Op weg naar een christologie," *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 18 (1978) 148-149; and "Can Christology be an Experiment?" *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 35 (1980) 13.

⁸ Edward Schillebeeckx, "Forumdiscussie," in *Politiek of Mystiek? Peilingen naar de verhouding tussen religieuze ervaring en sociale inzet*, ed. E. Schillebeeckx et.al., (Brugge / Utrecht: Emmaus / Desclée de Brouwer, 1972), 84; "God, Society and Human Salvation," 92.

⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 548 / *Jesus*, 673; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 742 / *Christ*, 803-804; *Mensen*, 150-151, 194-195 / *Church*, 132, 175-177. See also *Tussentijds verhaal*, 68 / *Interim Report*, 58; *Als politiek*, 25, 71-72 / *Christian Faith*, 19-20, 74. For further references consult "De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze," *Socialisme en Democratie* 29 (1972) 70; "The Christian and Political Engagement," *Doctrine and Life* 22 (1972) 119; "Kritische theorieën en politiek engagement van de christelijke gemeente," 59-60 / "Critical Theories and Christian Political Commitment," 79-80; "Bereid tot het evangelie van vrede," *Concilium* 19 (1983) 101 / "Eager to Spread the Gospel of Peace," in *The Language of Faith: Jesus, Theology, and the Church*, ed. Robert J. Schreiter, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 205; "God, Society and Human Salvation," 91; and "Op weg naar een christologie," 148.

caritative and interpersonal concerns to an extensive engagement of ecological, socio-cultural and political-economic challenges. On the one hand, the shift in focus dramatically relocates the interpretation of God's salvific activity, previously limited to the intimate atmosphere of intersubjective concerns, in the transformation of ecological, socio-cultural and political-economic systems. On the other hand, there is a profound unity amidst the change, in so far as both understandings of salvation share the same view of the interactive exchange between the inbreaking of God's reign and the responsibility of human action for historically realizing the divine initiatives and seeing them through in tangible public outcomes. Through a liberating praxis, practical-critical soteriology seeks to mediate the political communication of love in a society. My dissertation is situated in the structuring horizon of this development amidst continuity in Schillebeeckx' understanding of transformative love. Taking up the implications of this development, I therefore seek to identify and evaluate the dialectical interaction between the religious and political dimensions of transformative love, between salvation and emancipation in Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology. In the rest of this chapter I set forth the practical-critical commitment of Schillebeeckx' soteriology.

1.I. Soteriology and Christology

Schillebeeckx deliberately casts the first two volumes of the christology-trilogy in the genre of a prolegomenon, an introductory discourse, in christology.¹⁰ This is significant for deconstructing the primacy of the theoretical system as a deductive approach to christology and signaling a new hermeneutical context for his soteriological endeavor. The soteriological accent of the very first prolegomenon to the christological trilogy is already evident when, introducing his ground-breaking book *Jezus* in 1974, he writes:

De ondertitel: 'een christologische proeve' is daarom nog te pretentief en voortijdig. Dit boek is een prolegomenon. Ik noem het een 'prolegomenon' niet om hetgeen in feite in dit boek gezegd is, maar om hetgeen ik aanvankelijk had bedoeld: een synthetische visie te geven op het hedendaagse probleem van 'verlossing' en 'emancipatie' of menselijke zelfbevrijding(...).¹¹

The interpretation of redemption and emancipation in relation to each other signals the new hermeneutical context. The exegetical retrieval of the historical Jesus was

¹⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 28, 548 / *Jesus*, 35, 673; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 22 / *Christ*, 25; *Mensen*, 28 / *Church*, 8-9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 28 / *ibid.*, 35: "The subtitle 'An Experiment in Christology' is still too pretentious and premature, therefore. This book is a prolegomenon. I call it a prolegomenon not because of what is actually said in it, but because of what had been my original intention: to offer a synthetic view of the contemporary problem of 'redemption' and 'emancipation' or the self-liberation of humans (...)." Anticipating the second volume in the trilogy, he writes at the end of *Jezus*, 545 / *Jesus*, 669: "Wel vraagt dit boek (dat ik immers een prolegomenon heb genoemd) een wezenlijk complement in wat ik noemen zou: een reflectie op wat "genade" is, d.i. een uiteenzetting waarin binnen een hedendaagse verstaans- en handelings-horizon het probleem van *verlossing* en *emancipatie* – het huidige probleem van onze bevrijdingsgeschiedenis – ter sprake zou moeten komen. Wellicht krijgt dit boek dus nog een vervolg."

precisely an effort, through the return to original sources, to break the methodological impasse of a purely theoretical systematization and deductive epistemology in christology. The turn to exegesis, however, despite the massive extent of Schillebeeckx' historical-critical undertaking in *Jezus*, is only an interim and subsidiary move on the way to recontextualizing the experience and interpretation of salvation within the new hermeneutical context of the history of suffering. This shift from an exegetical retrieval to a recontextualizing hermeneutics is already initiated within *Jezus / Jesus*. "Part IV" of this text, entitled "De menselijke lijdensgeschiedenis op zoek naar zin en bevrijding" / "The Human History of Suffering in Search of Meaning and Liberation," clearly moves beyond a biblical theology of Jesus (the focus of the the first three parts of the book) to a contemporary christology of salvation-in-Jesus, the crucified and risen one. This recontextualizing intention, however, does not make it very far in this first volume of the trilogy. In so far as this fourth and final part of *Jezus* is still sorting out an interpretation of the dialectic between universality and particularity in the uniqueness of Jesus, the interdependence of theoretical and narrative forms of christology, and the unity in difference between God's activity in history and human agency in the practical mediation of truth, very little of "Part IV" remains dedicated to exploring the history of suffering as the actual contemporary context for the elaboration

of the connection between redemption and emancipation.¹² This recontextualizing effort continues to be explicitly operative well into the third volume of the christology.¹³

The articulation of this context, while identified in *Jezus*, is only fully developed in the sequel volume of the trilogy. In fact, “Part IV” of *Gerechtigheid en liefde / Christ* can be approached as an intertextual commentary on “Part IV” of *Jezus / Jesus*.¹⁴ The fourth and final part of *Gerechtigheid en liefde / Christ* thus actually carries forth a development anticipated but not fully realized in the first volume. Recontextualizing the interchange between salvation and liberating emancipation is the overriding focus of the concluding Part Four of the second volume, especially section Two entitled “Verlossing en bevrijding / Redemption and Liberation.”¹⁵ A striking literary parallelism between the two volumes can be observed that conveys their thematic coherence. Surveying the integrity of his text as a literary whole, he introduces *Gerechtigheid en liefde* by indicating that “De nieuwtestamentische ervaring van genade en heil van

¹² A scant eleven pages (see *Jezus*, 502-513 / *Jesus*, 612-625) are all that remain for exploring the new hermeneutical context. Please consult the Table of Contents (*Jezus*, 7-12 / *Jesus*, 7-15) for the layout of the four parts of this book.

¹³ See *Mensen / Church*, which resumes the same hermeneutical context (pp. 24-26, 47-49, 72-74 / 5-6, 28-29, 53-55), specifically legitimates the hermeneutics of recontextualization operative in the trilogy (pp. 52-63 / 33-45) and takes soteriological christology in the direction the practical mediation of ecclesial mission (121-204 / 102-186). The theological genre of the third volume defies any easy identification, partly due to Schillebeeckx’ own vacillating descriptions of it (ranging from christology to ecclesiology to pneumatology) and partly due to a conflict of interpretations over its significance. One is tempted to say that, while the first two volumes represent prolegomena, this volume represents a resumé, a summary.

¹⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 591-775 / *Christ*, 646-839.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 665-775 / *ibid.*, 724-839.

Godswege in Jezus Christus wil ik in dit boek ontleden als oriëntatie voor wat men zou kunnen noemen: een eerste aanzet tot een moderne christelijke soteriologie.”¹⁶ This declaration of intent is anticipated in *Jezus* and persists in *Gerechtigheid en liefde*. The two volumes find their thematic unity in developing a contemporary soteriology of salvation related to the desire for liberation within the history of suffering. He thus further introduces *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, writing:

Een hedendaagse, Jezus- en evangelie-getrouwe christologie die greep krijgt op ons zoekend bewustzijn en daarin heil bemiddelt, kan slechts procesgewijs worden opgebouwd. Wellicht is zelfs na dit tweede boekdeel pas een begin mogelijk van wat ‘christologie’ genoemd wordt. Ik ben geneigd om ook dit tweede boek een ‘prolegomenon’ te noemen; niet uit een zeker kritisch scepticisme (zij het wel mede uit huiver voor voorbarige totaliseringen), maar omdat ik vanuit het christelijk eschatologisch visioen ervan overtuigd ben dat elke levens-relevante christologie slechts mogelijk is op de wijze van een *pro-legomenon*: een voorlaatste woord, een zoeken naar het juiste ‘legomenon’ of woord, want mij is in onze geschiedenis verlossing alleen bekend in persoonlijk en collectief ervaren *fragmenten*, waarop echter Jezus’ kritische en produktieve belofte van een ondefinieerbare, definitieve heilstoekomst rust.¹⁷

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 20 / *ibid.*, 22: “In this book I want to analyse the New Testament experience of grace and salvation from God in Jesus Christ as an orientation for what we might call a first attempt at a modern christian soteriology.”

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 22 / *ibid.*, 25: “A contemporary christology which is faithful to Jesus and the gospels, which comes to influence our questing awareness and in so doing communicates salvation, can only be built up by stages. Perhaps it will be possible to make a beginning on what is called ‘christology’ *after* this second volume. I would be inclined to call even this second volume a prolegomenon: not out of a certain critical scepticism (though also in fear of over-hasty totalizations), but because I am convinced by the christian eschatological vision that any christology which is relevant to life is only possible in the form of a *pro-legomenon*: a work before the last word, a search for the right ‘legomenon’ or word. For in our history I know redemption only in fragments which are experienced personally and collectively; in which, however, Jesus remains the critical and productive promise of an undefinable definitive future salvation.”

This recognition of the unfinished quality of this genre applies analogously to the copious article-length texts he has written in the field of christology. It must be noted that the exegesis of structural soteriological elements in the biblical traditions of various New Testament literatures¹⁸ is subsidiary to the further recontextualization of redemption and sociopolitical liberation within contemporary contexts of suffering and evil. Schillebeeckx repristinates christological discourse in the mode of multiple introductions that stay in close proximity to the connection between histories of suffering and the practical-critical agency of Jesus as the advocate of God's solidarity. Schillebeeckx refuses to construct his christology in terms of a meta-historical or even trans-cultural theoretical system, even though his prolegomena reflect multiple layers of covert hermeneutical concerns related to previous conciliar and theological traditions in christology. This restraint arises from the contextual and action-centred concerns of his christology. Schillebeeckx seeks to articulate the identity and saving work of Jesus in the context of histories of suffering and the practical mediation of liberation. Such practical mediations communicate the pneumatic memory of Jesus and his regnocentric praxis in effective and meaningful ways.¹⁹ The conditions in which the experience of salvation from God in Jesus remains possible are renewed in a way that tangibly connects with contemporary struggles for sustainable human living. The restraint also reflects the priority of the realities of suffering and action over transcendental or

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 423-471, 511-537 / *ibid.*, 463-514, 558-586.

¹⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Mensen*, 186-187, 195 / *Church*, 167-168, 176.

theoretical considerations. For Schillebeeckx, it is the narrative proximity to negative contrast experiences and the ethical impulse to resist the causes and effects of suffering, not idealistic anthropologies or dehistoricized styles of ontotheology, which ensure the conditions for a liberating discursivity and reflexivity in theology.

The characterization of his own work in christology as only an introductory and always incomplete achievement underlies Schillebeeckx' flexible and interchangeable use of the terms "christology" and "soteriology." Christology in a sense can never leave soteriology behind, for the articulation of the significance of Jesus the Christ is for ever dependent on the interpreted experience of his liberating solidarity with suffering human beings in multiple contexts of changing historical conditions. However, the experiential interpretation of salvific encounters with God in Jesus inevitably leads to the question of who Jesus is and how it is that the lifepraxis and suffering of Jesus communicate God's solidarity of love with vulnerable people in society.

Given that the interpretation of Jesus as the eschatological prophet of God's solidarity remains central throughout his christology, Schillebeeckx sometimes describes his incipient and incomplete christology, at least in part, as a soteriology. Schillebeeckx notes that "*Sôteria* betekent heil of verlossing. Soteriologie is verlossingsleer: de visie die men heeft op 's mensen heil, verlossing of bevrijding."²⁰ He subsequently amplifies that "Het griekse woord *sôteria* betekent heil of verlossing.

²⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 608 / *Jesus*, 751: "*Sôteria* means salvation or redemption. Soteriology is the teaching of redemption: the view one has of the salvation of human beings, redemption or liberation."

Soteriologie betekent dus verlossingsleer: visies en verwachtingen, die mensen hebben m.b.t. hun gewenste héél-zijn, welzijn en heil, verlossing en bevrijding.”²¹ In an effort to recontextualize and communicate the New Testament witness to redemptive encounters and experiences, Schillebeeckx’ contemporary soteriology focuses on the experience and interpretation of redemptive events as events of sociopolitical liberation with and for human beings in regional and global contexts. Such events aim at the sustainable well-being and happiness of humans who, on a local as well as global basis, share the exhaustible and threatened life of planet earth in the construction of ecohuman societies. Soteriology focuses on these events in terms of the way in which they effect a release from suffering for the sake of engaging deeply humanizing developments that range from the structural to the interpersonal. Soteriology includes the theological interpretation of the religious significance of liberating praxes as praxes that communicate justice and reconciliation amidst structural oppression and exclusion.

Given the proximity of the terms “christology” and “soteriology,” I would like to delimit the field of christology in order to further specify the practical and critical orientation of soteriology (see 1.I.1-2 below). This assists in clarifying what these slightly different terms mean for Schillebeeckx. Christology can be described as interpreting the experience of God’s saving activity in and with Jesus, the eschatological

²¹ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 840 / *Christ*, 906: “The Greek work *sôtêria* means salvation or redemption. Thus soteriology means the teaching of redemption: views and expectations which humans have in respect of their salvation, well-being and wholeness, redemption and liberation.”

prophet confessed as the Christ. By recontextualizing the person, glory, execution and activity of Jesus, christology tries to ensure that God's saving initiatives as a God for and with human beings are accessible within contemporary contexts of action and interpretation provoked by suffering. Christology strives to ensure that these saving initiatives are not only accessible, but as inviting, intelligible and communicable in current contexts for contemporary women and men as they were in the first century CE and have continued to be, at least somehow and to some extent, in every generation since. Christology recontextualizes the cumulative memory of the life, execution and pneumatic outpouring of Jesus and narrates the collective stories of being transformed by these memories. Out of these recontextualized biblical memories and stories of grace, christology articulates the question of who this God of Jesus the Christ is that heals and empowers amidst suffering. Christology also articulates the question concerning the personal identity of Jesus, wondering how it is that he effectively communicates God's solidarity and compassion in relation to other human beings.

While christology is pivotal for and central to theology, Schillebeeckx consistently limits the range of christology by insisting on the polycentric diversity of theology. He does not advocate a soteriological monism, which absolutizes the cultural relativity of a dehistoricized version of the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth.²² He refuses to endorse Jesus as a divine emanation that exhaustively empties God of all further

²² Schillebeeckx, *Mensen*, 184-185 / *Church*, 165-166. See also *Als politiek*, 10 / *Christian Faith*, 2-3.

transcendence or revelatory communications.²³ Jesus the Christ both reveals and conceals God in herself as well as in relation to creatures.²⁴ The God of creation is always more than the historical particularity of the divine manifested in the contingent humanity of Jesus. Negative eschatology, the theology of creation, pneumatology, ecclesiology, autonomous ethics and the history-of-religions, to name but some fields of discourse, limit the range of christology. They significantly qualify the repercussions of this field and direct it towards an interdependent interaction with these associated centres of theological and interdisciplinary endeavour. Recognizing other theological foci broadens and diversifies the interpretation of God's initiatives in the universe in support of a sustainable future for human living on earth. According to Schillebeeckx, this breadth and diversity of theology both qualify and contribute to christology: "Dit laatste impliceert ook dat we theologie niet kunnen herleiden tot een christologie: er zijn vragen en ook religieuze problemen die buiten het christologisch veld vallen."²⁵ While it is not the place of this thesis to pursue this combined intensification and relativization of christology with all their ramifications for theological discourse, recognizing the polycentric breadth of theology deters a totalizing reading of Schillebeeckx' practical-

²³ *Ibid.*, 184 / *ibid.*, 165. See also *Als politiek*, 11 / *Christian Faith*, 3-4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 29 / *ibid.*, 9. See also *Jezus*, 545 / *Jesus*, 668-669; "Christelijke spiritualiteit als ziel en bevrijding van de ethiek," *Tijdschrift voor Geestelijken Leven* 41 (1985) 412-413; *Als politiek*, 10 / *Christian Faith*, 2; and "Identiteit, eigenheid en universaliteit van Gods heil in Jezus," *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 30 (1990) 271-272.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 29 / *ibid.*, 9: "we cannot reduce theology to a christology: there are questions and also religious problems which fall outside the field of christology." See also "Christelijke spiritualiteit als ziel en bevrijding van de ethiek," 412; *Als politiek*, 11 / *Christian Faith*, 3.

critical soteriology and situates soteriology in relation to other theological considerations.

A contrast thus emerges between soteriology and christology in Schillebeeckx' theology. Soteriology is concerned with the interpretation of Jesus confessed as the Christ from the perspective of what Jesus did and continues to do for us in terms of sustaining a liberating life. Soteriology articulates the experiential and interpretative involvement of women and men in fragments of salvation on the experiential basis of tangible or anticipated liberations. On the other hand, christology signifies the ensuing reflection on Jesus as the superabundant person and agency that actually renders such redemptive encounters possible. Two central questions associated with christology and extensively handled by Schillebeeckx concern the interpretation of Jesus' Abba-experience as well as the uniqueness and universality of Jesus the Christ as an eschatological servant of God's reign. Whereas soteriology concerns the experiential recognition of God's saving activity with Jesus, both current and promised, within events of healing and empowerment amidst violent sociopolitical systems and alienating interpersonal relationships, christology concerns the being and agency of Jesus and how it is that Jesus can represent the definitive communication of God's solidarity seeking justice with love.

Schillebeeckx thus asserts that the experience and interpretation of God's liberating activity in Jesus with and for human beings is, at the cognitive level of knowing, prior to the reflection on the personal identity of Jesus, confessed as the Christ, in his

existential being and agency.²⁶ Critical reflection on interpreted experiences of fragments of salvation engenders and orients subsequent reflection on the identity of Jesus the Christ. “C’est dire qu’il y a une priorité de la *sotériologie* (explication doctrinale de cette expérience de salut) sur la *christologie* (réflexion sur la personnalité, l’être profond de Jésus). La christologie est une explicitation de la sotériologie, et non l’inverse.”²⁷ Schillebeeckx therefore maintains that “Soteriologie is de weg naar christologie, – dit wordt uit het nieuwe testament wel duidelijk!”²⁸ While soteriology precedes christology, the personal identity of Jesus as the advocate of God’s solidarity remains the origin of the salvific repercussions for sociopolitical structures and interpersonal relationships. In bringing the identity of the historical Jesus, confessed as the eschatological Christ, into language, christology nonetheless remains inseparable from the saving activity which Jesus embodies, communicates and celebrates as a distinct advocate of God’s reign. Soteriology gives rise to and pervades christological language. In this sense, christology includes soteriology. Soteriology articulates the historically situated departure points of christology with reference to tangible

²⁶ Schillebeeckx, “Can Christology be an Experiment?” 1.

²⁷ Edward Schillebeeckx, “Jésus de Nazareth, le récit d’un vivant,” *Lumière et vie* 134 (1977) 34: “That is to say that there is a priority of *soteriology* (the doctrinal explanation of this experience of salvation) over *christology* (reflection on the personality, the ultimate being of Jesus). Christology is an extrapolation from soteriology, and not the reverse. It is thus the experience of salvation in the deeds and words of Jesus that determines the meaning of the titles, not the titles of Jesus that impose a meaning on his words and deeds.

²⁸ Schillebeeckx, “Op weg naar een christologie,” 33: “Soteriology is the way towards christology – this has been made clear throughout the New Testament!” See also *Tussentijds verhaal*, 72 and 109-112 / *Interim Report*, 62 and 95-97.

manifestations of salvific experiences at once given and constructed. Soteriological language, by articulating healing activity and empowering encounters, eventually leads to questions of the identity of Jesus and God as the communicative sources of liberating activity within creation. Soteriology is at the origin of and culminates in christology. Soteriology and christology, therefore, are interrelated yet distinct lines of theological discourse.²⁹

Sometimes Schillebeeckx includes a soteriological accent in his use of the term “christology.” Most often, however, the term “christology” is used in an entirely restricted sense as the critical reflection on the identity of Jesus in relation to the reign and being of God, both in the New Testament and subsequent christian traditions, in specific contrast to the contextually determinate focus of soteriology.³⁰ Soteriology focuses on what the activity of God with and in Jesus means *for humans* in their experiences and interpretations of salvation and sociopolitical liberation amidst conditions of oppression and resistance. Christology focuses on who this Jesus is, in relation to both human beings and in relation to God’s reign and being, such that his person and lifestyle are capable of effectively communicating healing and empowerment, with distinctive productive and critical force, amidst human suffering. Within this contrast, soteriology remains connected to christology as bringing to language the transformative repercussions of the person and praxes of Jesus for the lives

²⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Tussentijds verhaal*, 72 and 109-112 / *Interim Report*, 62 and 95-97.

³⁰ Schillebeeckx, “Can Christology be an Experiment?” 1-2.

of marginal and oppressed people. These repercussions are the starting point, the impetus for the sustained encounter and eventual reflection on the identity of Jesus confessed as the Christ. Soteriology acts as the methodological starting-point of further christological interpretation. For its part, christology remains connected to soteriology as the naming of transcendence within the contingent humanity and finite agency of Jesus. This naming witnesses to the liberating initiatives encountered through God's salvific activity in Jesus. In its restrictive sense, christology articulates the personal identity of Jesus in relation to God and other humans in terms of metaphorical actions or languages. In its restrictive sense, christology also interprets the uniqueness and universality of God's saving activity in Jesus confessed as the crucified and exalted Christ. In so far as Jesus not only reveals but conceals the divine Other constitutive for his identity and praxis in relation to God's reign and realm, negative limits are set to christological discourse. Christology and soteriology signify different yet wholly interrelated aspects of the religious discourse that tries to articulate the historical interactions between the divine and the human in the desire to communicate love through justice and reconciliation. This thesis is directly concerned with soteriology and its focus on the interpretation of the experience of salvation in the history of suffering. It is within these parameters of discourse that I consolidate the practical-critical orientation of Schillebeeckx' soteriology.

1.I.1. Practical Soteriology

Since practical and critical connote differentiated yet related emphases in the christology of Schillebeeckx, each of these aspects will be considered individually, even though they are inseparable. Schillebeeckx introduces phenomenological, theological, biblical and ecclesial warrants for intensifying the practical turn of his soteriology. These elements are interconnected yet merit distinct attention.

Schillebeeckx situates his christology in the global as well as particular experiences of human suffering that burden vast ranges of people in their daily subsistence and struggle to simply live on the earth. Schillebeeckx attends to the phenomenon of suffering in the various sites and contexts of the degrading and absurd experiences lived by many people. These contexts of violence, humiliation and defeat define the structure of experience and horizon of interpretation for the majority of human beings dwelling on the earth today.³¹ Schillebeeckx feels that there are widespread movements for the making whole of society and for the restoration of the integrity of sustainable living.³² Schillebeeckx therefore situates the task of soteriology within two global aspects of

³¹ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 15, 508-512 / *Jesus*, 19-20, 619-623; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 591, 666 / *Christ*, 647, 725; *Mensen*, 25-26 / *Church*, 5-6. See also *Tussentijds verhaal*, 65 / *Interim Report*, 55.

³² Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 18-20 / *Jesus*, 24-25; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 614 / *Christ*, 671; *Mensen*, 250 / *Church*, 232. See also *Tussentijds verhaal*, / *Interim Report*, 57-58; "God, Society and Human Salvation," 87-88; "Questions on Christian Salvation of and for Man," in *Towards Vatican III: The Work that Needs to Be Done*, ed. D. Tracy et.al., (New York, NY: Crossroads, 1978), 27-28; "Theologie, cultuur, politiek," *Dominikaans Leven* 46:1 (1990) 9.

human living. First, he exposes soteriology to the faces, narratives and analyses of suffering that make up the daily lives of the majority of the earth's populations, namely the violated who struggle and the vanquished dead. Second, he aligns soteriology with the tenacious desire for social healing and empowerment. By exposing and aligning soteriology in this way, Schillebeeckx disorients traditionally systematized christological discourse. This exposure and alignment are risked in order to uproot soteriology from a protective theoretical enclave. Such a practical initiation confronts soteriology, as a discursive practice, with the following set of questions: what context is soteriology rooted in, whose voices does it valorize or exclude, which conversations are validated, and which defining actions does it sustain?

In addition to this phenomenological grounding of soteriology in the practical as an exposure and response to concrete human suffering, Schillebeeckx offers a theological legitimation for the practical turn in soteriology. The confrontation with human suffering raises the theological issue of evil and the ultimate sovereignty of divine goodness. Along with Ricoeur and Metz, Schillebeeckx does not find that this challenge to the integrity of life capable of a theoretical resolution. The reality of evil cannot be encompassed by any intellectual account, whether soteriological, grounded in a speculative interpretation of God's saving activity; or metaphysical, grounded in the consideration of immutable divine attributes.³³ Schillebeeckx also refuses the Hegelian,

³³ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 509 / *Jesus*, 620-621; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 666-669 / *Christ*, 725-728; See also "Plezier en woede beleven aan Gods schepping," *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 33 (1993) 340-344.

ontologizing option of Moltmann, which dialectically situates suffering in God in an effort to communicate God's loving proximity with the violated and the vanquished.³⁴ Schillebeeckx endorses the move to convey that God is vulnerable to the misery of the marginalized and a friend to the excluded. In Jesus and his suffering, God is silent and defenseless. Yet this defenselessness does not locate suffering in God. God remains the wholly Other in absolute resistance to evil, the complete positivity of the good that liberates. Consistent with this, he refuses to interpret the torture and execution of Jesus through mythopoetic or metaphysical lenses, lenses that would somehow sacralize violence.³⁵ By letting the events stand in their naked barbarity as a banal humiliation and legal murder, Schillebeeckx allows the distressing injustice and political violence in the execution of Jesus the full measure of their negative impact. Schillebeeckx therefore locates unjustifiable suffering and failure in the finitude of human beings, rather than in a divine imperative or divine oversight.³⁶ Evil and good remain contrasted in utter asymmetry, with the priority and ultimacy belonging to the good. The capacity for suffering, rooted in the ambiguity of finitude, is not capable of restricting the unlimited and infinite gratuity of God.

³⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 669 / *Christ*, 728.

³⁵ Schillebeeckx, *Mensen*, 138-139, 144 / *Church*, 119-121, 125.

³⁶ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 669-670 / *Christ*, 728-729; *Mensen*, 157 / *Church*, 138.

In contrast to these dialectical, metaphysical and speculative theories, Schillebeeckx argues that the practical response to evil is most coherent.³⁷ This practical response entails remembering and resisting evil at the ethical level of human action. Remembrance and resistance are bolstered by continuing to believe in God as the God of pure positivity whose superabundant communication of goodness ultimately prevails over finite evil.³⁸ It further entails the possibility of a future given by God to the historical efforts in support of justice and love beyond the cumulative limits of historical efforts and failure.³⁹

In addition to the phenomenological and theological bases for the practical emphasis in soteriology, Schillebeeckx presents a christological warrant to further intensify the practical turn in soteriology. The primary focus of Schillebeeckx' soteriology as a discourse is to assist in recontextualizing the practices and interpretative resources of a lifestyle based on Jesus's praxis of God's reign of solidarity, and thus sustain the experience of salvation today.

Christologie is een interpretatie van Jezus van Nazaret: daarin wordt gesteld dat de God van Jezus verlosser van alle mensen is ... Maar wat verlost, wat bevrijding en verlossing bemiddelt, is niet de interpretatie, maar het verlossingsmiddel zelf ... Bovendien is de verlossing door Jezus pas uniek en universeel in zoverre dat datgene wat in Jezus gebeurde, wordt voortgezet in zijn leerlingen. Zonder

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 666-667 / *ibid.*, 726; see also *Jezus*, 509 / *Jesus*, 620-621; and "Mysterie van ongerechtigheid en mysterie van erbarmen," *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 15 (1975) 9-11.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 671 / *ibid.*, 730.

³⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 513 / *Jesus*, 625; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 774-775 / *Christ*, 838; *Mensen*, 116-117 / *Church*, 98-99. See also *Als politiek*, 63-64 / *Christian Faith*, 64-65.

relatie tot een verlossende en bevrijdende praktijk van christenen, hangt de verlossing, destijds door Jezus gebracht, in een louter speculatieve, ijle lucht ... Zo ontvangt christologie haar authenticiteit uit de concrete praxis van het rijk Gods: de geschiedenis van Jezus' levensweg moet zich voortzetten in zijn leerlingen (...).⁴⁰

Soteriology interprets Jesus' gratuitous practices -- practices of healing, of social inclusion, of economic independence, of table-fellowship and of telling narrative parables which rehabilitate the social imagination -- in order to discern equivalent, not identical but proportionally similar, practices in contemporary contexts. Soteriology, as a discourse made possible by yet conditioning the lifestyle oriented by the memory of the regnocentric praxis of Jesus, is practical in so far as, articulating God's solidarity a solidarity that reverses suffering for the flourishing of justice and love, it is a discourse aiming at the motivation and reorientation of human action. In supporting actions that mitigate absurd suffering and by advocating structural alternatives that set oppressed peoples free to engage their well-being, soteriology is historically productive.

In addition to these phenomenological, theological and christological bases for the practical approach in soteriology, Schillebeeckx presents soteriology as a reflection on ecclesial and secular institutional practices. Practical soteriology thus reflects on the

⁴⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Mensen*, 186-187 / *Church*, 167-168: "Christology is an interpretation of Jesus of Nazareth: it explains that the God of Jesus is the redeemer of all humans ... But what redeems, what brings liberation and redemption, is not the interpretation but the means of redemption itself ... Moreover redemption through Jesus is unique and universal only in so far as what happened in Jesus is continued in his disciples. Without any relationship to a redeeming and liberating practice of Christians, redemption, brought by Jesus, remains in a purely speculative, empty vacuum ... christology derives its authenticity from the concrete praxis of the kingdom of God: the history of Jesus' career must be continued in his disciples (...)."

sociopolitical repercussions of the practices of mainline churches,⁴¹ ecumenical coalitions,⁴² critical christian communities⁴³ and christian liberal-democratic or christian socialist movements⁴⁴ in terms of the regnocentric praxis of Jesus. By assessing their constructive engagements, their passive complicities, their outright failures or the residual ambiguity of their public effects, especially in so far as they affect impoverished or vulnerable people, soteriology is practical; it evaluates the various public repercussions of these institutions and movements in either diminishing or increasing social suffering and systemic violence. Apart from solidarity with the

⁴¹ Edward Schillebeeckx, "Theologische draagwijdte van het magisteriële spreken over sociaal-politieke kwesties," in *Geloofsverstaan: interpretatie en kritiek*, (Bloemendaal: Nelissen, 1972), 144-161 / "The Magisterium and the World of Politics," in *God the Future of Man*, (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, 1968), 141-166; "Godsdienstige herleving in conflict met sociale inzet," 29; *Jezus*, 511-512 / *Jesus*, 623; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 723, 746-747, 757 / *Christ*, 784, 809, 820; "Spreken over God in een context van bevrijding," *Tijdschrift voor Geestelijken Leven*, 40 (1984) 10-16; *Als politiek*, 72-79 / *Christian Faith*, 75-83; *Mensen*, 252 / *Church*, 234; "Terugblik vanuit de tijd na Vaticanum II," in *Tussen openheid en isolement: het voorbeeld van de katholieke theologie in de negentiende eeuw*, ed. E. Borgman and A. van Harskamp, (Kok: Kampen, 1992), 165-167.

⁴² Edward Schillebeeckx, "Het nieuwe Godsbeeld, secularisatie en politiek," *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 8 (1968) 61 / "Man's Future on Earth," in *God the Future of Man*, (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, 1968), 196; "Kritische beschouwingen over het 'secularisatie'-begrip," 138-139; *Jezus*, 547 / *Jesus*, 672.

⁴³ Schillebeeckx, "Kritische theorieën en politiek engagement van de christelijke gemeente," 47-61 / "Critical Theories and Christian Political Commitment," 71-82; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 723, 746-747, 757 / *Christ*, 784, 809, 820; "Glaube und Weltverantwortung," *Begegnung* 12 (1984) 12-13.

⁴⁴ Schillebeeckx, "Het nieuwe Godsbeeld, secularisatie en politiek," / "Man's Future on Earth," 195-196; "De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze," 68-78; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 709-712, 716-728 / *Christ*, 770-773, 779-789; "Evangelische inspiratie en politiek," *Schrift* 56 (Apr 1978) 43-48; *Als politiek*, 72-79 / *Christian Faith*, 75-83.

violated and the vanquished in a liberating praxis, Schillebeeckx laments, the witness of the churches is unpersuasive and unintelligible.⁴⁵

These phenomenological, theological, christological and ecclesial warrants concretize the epistemological principle of a dialectical interaction between theory and praxis that pervades soteriology. Soteriology is a richly textured network of narratives and discourse that presuppose and condition orthopraxis.⁴⁶ For Schillebeeckx, orthopraxis denotes befriending the burdened, developing inclusive and egalitarian relationships that eradicate master-slave pragmatics, advocating structural and systemic sociopolitical improvements to the quality of life for the oppressed majorities on earth, risking personal suffering while resisting evil in solidarity with the violated and the vanquished, and developing ecclesial practices of structural justice and reconciliation. In these ways, orthopraxis witnesses to the pure positivity of God as both the creator and redeemer of the integrity of life, even when failure and death seem to prevail in the ambiguous historical interim.

⁴⁵ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 511 and 524-525 / *Jesus*, 623 and 639; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 588 and 739-740 / *Christ*, 642-643 and 801; *Mensen*, 252 / *Church*, 234.

⁴⁶ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 603 / *Christ*, 659.

1.1.2. Critical Soteriology

Within this practical bearing of soteriology, a practical bearing identified as an orthopraxis within histories of suffering that empowers human flourishing despite the absurdity of evil, the critical dimension of soteriology is fully at work. The entire rubric of “practical-critical intent,” which for Schillebeeckx connotes an “*‘in begrip brengen’ van de concrete samenlevingsstructuren (...) met het oog op een praxis (...)*,”⁴⁷ finds its way into Schillebeeckx’ soteriological discourse through the evident inspiration of the Frankfurt School such as Horkheimer, Adorno and the early Habermas. Schillebeeckx engages the emancipative interest of these theorists and adopts their critical stance. He sees this interest and stance as a means of articulating God’s solidarity with the dispossessed. This solidarity is tangible in Jesus’ subversive activities of healing the wounds of suffering and empowering a reconstructive approach to sociopolitical relationships among women and men who are broken and burdened. Schillebeeckx goes so far as to admit that a coalition between soteriology and critical social theories is a historically justified and imperative demand of *caritas*, of redemptive love.⁴⁸

Schillebeeckx does not, however, view this coalition with critical theory as capitulating to contemporary versions of neo-marxist ideology, as caving into a naive

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 837 / *ibid.*, 900: “conceptualizing specific social structures (...) with a view towards praxis (...).”

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 712 / *ibid.*, 773. See “God, Society and Human Salvation,” 94.

acceptance of all aspects of various critical theories, or even as submitting to a mere repetition of their central tenets. By affirming the unique relationship of Jesus with the hidden God, which is constitutive for his definitive role in the approach of God's reign, Schillebeeckx emphasizes that the foundation of the critical power of practical soteriology lies with God's eschatological initiatives in Jesus. This critical power does not derive from the adaptation of Jesus to current instrumental agendas.⁴⁹ This unique and constitutive relationship of Jesus to God as the advocate of divine solidarity is the origin of the critical power of Jesus' activity. The power of his witness is not derived from contemporary instrumental interests, whether strategic or communicative.

Three independent elements thus construct the relative autonomy of soteriology in its coalition with the emancipative discourse of critical theories. The *first* element is epistemological. Exposed to the trauma and distress of multiple contexts of affliction, the remembrance of various histories of suffering generates a critical epistemic force that resists the hegemony of injustice and alienation.⁵⁰ In recognizing "het primaatschap van de cognitieve, kritische en bevrijdende kracht van herinneringen aan lijdensgeschiednissen," Schillebeeckx maintains that if "de praktische rede deze herinneringen serieus

⁴⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Als politiek*, 10-11 / *Christian Faith*, 3.

⁵⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, / *Jesus*, 621-622; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 614, 662 / *Christ*, 671, 721-722; *Mensen*, 196-197 / *Church*, 178. See also "Naar een 'definitieve toekomst': belofte en menselijke bemiddeling," in *De toekomst van de religie*, ed. Tijdschrift voor Theologie, (Utrecht: Desclee de Brouwer, 1972), 45-46; and "Questions on Christian Salvation of and for Man," 124-126.

neemt, zetten ze die rede aan tot een zeer bepaald bevrijdend handelen.”⁵¹ This epistemic force arises from negative contrast experiences and the concrete ethical imperatives they generate.

Het gaat in het geloof om de cognitieve kracht die eigen is aan het verhaal van een ‘pathische’ praxis, vooral de pathische kracht van lijdensverhalen van zeer concrete mensen. Immers, wie niet idealistisch denkt, moet de door het christendom verkondigde universele mensenliefde innerlijk verbinden met *solidaire partijdigheid* voor elk beschadigd en gekrenkt mensenlijke bestaan.⁵²

The epistemic force of stories of suffering precede their articulation through strategies of critical rationality. They therefore remain independent of any limitations that might accrue to this type of rationality from extraneous philosophical, ideological or strategic commitments. Their epistemic force can stir up ranges of empathy that motivate an active solidarity of resistance and reconstruction.

The *second* regulative element is christological. The memory of the life and death of Jesus, given a positive future through the resurrection event, offers a kerygmatic basis for the dangerous critical power of christian testimony.⁵³ Interpreted

⁵¹ Schillebeeckx, *Mensen*, 195-196 / *Church*, 177. In this same section, Schillebeeckx upholds “the primacy of the cognitive, critical and liberating power of memories of histories of suffering,” and therefore maintains: “If practical reason takes these recollections seriously, they prompt this reason to quite particular liberating action.”

⁵² *Ibid.*, 197 / *ibid.*, 178: “It is a question, within faith, of the cognitive power which is unique to the story of a ‘suffering’ praxis, especially the empathic power of stories of suffering of very concrete humans. Whoever does not think idealistically must connect the universal human love proclaimed by Christianity to a *partisan solidarity* with the wounded and diseased human condition.”

⁵³ Schillebeeckx, “Kritische theorieën en politiek engagement van de christelijke gemeente,” 57-58 / “Critical Theories and Christian Political Commitment,” 79: “Within this remembrance of varied religious inspiration, Christians find, in the lifepraxis of Jesus, that is,

through the lifepraxis and suffering of Jesus, faith in the resurrection event offers an irreversible source of critical power:

Er ligt een enorme kritische kracht in dit christelijk verrijzenisgeloof. Het is een kritiek op elk fatalisme, dualisme, cynisme, egoïsme; kritiek ook op alwie de zin en het subject van de geschiedenis historisch, maatschappelijk en politiek willen aanwijzen; bron tevens van humor en relativering (...) ; en, tegelijk, stimulans en oriëntatie (zij het via historische vormgevingen) voor een werkdadige overwinning op alle negatieve aspecten in onze geschiedenis, in verzet tegen all vormen van kwaad, – een bron dus van progressieve politiek.⁵⁴

The praxis, death and resurrection of Jesus relativize the power of domination and radicalize the impulse to humanize sociopolitical relationships by reversing the claims of oppression with a progressive political praxis. Jesus communicates God's approaching reign as a definitive solidarity with the violated and the vanquished.

Juist het christelijk evangelie leeft van de kritische herinnering aan de menselijke lijdensgeschiedenis; het herinnert aan de boodschap en levenspraxis van Jezus, die omzag naar armen en onderdrukten en daarom ook zelf lijden en de marteldood kende ... Beslissend is de praxis van het rijk Gods in solidariteit met alle mensen en, juist daarin en daarom, in een partijdige keuze voor armen en

in their remembrance of his life and of his death and resurrection, both the basis of the promise and the critique which comes from this and at the same time an orientation for their action in making the world free. Jesus the Christ is, in other words, the norm for the Christian's emancipative interest." See also "Naar een 'definitieve toekomst'," 47-48.

⁵⁴ Edward Schillebeeckx, "Mysterie van ongerechtigheid en mysterie van erbarmen," 19: "There is a vast critical power in this christian faith in the resurrection. It is a critique of all fatalism, dualism, cynicism and egoism whatsoever; a critique too of whoever historically, socially or politically wants to identify the meaning and subject of history; a source, at the same time, of humour and relativization. (...) ; and, simultaneously, a catalyst and orientation (even through historical movements) for the active victory over all negative aspects of our history, in protest against all forms of evil, – a source therefore of progressive politics." See also Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 717-718 / *Christ*, 778-779; *Mensen*, 150 / *Church*, 131.

onderdrukten, tegen de onderdrukking door machtige mensen en door structuren die mensen schrijnen.⁵⁵

The message of the ongoing approach of God's solidarious reign with the dispossessed carries an intrinsic critical power.⁵⁶ It is the critical power which, detached from the dominant interests manipulating political-economic structures, is able to expose alternatives.

The *third* regulative element is ecclesial. The critical power of the memory of the life and death of the risen Jesus effectively resides in the praxis of the living christian community that overcomes suffering.⁵⁷ The liturgical remembrance of the life praxis of Jesus, of his death and resurrection, generates a productive critical force. This force anticipates a universal redemption, even for the powerless and the dead.

Nourished liturgically, this solidarity is embodied and practical, not merely theoretical:

Ofschoon de christelijke geloofsinhoud een eigen cognitieve kracht bezit, die in de navolging van Jezus in het leven der kerken (zij het met ups and downs) tot historische manifestatie komt, toch is deze cognitieve, kritische en bevrijdende

⁵⁵ Schillebeeckx, *Mensen*, 50 / *Church*, 30-31: "It is precisely the christian gospel which lives by the critical recollection of the human history of suffering: it recalls the message and praxis of Jesus, who was concerned for the poor and the oppressed and therefore also himself experienced suffering and a painful death. ... What is decisive is the praxis of the kingdom of God in solidarity with all men and women, and precisely in that and as a result of it, in a partisan choice for the poor and oppressed, against oppression by the powerful and by structures which hurt people."

⁵⁶ Schillebeeckx, "Glaube und Weltverantwortung," 5.

⁵⁷ Schillebeeckx, "Naar een 'definitieve toekomst'," 48: "De kerk is dus een kritische 'memoria Christi' *naarmate* haar concrete, voor allen aanwijsbare en zichtbare en juist daarom uitdagende en opstandige praxis, als beleefbare gebeurtenis van nu onder ons, lijden overwint ... Zulk een in de praxis geactualiseerde 'memoria Christi' is metterdaad maatschappijkritisch en ideologiekritisch."

kracht niet te identificeren met de cognitieve kracht van een theorie of een theoretische anticipatie op universele zin. Het christelijke grondverhaal over Jezus, als verhaal van het leven en de dood van de verrezen Jezus, en als verhaal van de kerkelijke navolging van Jezus, is ... een in de geschiedenis van Jezus als de Christus gefundeerd verhaal van vertrouwen en hoop, die zich historisch, zoals in Jezus, manifesteren in een boodschap van universele gerechtigheid en vrede van en voor een ieder in een solidaire praxis die innerlijke vrijheid en een van dwang bevrijde samenleving voor allen hoopt te realiseren.⁵⁸

It is the current liberating praxes of christian communities, in continuity with the lifepraxis of Jesus and trusting in the prophetic conviction of his resurrection, that generate independent critical forces deconstructing the dominant systems of ecosocial violence. In sum, these three elements – the cognitive force of anamnestic narratives that vividly render the traumas of the broken and downtrodden present, the liberating life praxis of Jesus and the ethical-liturgical remembrances of believing communities – influence the coalition of soteriology with critical theory endorsed by Schillebeeckx.

On the basis of these independently originating critical elements constitutive for christian identities, Schillebeeckx negotiates a complex interaction with various aspects of the critical theories of the Frankfurt School. It is not critical theory that renders soteriology critical. Soteriology is critical through the figure of Jesus, the Spirit-led

⁵⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Mensen*, 196 / *Church*, 177: “Although the christian content of faith has its own cognitive power, which is manifested historically in the way in which Jesus is followed in the life of the churches (though with its ups and downs), this cognitive critical and liberating power is not to be identified with the cognitive power of a theory or a theoretical anticipation of universal meaning. The basic christian story about Jesus, as the story of the life and death of the risen Jesus, and as the story of the church’s following of Jesus, is ... a story founded in the history of Jesus as the Christ, of trust and hope, which historically, as with Jesus, manifest themselves in a message of universal justice and peace of and for one another in a praxis of solidarity which hopes to bring about an inner freedom and a society liberated from coercion for all.”

servant of God's unconditional love who communicated decisive liberating shifts, both tangible and anticipated, to actual women, men and children in historical contexts of oppression. Soteriology finds a social analysis of alienation in critical theory that is of considerable importance; but it is not this analysis of alienation that determines the productive critical power of soteriological discourse. On the basis of these critical resources from the Jesus narratives, soteriology is able to enter into an interdependent coalition with critical theories, finding converging commitments and debating divergent viewpoints. This foray into the constitutive orientation of Schillebeeckx' soteriology establishes that, while soteriology endorses the transformation of sociopolitical structures through a practical and critical mediation of love through liberating action, the motives and viewpoints animating this mediation of love cannot be reduced to an exercise in mere critical rationality alone.

1.I.3. Three Types of Soteriology

While Schillebeeckx does not explicitly systematize these transformative commitments, he proposes a typology of soteriologies which further clarifies the specific orientation of his practical-critical soteriology. He defines soteriology as “verlossingsleer: visies en verwachtingen, die mensen hebben m.b.t. hun gewenste héél-

zijn, welzijn en heil, verlossing en bevrijding.”⁵⁹ In the context of this definition, he differentiates between three types of soteriologies: horizontal-instrumental, vertical-fideistic and interactive:

Samenvattend kan men spreken van – (1) *horizontaal-futuristische* soteriologieën (men wil volkomen andere samenlevingsstructuren); – (2) *verticale* soteriologieën (vaak a-politiek in hun wellicht goedbedoelde religieuze bevrijding); – (3) *religieus-politieke* soteriologieën (waarbij de progressief-politieke betekenis van het religieuze wordt beklemtoond).⁶⁰

This typology is interesting on several counts. It confirms the practical-critical commitment of his soteriology to a liberating political praxis. It further clarifies a discriminate stance towards the momentous repercussions of other kinds of soteriologies. A final interesting feature of this typology is that it distinguishes the soteriologies, not on the basis of religious criteria, but on differences defining their relation to the political. Horizontal soteriologies are instrumental in the sense of totalizing a finite sociopolitical movement as the definitive agent or absolute disclosure of historical salvation. This type of soteriology tends towards totalizing and, if religiously articulated, sacralizing transient forms of a political culture, whether marxist-leninist, fascist or neo-liberal. In the extreme, instrumental soteriologies legitimate institutional and structural violence in

⁵⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 840 / *Christ*, 906: “the teaching of redemption: views and expectations which humans have in respect of their salvation, well-being and wholeness, redemption and liberation.”

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 840 / *ibid.*, 907: “To sum up, one can speak of (i) *horizontal and futurist* soteriologies (which look for completely different social structures); (ii) *vertical* soteriologies (often apolitical in their, perhaps well-intended, religious liberation); (iii) *religious and political* soteriologies (in which the progressive and political meaning of the religious is stressed).”

order to benefit the ideals of an elite group. These ideals objectify human beings into expendable instruments subordinate to abstract and narrow priorities and centralizing the power of the elite. These soteriologies seek a merely political application to liberate society. Vertical soteriologies are fideistic in the sense of locating salvation in a disembodied and dislocated interiority withdrawn from historical responsibilities. Fideistic soteriologies tend towards sectarian and esoteric forms of religious withdrawal from the complexities of dominant socio-cultural and political-economic realities. They seek release from this complexity in a transcendental purity. In the extreme, such withdrawals intend sociopolitical neutrality but in fact submit to, even passively participate in, the dominant systems of oppression. Schillebeeckx connects the instrumental and sectarian types of soteriology with particular social formations in historical societies and churches.

The third type offers a different way amidst these extremes of supposed emancipation without salvation, on the one hand, and salvation without emancipation on the other. An interactive soteriology disclaims both the totalization and the renunciation of the political. Neither totalizing nor renouncing the political, this third way seeks to transform the political. The religiously and politically interdependent type of interactive soteriology avoids the excesses of either too much immanence or transcendence characteristic of the instrumental and fideistic types. Religious transcendence and sociopolitical immanence are in a mutually productive tension with each other, allowing their various fields of meaning to confront and develop each other. The possibility of a

productive collaboration between the sociopolitical and religious dimensions of deliverance from suffering is proposed within this type. This interaction between salvation and emancipation is delineated and evaluated by my dissertation.

1.I.4. Summary

The description of Schillebeeckx' contextual christology as a practical-critical soteriology may sound cumbersome since unfamiliar. Schillebeeckx does not explicitly use this phraseology. Based on the inherently Schillebeeckxian features of soteriology as a discourse grounded in the practical mediation of human action and in negative critiques, the identification of Schillebeeckx' soteriology as practical-critical is thoroughly justified. Practical-critical soteriology thus differentiates itself from other types of christological discourse, whether transcendental, dramatic or speculative. Describing soteriology as practical and critical emphasizes the prominence of the liberationist commitment and correlationist mediations in its discourse. Finally, the specific difference of a practical-critical soteriology resides in its orientation towards sustaining a progressive politics through liberating action in society. This still needs explanation and development through the remaining chapters of this thesis, but the practical-critical orientation to Schillebeeckx' soteriology is clearly emergent from a consideration of the thematic unity in the christology-trilogy and the difference between soteriology and christology.

1.II. The Languages of Salvation and Emancipation

Before initiating the study of the interaction between salvation and emancipation in Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology in the next chapter, I would like to cover one last preliminary resource: the languages of salvation and emancipation. I use the plural language-*s* to underscore that Schillebeeckx is very flexible in his use of terms. The primary texts in Schillebeeckx' christological trilogy offer a fluid yet consistent pattern of words and phrases relevant to the distinctions and connections between salvation and emancipation. Further Schillebeeckx texts, especially in the two transitional books and in a multitude of articles from the historical period surrounding the gradual publication of the trilogy, display the same patterns and interrelationships. The central languages and related concepts, emerging from these texts and essential to the discussion of the distinctions and connections between salvation and emancipation in Schillebeeckx' soteriology, are rooted in the following terms and their cognates: *verlossing* / redemption, *heil* / salvation, *bevrijding* / liberation and *emancipatie* / emancipation. Schillebeeckx prefers to describe the meaning of these significant terms indirectly. Typical of Schillebeeckx' literary style is the juxtaposed use of these terms in close proximity, in couplets or even in triplets, such as "salvation, redemption and liberation,"⁶¹ "redemption and liberation,"⁶² "salvation and liberation,"⁶³ "redemption

⁶¹ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 608 / *Jesus* 751; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 423, 423-424, 469, 580, 681, 755 / *Christ*, 463, 464, 512, 634, 741, 817; "Waarom Jezus de Christus?" *Tijdschrift voor Geestelijk Leven* 33 (1977) 343; *Tussentijds verhaal*, 69 / *Interim Report*, 59; "Christelijke

and emancipation,”⁶⁴ or “liberation and emancipation.”⁶⁵ These associations are used

identiteit en menselijke integriteit,” *Concilium* 18:5 (1982) 38 / “Christian Identity and Human Integrity,” in *The Language of Faith*, ed. R. Schreiter, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995) 191.

⁶² Schillebeeckx, “The Christian and Political Engagement,” 118, 120; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 436, 438, 470, 587, 603, 657, 685, 708, 757, 769, 828 / *Christ*, 477, 479, 513, 642, 659, 716, 745, 769, 819, 832, 894; “Waarom Jezus de Christus?” 4; “God, Society and Human Salvation,” 87; “Christelijke identiteit en menselijke integriteit,” 38 / “Christian Identity and Human Integrity,” 191; “Spreken over God in een context van bevrijding,” 8; “Theologie als bevrijdingskunde” *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 24 (1984) 400; *Als politiek*, 71 / *Christian Faith*, 74; “De levensweg van Jezus, beleden als de Christus,” 141; “The Role of History in What is Called the New Paradigm,” in *The Language of Faith*, ed. R. Schreiter, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 245; *Mensen*, 144, 151 / *Church*, 125, 132; “Godsdienst en geweld,” *Concilium* 4 (1997) 161 / “Religion and Violence,” *Concilium* 4 (1997) 140.

⁶³ Schillebeeckx, “De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze,” 70, 78; “The Christian and Political Engagement,” 118; “Stilte, gevuld met parabels,” 77; “De toegang tot Jezus van Nazaret,” *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 12 (1972) 56; “Ons heil: Jezus leven of Christus de verrezene,” *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 13 (1973) 164; *Jezus*, 24, 512, 518, 522, 524 / *Jesus*, 31, 624, 631, 636, 638; “Mysterie van ongerechtigheid en mysterie van erbarmen,” *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 15 (1975) 18; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 686, 751-752, 755 / *Christ*, 746, 814, 817; “Waarom Jezus de Christus?” 5; “God, Society and Human Salvation,” 92, 99; “Christelijke identiteit en menselijke integriteit,” 37-38 / “Christian Identity and Human Integrity,” 189-191; “Christian Conscience and Nuclear Deterrent,” *Doctrine and Life* 32 (1982) 102, 111; “Spreken over God in een context van bevrijding,” 8; *Als politiek*, 19, 23 / *Christian Faith*, 14, 17; “Befreiende Theologie,” in *Mystik und Politik: Theologie im Ringen von Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, ed. E. Schillebeeckx, (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald, 1988) 56, 70, 71; “De levensweg van Jezus, beleden als de Christus,” 147; *Mensen*, 29, 72, 140, 195 / *Church*, 9, 53, 122, 176; “Plezier en woede beleven aan Gods schepping,” 343.

⁶⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 28, 545 / *Jesus*, 35, 669; “De ‘God van Jezus’ en de ‘Jezus van God’,” *Concilium* 10 (1974) 112 / “The ‘God of Jesus’ and the ‘Jesus of God’,” *Concilium* 93 (1974) 123; “Salut, rédemption et émancipation,” in *Tomasso d’Aquino nel suo settimo centenario*, (Napoli: Libreria scientifica editrice, 1976), 274; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 53, 685 / *Christ*, 61, 745; “The Role of History in What is Called the New Paradigm,” 245; *Mensen*, 151 / *Church*, 132.

⁶⁵ Schillebeeckx, “Stilte, gevuld met parabels,” 77; *Jezus*, 28, 523-524, / *Jesus*, 35, 637; “Mysterie van ongerechtigheid en mysterie van erbarmen,” 11; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 53, 703, 707, 708, 755 / *Christ*, 61, 764, 768, 769, 817; “Christelijke identiteit en menselijke integriteit,” 38 / “Christian Identity and Human Integrity,” 191; *Als politiek*, 71-72 / *Christian Faith*, 74; “The Role of History in What is Called the New Paradigm,” 245; *Mensen*, 151, 189 / *Church*, 132, 170.

freely, unencumbered by systematic definition or deliberate restriction. This spontaneity and flexibility demand an attentive reading that delineates the conceptual interactions and relationships between the various terms. Sometimes the conjunctive connector “and” signifies a unifying equivalence between two parallel terms that are basically synonomous, with some variation of emphasis. At other times the conjunctive modifier “and” signifies a distinct contrast between two terms that are not only juxtaposed but introducing different kinds of meanings. Efforts to understand these various terms, both singly and in their patterns of association, however, are significant for determining the interaction between salvation and emancipation in Schillebeeckx’ practical-critical soteriology. This chapter takes up the sense and reference of these terms in order to clarify and elaborate the overlap and difference between salvation and emancipation. It begins with some general literary and etymological observations.

There are two prevalent clusters determined by easily identifiable semantic networks that are pivotal for the current discussion: the first cluster concerns the terms *verlossing* / redemption, *heil* / salvation and *bevrijding* / liberation; the second cluster concerns the terms *bevrijding* / liberation and *emancipatie* / emancipation. The occurrence of *bevrijding* in both clusters is noteworthy.

1.II.1. *Verlossing - Heil - Bevrijding*

In the language of Schillebeeckx' soteriology, the terms and cognates of *verlossing*, *heil*, and *bevrijding* are equivalent and co-extensive in the sense of their meaning. The terms "redemption," "salvation" and "liberation" as well as their derivatives commonly connote, within the economy of grace, the eschatological gift of God's salvific activity in and with Jesus through their Spirit. The cumulative use of these terms by Schillebeeckx, however, suggests that they denote slightly different aspects of the gift. The terms denote and refer with varying degrees of emphasis to slightly variable aspects within the same sense of meaning in signifying God's salvific activity in solidarity with human beings and created life on earth.

i) *verlossing* / redemption

While sharing the same connotation as its more immediate religious counterpart in signifying the processes of God's salvific activity as creator and liberator, it remains worth noting that "redemption" carries a slightly different denotation in the writings of Schillebeeckx than "salvation." While directly connoting the process and content of God's salvific activity, the term "redemption" tends to denote two distinct aspects of this activity. First, "redemption" refers to the historical particularities of the revelation of God's saving initiatives and activities in the exaltation, death and lifepraxis of Jesus the Christ. Second, "redemption" refers to the christian traditions of interpretation and experience, both biblical and historical, which communicate the memory of these

revelatory events of God's salvific action in and with Jesus. With respect to these events, Schillebeeckx accentuates the historical location of redemption in the historical event of Jesus the Christ with phrases such as "a redemptive, atoning death,"⁶⁶ "the favours of redemption and liberation shown forth in history and experienced by humans in faith,"⁶⁷ "redemption through Christ,"⁶⁸ "the immanence of christian redemption,"⁶⁹ "that within the limits of history, redemption can never be achieved by some heroic transcending of finitude"⁷⁰ and "redemption already accomplished."⁷¹ With respect to the second tendency to accentuate christian traditions of experience and interpretation, Schillebeeckx writes of "the New Testament understanding of what redemption through Christ Jesus is,"⁷² "the religious message of redemption,"⁷³ "religious concepts of redemption"⁷⁴ "christian salvation, named redemption in the already centuries-old biblical tradition,"⁷⁵ "the long religious tradition of experience [through which] the

⁶⁶ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 238 / *Jesus*, 291.

⁶⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 422 / *Christ*, 463.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 438 / *ibid.*, 479.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 700 / *ibid.*, 761.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 708 / *ibid.*, 769.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 759 / *ibid.*, 821.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 436 / *ibid.*, 477.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 685 / *ibid.*, 745.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 685 / *ibid.*, 745.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 683 / *ibid.*, 743.

humanly meaningful history of liberation can be experienced and interpreted as a part of christian redemption history,”⁷⁶ “redemption which is the reign of God.”⁷⁷ The term “redemption” and its relatives thus accentuate the revelatory and historically mediated communication of God’s salvific activity in and with Jesus.

ii) *heil* / salvation

The term “salvation,” by contrast, does not usually denote the revelatory or interpretative emphases of its counterpart “redemption” in reference to God’s salvific activity. The term “salvation” and its cognates take the reference to God’s salvific activity in two distinct directions. First, they refer to the direct involvement of God’s being and agency in salvific initiatives within creation. Salvation refers to God’s being and activity both transcendentally in creation as well as historically in the person and ministry of Jesus. Second, they refer to the historical effects and finite content of God’s salvific activity within creation in human events of healing and empowerment. By contrast to the revelatory and interpretative emphases of the language of “redemption,” there is a procedural and substantive accent in the language of “salvation.”

With respect to the first accent in the term “salvation” and its cognates, salvation signifies God’s salvific initiatives to sustain a liberated and reconciled creation. The pervasive and continuous use of phrases such as *Gods heilshandeln*, *heilshandeln van God*, *heil van Godswege*, *heilswege-van-God*, *Gods heilsinitiatief*, *Gods heilsbelofte*,

⁷⁶ Schillebeeckx, “Theologie als bevrijdingskunde,” 400.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 401.

*heil*sbetekenis van Jezus, or *heil*sgebeuren throughout his trilogy, the transitional books and his directly relevant writings are indicative of this accent within the signifying capabilities of the term *heil* and its cognates. They denote the being and agency of God in the divine initiatives of creation and liberation. This entails the sovereign and absolute initiative of God's being and agency as the origin and communication of love within creation. With respect to God's direct involvement in saving initiatives, this term and its cognates further denote the divine being and agency as the origin, process and plenitude of the divine liberating activity within creation. In terms of a process, moreover, salvation signifies the activity of God's salvific initiatives prior to and independent of any religious tradition or church that brings this activity into language and discourse. In his lifepraxis, death and resurrection, Jesus communicates the unoriginate, unconditional and universal solidarity of divine love with suffering human beings on earth in history. This activity is infinitely superabundant, with no determinate limitations set from within. This activity is qualified by a preferential solidarity with the violated and vanquished who suffer abuse and deprivation, but it also sustains reconciliation with the abuser and oppressor. This activity is free of destructive force. This activity is sovereign and unconditional, refraining from manipulating any outcome. This transcendent activity remains historically immanent only as an appeal to and prompting of human freedom, for it has no means of being communicated within history and creation except through contingent human actions which, accepting the invitation, realize their intrinsic capacities as finite creatures for historical freedom.

In contrast to this more procedural reference of the language of salvation, the term “salvation” and its cognates also signify the historical content and real effects of God’s liberating activity within creation. Schillebeeckx supports a description of this content and effect through an etymological study of the Latin and Germanic origins of the term *heil*:

Het etymos van het woord *salus* of heil heeft, zowel in de romaanse als in de germaanse talen, te maken met *sanitas*, gezondheid; met “heel-zijn” of integriteit. M.a.w. eschatologisch heil wordt steeds uitgedrukt in termen van integriteit van *menselijk* leven. De bijbel drukt dit uit in termen van “shaloom”, waarin ook de maatschappelijke dimensie medewezenlijk is.⁷⁸

This explains the pervasive use of the synonyms that Schillebeeckx uses for indicating salvation as the content and effect of God’s salvific activity, such as, for example, “healing,” “well-being,” “wholeness,” “making whole,” “the being-whole of humans,” “the integrity of life,” and “happiness.” Salvation sets limits to evil, rehabilitates suffering, and eliminates alienation. Salvation is “of and for humans,” and therefore humanizes relationships in society through justice and reconciliation. Consonant with this enlarged notion regarding the content of salvation, Schillebeeckx is adamant that salvation includes ecological, socio-cultural and political-economic realities.

Als christelijk heil een heil van en voor mensen is – mensen, met geest, hart, gemoed, lichamelijkeid, mensen die op de natuur zijn aangewezen om in

⁷⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 686 / *Christ*, 746: “The etymology of the word *salus* or salvation, in both Latin and Germanic languages, has to do with *sanitas*, health; with “being-whole” or integrity. In other words, eschatological salvation was always expressed in terms of the integrity of *human* life. The bible expresses this in terms of “shalom,” in which the social dimension is also co-essential.” See “God, Society and Human Salvation,” 92.

gerechtigheid en liefde elkaar te bevestigen en een samenleving op te bouwen waarin zij als mensen menselijk kunnen leven (zie II, 671-683) – , dan betekent dit dat christelijk heil niet slechts ‘zieleheil’ kan zijn maar heling, heelmaking van heel de mens, van de persoon in al zijn facetten en van de samenleving waarin hij leeft. Christelijk heil omsluit dus ook ecologische, maatschappelijke en politieke aspecten (...).⁷⁹

Salvation as the outcome and content of God’s salvific initiatives includes ecological sustainability, socio-cultural healing and political-economic redistribution. Justice and love, as the human disclosure of salvation, are the basis for healing and empowering the integrity of life, including its socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological dimensions.

iii) *bevrijding* / liberation

The term *bevrijding* / liberation represents a unique semantic resource in Schillebeeckx soteriological discourse. This is the most polysemic of the terms as it belongs to both the first and second clusters of semantically interdependent terms. It crosses boundaries between clusters, associates freely with terms located in either cluster, and sometimes plays on the ambiguities of a hybrid identity. In addition, therefore, to its semantical equivalencies with the sense and reference of “redemption” and “salvation,”

⁷⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Tussentijds verhaal*, 68 / *Interim Report*, 58: “If christian salvation is salvation of and for human beings – humans with spirit, heart, feelings, bodiliness, humans who are situated in a natural ecology in order to affirm each other in justice and love and build a society in which they as humans can be fully human (see II, 731-743) – , then this means that christian salvation cannot simply be the ‘salvation of souls’; it is the healing, the making whole of the whole human being, of the person in all her or his dimensions and of the society in which they live. Christian salvation thus includes ecological, social and political aspects (...).” See also “Op weg naar een christologie,” 148; and “Can Christology be an Experiment,” 12-13. The reference is to the section on the anthropological constants which structure the coordinates of the humanum in *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 671-683 / *Christ*, 731-743.

the terms *bevrijding* / liberation and their cognates are also operative in the second semantic network closely associated with the term *emancipatie* / emancipation. The term *bevrijding* / liberation and its cognates are co-extensive with the procedural and substantive meanings of the term *heil* / salvation. The term “liberation” thus also refers to God’s being and agency active in history as well as to the realization of healing and the empowerment of wholeness in personal, ecological, socio-cultural and political-economic contexts.

This word, however, remains further differentiated from its counterparts in its referential emphases. Closely associated with the procedural and substantive signification of “salvation,” it further introduces two accents according to whether it refers i) to the human agency that freely mediates and communicates the divine solidarity that is salvific or ii) to the realization of love through a justice that overcomes oppression and a reconciliation that overcomes alienation. We are dealing here with relative and interdependent degrees of emphasis within an overriding common meaning among the terms *verlossing*, *heil* and *bevrijding*.

With respect to the first emphasis, “liberation” and its linguistic derivatives place a further accent on human agency and responsibility as the mediation and communication of divine solidarity. Human agency enacts and embodies divine solidarity within the finite conditions of interpersonal and ecosocial being. The term “liberation” thus emphasizes the free and deliberate human participation in God’s salvific activity. This includes the finite freedom of the humanity of Jesus, the eschatological prophet, a

limited freedom that is completely surrendered to, identified with and empowered by God's salvific activity. In his praxis, suffering, death and resurrection, Jesus is completely surrendered to, identified with and empowered by divine solidarity with suffering human beings. Human participation also includes the remembrance of God's saving initiatives in Jesus through their Spirit. The Spirit of Jesus empowers humans to re-interpret and recontextualize a historically-situated praxis of God's inbreaking reign in contemporary situations of oppression and alienation.

With respect to its second emphasis, the term "liberation" and its derivatives refer to being rescued or restored from suffering and thereby set free for resisting historical evil and empowering the integrity of life. Liberation is thus not only liberation from unjust conditions for renewed relationships but the reorientation of those renewed relationships with an ethical responsibility to empower other human beings to overcome conditions of oppression and alienation.⁸⁰ Liberation "from" thus includes release from various forms of: human slavery; existential anxieties related to death, supernatural powers and cosmological determinism; oppressive attachments; arbitrary violence; exploitation of material vulnerability; vitiating sorrow and despair.⁸¹ Liberation "for" thus includes the availability for: confidence in the trustworthiness of life; right relations; ethical responsibility, distributive justice; the healing and making whole of

⁸⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 469 / *Christ*, 513.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 469 / *ibid.*, 513.

each and every individual; reconciliation with finitude and with God.⁸² Liberation essentially consists of being set free from alienating relationships and oppressive structures in order to be free for a healing and empowering solidarity with and for others in the face of residual evil and the inevitability of decline and death.

These general literary observations establish that the terms *verlossing*, *heil*, and *bevrijding* as well as their cognates connote God's activity as the creative liberator of the earth and its interdependent lifesystems (both ecological and sociopolitical as well as interpersonal and individual) and the human responses ensuing from the appropriation of this activity in love, hope and faith.⁸³ Within this shared connotation, these terms and related expressions fluctuate and differentiate according to different emphases which, while inseparable and convergent, remain somewhat distinct: "redemption" to the revealed and mediated communication of God's salvific activity in Jesus, "salvation" to the agency and outcomes of the salvific activity of God in Jesus and their Spirit; and "liberation" to the tangible human dimensions of salvific gifts received,

⁸² *Ibid.*, 469 / *ibid.*, 513.

⁸³ With respect to salvific, liberating activity, divine agency and human agency are not dualistically parallel, in rivalry or competition, or conflicting of necessity. They are, rather, within the perspective of a negative theology, two interdependent dimensions of a single yet differentiated reality whereby the infinite and the finite are connected with each other yet without fusion and thus autonomous. While emphasizing the transcendent origin within a historically immanent and finite communication of inexhaustible and irrevocable gift, the terms *verlossing*, *heil* and *bevrijding* retain their reference to the human agency that encounters, receives, appropriates and communicates the gift as a responsibility of self-transcending justice and love with and for others in history. At the same time, while emphasizing the immanent development and communication of justice and love within history, *verlossing*, *heil* and *bevrijding* retain their reference to a para-historical origin and eschatological renewal if not fulfilment of personal and ecosocial life.

developed and experienced as a growing wholeness or integrity of life. Liberation consists of the wholeness and integrity of life initiated and oriented by Jesus with and for human beings throughout history amidst the evil of suffering and the alienating rupture of death. “Dit alles wijst er op, dat verlossing en bevrijding in het nieuwe testament zowel een gave als een te realiseren opdracht zijn.”⁸⁴ It is only with an attentive regard towards the surrounding literary context that precise significations can be discerned in Schillebeeckx’ use of any one of these terms, their cognates and their juxtaposition in any number of possible combinations. The fluid and flexible use of these terms by Schillebeeckx makes it difficult to identify a systematic definition that is rigorously applied according to a strict logic. This is indicative of the performative and persuasive, rather than demonstrative and apodictic, style of Schillebeeckx’ genre. Amidst this fluid and flexible use of terms, however, a coherent conception of the relation between eschatological salvation and sociopolitical liberation can be reconstructed. The second cluster of semantic networks arising from the multivalent *bevrijding* and its association with *emancipatie* thus needs to be examined.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 470 / *ibid.*, 513: “All this indicates that redemption and liberation in the New Testament are both a gift and a task to be realized.”

1.II.2. *Bevrijding / Liberation and Emancipatie / Emancipation*

In the language of Schillebeeckx' soteriology, the terms and cognates of *bevrijding* / liberation and *emancipatie* / emancipation are equivalent and co-extensive in the sense of their meaning. The terms "liberation" and "emancipation", along with their derivatives, commonly connote human actions, collective movements and historical events that overcome socio-cultural and political economic conditions of alienation, exploitation and oppression, and thereby eliminate causes of violence while rehabilitating the legacies of suffering. Phrases with various combinations and developments of terms such as "emancipation or human self-liberation,"⁸⁵ "liberation and emancipation,"⁸⁶ "emancipative self-liberation,"⁸⁷ or "emancipative liberation,"⁸⁸ are indicative of this strand of signification. Within this shared signification between the terms, "emancipation" accentuates a historical concern. This concern is related to the tasks of practical reason inaugurated by the Enlightenment as renewed by

⁸⁵ Schillebeeckx, "Stilte, gevuld met parabellen," 77; *Jezus*, 28 / *Jesus*, 35 (where the disjunction "or" actually expresses equivalence); "Mysterie van ongerechtigheid en mysterie van erbarmen," 11; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 685, 693 / *Christ*, 745; 752.

⁸⁶ Schillebeeckx, "Stilte, gevuld met parabellen," 77; *Jezus*, 28, 523-524 / *Jesus*, 35, 637; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 53, 703, 707, 708, 755 / *Christ*, 61, 764, 768, 769, 817; "Christelijke identiteit en menselijke integriteit," 38 / "Christian Identity and Human Integrity," 191; *Als politiek*, 71-72 / *Christian Faith*, 74; *Mensen*, 151, 189 / *Church*, 132, 170.

⁸⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 691, 700, 707, 708 / *Christ*, 751, 761, 768, 769; *Als politiek*, 71 / *Christian Faith*, 74;

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 691, 704, 707, 709 / *ibid.*, 751, 765, 768, 770; "God, Society and Human Salvation," 87

continental European critical theories and associated political movements in the 1960s to 1980s updating the Enlightenment project.⁸⁷ The term, as Schillebeeckx notes, first originated from the practice under Roman law of setting a household slave free from the domination of the master.⁸⁸ Noting how, under the Enlightenment critique of the authority of religious traditions, the concept of emancipation came to signify the use of practical reason in forging an autonomous public space, Schillebeeckx corroborates the more recent development of the notion by Bloch, Marcuse, the Frankfurt School and especially the early Habermas in terms of a history of freedom from instrumental rationality and industrial interests.⁸⁹ Although each of these authors develops the notion of emancipation differently, Schillebeeckx considers the term mostly in its Habermasian sense of freeing communication from the manipulations of distortion and oppression.⁹⁰ When not associated directly with Habermas, Schillebeeckx' language of emancipation expresses the process of attaining the integrity of life in society through practical and critical mediations of human action.

The terms "liberation" and "emancipation" are thus exchangeable, as the various hybrids such as "emancipative liberation" or "emancipative project and process of

⁸⁷ See Schillebeeckx, "Kritische theorieën en politiek engagement van de christelijke gemeente," 47-61 / "Critical Theories and Christian Political Commitment," 71-82; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 833 / *Christ*, 900; *Mensen*, 189-197 / *Church*, 170-178.

⁸⁸ Schillebeeckx, "Kritische theorieën en politiek engagement van de christelijke gemeente," 47 / "Critical Theories and Christian Political Commitment," 71.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 47-50 / *ibid.*, 71-74.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 50 / *ibid.*, 74

human liberation,” etc., indicate. To emphasize this synonymity with its counterpart, Schillebeeckx extensively qualifies the term “liberation” with various qualifiers such as “human liberation,” “self-liberation,” “liberation movements,” or “sociopolitical liberation.” Within this cluster of terms, the sociopolitical contexts and structural repercussions of human action are accentuated. It is interesting to note, meanwhile, that the usage of the term “liberation” and its relatives in their sociopolitical connotation are more prevalent in Schillebeeckx’ soteriology than the term “emancipation.” This indicates how intimately connected the reality of sociopolitical liberation remains to eschatological salvation in Schillebeeckx’ soteriology; it also indicates, perhaps, a somewhat ambivalent or even reticent attitude on Schillebeeckx’ behalf towards the neo-marxist language games that vivify the contemporary usage of the term “emancipation.”

It is the differentiated semantic horizon shared between “liberation as redemption” and “liberation as emancipation” that modulates Schillebeeckx’ usage of the term “praxis” to suggest an activity with transformative effects. Within the traditions of the primacy of practical reason in projects of political-economic and socio-cultural emancipation, the prevailing notion of praxis in Schillebeeckx’ writings stresses the decisive priority of human action in history. This term, while pertaining to human action, is much like its structural counterpart “emancipation” in so far as these terms are derived from neo-marxist contexts of action and interpretation which permeated northern continental European university cultures in the 1960s and 1970s. However,

while the usage of praxis may have originated out of these secular contexts, it is charged with a polyvalent eschatological surplus. Much like the language of liberation, which is capable of a wide range of significations which are not always co-extensive, the exact reference of the language of praxis can at times be difficult to determine in Schillebeeckx' texts. The usage of the term remains very malleable. Noteworthy in this regard is an extensive use of phrases such as "the praxis of the reign of God," "the lifepraxis of Jesus," "the praxis of the church," "liturgical praxis," "reconciling praxis," "christian praxis," "humanly liberating praxis," "world-liberating praxis," and "liberating political praxis," or simply "political praxis," but a minimal occurrence of the term "emancipative praxis" in Schillebeeckx' oeuvre.⁹¹ Noteworthy is the extension of the reference of the term beyond secular sociopolitical movements and into ecclesial as well as regnocentric significations. This reflects Schillebeeckx' affinity with European theological currents that were seeking to render their articulation of christian traditions and ecclesial identities experientially relevant to the widespread emancipative movements of their times. In so far as Schillebeeckx sometimes uses the term "praxis" to denote a progressive political activity, and since the aims of such political activity clearly, for Schillebeeckx, include emancipation from political-economic oppression or

⁹¹ While "lifepraxis of Jesus" as the translation of "levenspraxis van Jezus" may sound less than smooth to the English ear, I retain the more literal translation "lifepraxis" since the term "praxis" is a highly technical term directly associated with themes of salvation, liberation and emancipation; it also conveys the cultural atmosphere of the university, critical christian communities and social protest movements that animated the context of Schillebeeckx' theological work.

socio-cultural alienation, then it is justifiable to renew his use of the term “emancipative praxis” in the discussion of the sociopolitical repercussions of salvation in Schillebeeckx’ practical-critical soteriology.

Given the polyvalence and consequent ambiguity surrounding the term “liberation,” I will use the term “emancipation” when trying to emphasize its differentiation from “eschatological salvation.” Since the notion of liberation is polyvalent, I emphasize the language of emancipation in order to place an accent on sociopolitical liberation and the structural transformation of society through the public mediation of human action. Throughout this thesis, the terms “emancipation,” “sociopolitical liberation,” or even “sociopolitical emancipation” and various other hybrids (i.e., “emancipative praxis,” “sociopolitical praxis,” “progressive political praxis,” “liberating political praxis” when the emphasis is on human agency) are used as synonyms. The term “liberation” without any further qualification of associated words or contexts remains fundamentally ambiguous given the highly charged religious connotation of the term in Schillebeeckx’ soteriological discourse. For the sake of literary relief, I still use “sociopolitical liberation” to distinguish the emancipative use of the term from its counterparts in the languages of salvation and redemption.

1.II.3. Summary

These general literary observations establish an intricate network of semantic innovation with respect to the terms involved. The polysemy of the term “liberation” presents a unique challenge amidst these terms due to its polyvalent capacity to signify meanings related to both salvation or redemption, on the one hand, and, emancipation on the other. Careful discernment is required in following the use of this term, after which a creative residue of ambiguity and play still remains active in the texts. What this literary evidence strongly suggests, however, is that the contrast between these two clusters of terms offers no basis for drawing any theological conclusions that dualistically dichotomize the spiritual and the material, regnocentric witness and political praxis, the divine and the human. Divine and human agencies are equally, nonetheless differently, active in both salvific and emancipative activities. The spiritual and the material are equally involved in both the experience of salvation and the experience of emancipation. Regnocentric witness and political praxis, while not wholly co-extensive, significantly overlap, weaving in and out of each other. Salvation and emancipation, or redemption and sociopolitical liberation, are profoundly connected yet remain distinct alterities with respect to one another. This pattern of alterity within a more profound unity is at the heart of the polyvalent capacities of the term “liberation” and its related languages. This pattern is evidently christological in its affirmation of a

single identity with two principles which are neither fused nor separated. The pattern of difference within interdependence is addressed in the next chapter.

I.III. Chapter Summary and Transition

The particular burden of this chapter has been to establish the practical-critical definition of Schillebeeckx' soteriology. Practical-critical soteriology identifies the productive discourse Schillebeeckx endorses in his prolegomena and summary of the interaction between salvation and emancipation in the trilogy of *Jezus - Gerechtigheid en liefde - Mensen*. This productive discourse arises for Schillebeeckx out of the context of histories of suffering. Practical-critical soteriology seeks to renew the encounters with, and even responsibilities for salvation through the constructed experiences of sociopolitical liberation and emancipative praxis. Practical-critical soteriology also seeks to renew the interpretations and responsibilities furthering emancipation through articulating the promises of salvation in society. This parallel initiative anticipates the question concerning the kind of interaction that Schillebeeckx proposes between emancipation and salvation. In responding to this question, the basis for sustaining the political communication of love through a progressive, since transformative, political praxis might begin to emerge.

CHAPTER TWO

Emancipation and Salvation in Practical-Critical Soteriology

In classifying three different kinds of soteriology, Schillebeeckx proposes an interactive soteriology as an alternative to the disturbing sociopolitical repercussions of instrumental and fideistic soteriologies. Instrumental soteriologies sacralize or totalize a finite sociopolitical movement as the definitive agent or absolute disclosure of historical salvation. Fideistic soteriologies relegate salvation to a dislocated interiority withdrawn from historical responsibilities. An interactive soteriology disclaims both the move to totalize and the move to abandon the political. Recognizing the salvific importance of sociopolitical responsibility and the emancipative potential of eschatological traditions, an interactive soteriology seeks to sustain a liberating praxis for a progressive politics. This type of soteriology places religious transcendence and sociopolitical emancipation in relation to each other as distinct yet mutually implicated aspects of divine gift and human responsibility. Allowing for the transcendence of eschatological salvation, it articulates the redemptive significance of sociopolitical emancipation. Allowing for the immanence of sociopolitical emancipation, it equally articulates the liberating significance of eschatological salvation. Within this possibility, sociopolitical liberations are approached in their capacities to communicate the eschatological depth of salvation. Religious narratives of salvation, moreover, are approached as capable of orienting a progressive political praxis. Religious transcendence and sociopolitical immanence, salvation and emancipation, eschatological activity and progressive

political praxis are placed in a mutually productive tension with each other, allowing their various points of reference to encounter and develop each other without fusion or separation. This mutually involving pattern of interaction between salvation and emancipation conditions the practical and critical features of Schillebeeckx' soteriology.

Schillebeeckx' development of an interactive soteriology invigorates the christology-trilogy consisting of *Jezus / Jesus, Gerechtigheid en liefde / Christ*, and *Mensen / Church*. The purposes of *Jezus* (1974) include establishing the biblical basis for interpreting the saving work and person of Jesus in order that a comprehensive view of the connections between “‘verlossing’ en ‘emancipatie’ of menselijke zelfbevrijding” could eventually be established.¹ While the biblical basis is extended in *Gerechtigheid en liefde* (1977) to include the experience of grace in the early christian communities, “de vraag naar de verhouding tussen verlossing en emancipatieve zelfbevrijding” is paramount throughout the entire text.² The original Dutch version of *Christ*, it is worth noting, actually carries the title *Justice and Love: Grace and Liberation*, resituating the historical- and literary-critical exegesis of the experience of grace in early christian communities within a larger encompassing movement towards recontextualizing salvation in contemporary contexts seeking liberation from suffering. The biblical foundations advanced in *Jezus* and the first three parts of *Gerechtigheid en liefde* thus

¹ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 28 / *Jesus*, 35: to correlate “‘redemption’ and ‘emancipation’ or human self-liberation.”

² Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 53 / *Christ*, 61: “the question concerning the relation between redemption and emancipative self-liberation.”

serve as a subsidiary preparation for the fourth and final part of the latter text, “Gods eer en het ware, goede en gelukkige menszijn / God’s Honour: A True, Good and Happy Humanity” especially its lengthy concluding section, entitled “Verlossing en bevrijding” / “Redemption and Liberation.” The central question framing the entire set of enquiries animating *Jezus* and the first three sections of *Gerechtigheid en liefde* is amplified in this extensive concluding section.

The beginning of the fourth and final part of *Gerechtigheid en liefde* thus marks a pivotal shift in the christology-trilogy. There is a remarkable shift from a historically-minded *exegetical retrieval*, both of the historical Jesus as the eschatological prophet of God’s inbreaking reign and of the experience of grace in the early christian communities, to a *recontextualizing hermeneutics* of the experience and interpretation of christian salvation within the contemporary horizon of histories of human suffering seeking emancipation. With this shift, Schillebeeckx sharpens the decisive question guiding his christological trilogy:

De kritische vraag daarbij is dan, of onder de huidige maatschappelijke condities zelfbevrijding en emancipatie niet een voorwaarde zijn voor een mogelijk geloof in de religieuze boodschap van de verlossing en daarin dan tegelijk reeds en fragmentarisch teken van heil ... En dan is het de vraag, of de vrijheid van de kinderen Gods niet ook aangewezen is op een maatschappelijke bevrijding als integraal bestanddeel van het eschatologisch heil van Godswege. M.a.w. de vraag, of de christelijke vrijheid of verlossing aangewezen is op politieke en maatschappelijke bevrijding als op een conditie van haar eigen mogelijkheid.”³

³ Ibid., 685 / *ibid.*, 745: “the critical question here is then whether in the present social conditions self-liberation and emancipation are not a condition for a possible faith in the religious message of redemption and as such already a fragmentary sign of salvation ... The question then is whether the freedom of the children of God is not directed as well towards

This passage affirms a connection yet difference between emancipation and salvation. Schillebeeckx proposes that, given contemporary contexts of oppression, sociopolitical emancipations are a condition for the possibility of faith in the promises of salvation. He strengthens this further by adding that sociopolitical emancipation is an integral and constitutive element of the very historical reality of eschatological salvation. Realizing emancipation not only renders salvation believable but available. In so far as sociopolitical liberations enact real fragments of redemption and thereby sustain faith, Schillebeeckx further proposes that the christian responsibility for rendering salvation believable and available entails a direct responsibility for participating in sociopolitical movements of emancipation. If furthering and realizing emancipation are a necessary condition for a believable salvation to occur, then the responsibility for communicating eschatological faith necessarily implies a responsibility for the furthering and realization of emancipation.

This approach to sociopolitical liberation as the condition for rendering salvation available and believable is renewed in the final volume of the trilogy, *Mensen / Church*.⁴

social liberation as an integral and constitutive part of eschatological salvation from God. In other words, the question whether christian freedom or redemption includes political and social liberation as a condition of its own possibility.” See also “God, Society and Human Salvation,” 91.

⁴ Given that Schillebeeckx considers the church to bring the history of revelation (and concealment) to language in word and sacrament, and since the history of revelation is itself only a partial reflection of the history of salvation, and since the history of salvation is itself eschatologically correlated with (and hence, in the order of human knowing, dependent on) a liberating human history amidst the history of suffering, it is unfortunate that the translation of the title of *Mensen als verhaal van God* unduly restricted the reference of the original title by switching to *Church: The Human Story of God*. For it is precisely Schillebeeckx’ point, in “the

Mensen not only summarizes the shift from retrieval to recontextualization previously initiated in *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, but further develops the creative tension between salvation and emancipation.

(...) [A]lleen mens-bevrijdende geschiedenis kan worden ervaren als heilsgeschiedenis ... Menselijke geschiedenis, voor zover ze mensen bevrijdt tot ware en goede menselijkheid in diep respect voor elkaar, is voor christenen *Gods heilsgeschiedenis*, en ze is dit onafhankelijk van ons weet-hebben van deze genadevolle heilsstructuur, echter niet zonder dat er bewuste menselijke bevrijding geschiedde ... In het spel is veeleer de *religieuze* betekenis van bewust-menselijk, bevrijdend, helend en communicatie stichtend handelen. De geloofsinterpretatie wil duidelijk maken wat het betekent *in termen van Gods heilsbeloften* te spreken over onze dagelijkse 'profane' wereld en samenleving.⁵

For Schillebeeckx, the history of sociopolitical liberation is intrinsic to the interpretation of the history of salvation. Empowering and communicating liberation in historical contexts is presented as the immanent realization of God's salvific activity. The healing and reconciling effects of sociopolitical liberation form the basis for interpreting and experiencing the divinely originating gift. Historically occurrent liberations secure the

spirit of a negative ecclesiology in a minor key," to emphasize that the story of the church is but a fragment, although a concentrated and sacramental fragment, of the larger story of human liberation as the story of God's solidarity with creation. The English title suggests that the gist of the human story is subordinate to the identity of the church; whereas the gist of the Dutch title is that the identity of the church is dependent on the history of liberation from suffering. The English title does not appear wholly consistent with the theological hermeneutics and ecclesiology of the book it represents!

⁵ Schillebeeckx, *Mensen*, 29 / *Church*, 9-10: "(...) [O]nly a history actually liberating humans can be experienced as salvation history ... Human history, in so far as it liberates humans for true and good humanity with a deep respect for one another, is, for Christians, *the history of salvation from God*, and is so independently of our being aware of this gracious structure of salvation; not, however, without intentional human liberation occurring ... At stake is the religious meaning of intentional, human action that is liberating, healing and opening up communication. The interpretation of faith seeks to clarify what it means to speak of our daily secular world and society *in terms of God's promises of salvation*."

basis in a society for meaningfully bringing the eschatological promises of salvation into language. In continuity with the previous text from *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, this text from *Mensen* affirms that sociopolitical emancipation enter into and establish the very historical reality of eschatological salvation. This passage extends the significance of this constitutive relationship by emphasizing that emancipation secures the very intelligibility, the very capacity to meaningful signify and discuss the divine promises of salvation in society. There is a common commitment in these texts to probe the social repercussions of faith in eschatological salvation.

The contextual aspects of the interaction between salvation and emancipation, moreover, are intensified in *Mensen*. Whereas the approach to the connection between salvation and liberation so far emphasizes the significance of emancipation for rendering eschatological salvation real, believable and intelligible in society, in this passage Schillebeeckx emphasizes the significance of salvific initiatives for furthering sociopolitical emancipation.

We worden bevrijd tot nieuwe, echt-menselijke levensmogelijkheden ... door Jezus' verlossing ervaren christenen de vrijheid (...) om mee te doen met de strijd voor economische, maatschappelijke en politieke gerechtigheid ... Christelijke verlossing is inderdaad bevrijding uit de zonde. Bevrijding van zonde heeft echter ook een culturele context. In onze tijd sluit het christelijk verstaan van zonde ook de herkenning in van systematische communicatiestoornissen als seksisme, racisme en fascisme, antisemitisme, haat en wrok tegen gastarbeiders, westers cultureel en religieus superioriteitsgevoel. De christelijke gemeenschap stichtende liefde sluit daarom ook de erkenning in van de noodzaak van harte

mee te doen met het hedendaagse handwerk van politieke, culturele, maatschappelijke emancipatie.⁶

Salvation contributes to emancipation by renewing the freedoms necessary for political-economic and socio-cultural struggle. The redemptive activity of God in Jesus, an activity which liberates humans for a renewed engagement in society, is contextualized in terms furthering emancipation from political-economic inequalities and from socio-cultural alienations related to sexism, racism, antisemitism and ethnocentrism. The renewal of human capacities for love is directed towards participating in political-economic and socio-cultural struggles for emancipation. By advocating an interpretation of oppression in terms of communications theory, Schillebeeckx is also emphasizing that efforts at emancipation render salvation not only real and intelligible but communicable within society. Surveying the three volumes of the trilogy for a literary unity which affiliates their various lines of discourse, the connection between salvation and emancipation emerges as a representative theological focus animating Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 150-151 / *ibid.*, 132 : "We are liberated to new, authentically human possibilities of life ... Through Jesus' redemption Christians experience the freedom (...) to join in the struggle for economic, social and political justice ... christian redemption is indeed liberation from sin. But liberation from sin also has a cultural context. In our time the christian understanding of sin includes the recognition of systematic disruptions of communication like sexism, racism and fascism, antisemitism, hate and vengeance directed at immigrant workers, and the Western cultural and religious feeling of superiority. The christian love which supports community therefore must include recognizing the necessity of engaging more fully in the present-day work for political, cultural and social emancipation."

2.I. Salvation and Sociopolitical Liberation: Biblical Resources

Schillebeeckx' retrieval of biblical resources orients and structures his soteriology. The retrieval of these biblical resources, moreover, is situated, as the thematic unity between *Jezus, Gerechtigheid en liefde* and *Mensen* emphasizes, within a contemporary horizon of liberation from histories of suffering. Schillebeeckx situates his approach to the interaction between sociopolitical liberation and salvation within the contemporary horizon of a fundamental striving for the integrity of life and the making whole of humanity. He finds that this striving is increasingly widespread and assumes global proportions amidst changing conditions of alienation and oppression. This striving is unique in so far as it defines broadly humanizing impulses in history and is increasingly universal. He finds the current anticipations for a healed, future humanity evident in various emancipatory movements, practical sciences, technological advances and cultures.⁷ These concerns are not restricted to religious traditions but have become driving forces in cultures and the sciences at large. In a typical articulation of this basic background to his soteriological endeavor, Schillebeeckx writes:

Wat vroeger nagenoeg alleen de interesse van godsdienstige mensen leek te hebben, is nu overal ter wereld een aangelegenheid van uiteenlopende wetenschappen en technieken, van acties, ideologieën en zelfs culturen. Zij alle streven naar helen: heel-making of heil van mensen en hun samenleving, bovendien in een van allerlei vervuilingen verschoonde aardse natuur. Men kan moeilijk ontkennen dat de vraag naar gave en leefbare menselijkheid, *als vraag*, meer dan ooit leeft onder alle mensen. In onze tijd wordt het antwoord erop des te dringender

⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 18-19 / *Jesus*, 24-25.

naarmate we enerzijds vaststellen dat mensen tekort schieten, tekort komen en vooral tekort worden gedaan, en we anderzijds reeds troostende en hoopgevende fragmenten van menselijke heelmaking en zelfbevrijding mogen ervaren. De vraag naar leefbare menselijkheid wordt feitelijk immers gesteld binnen opgedrongen condities van vervreemding, verknechting en vele vormen van menselijk leiden. We zien, te laat, dat het kwaad al is geschied. De daaruit smekende vraag naar heil, bevrijding van dwang, vroeger vooral thema van alle godsdiensten, is meer dan ooit de grote bede geworden van de mensheid, ook buiten alle godsdienstigheid. De heilsvraag is niet alleen religieus en theologisch, maar in onze tijd ook politiek en sociaal uitdrukkelijk bewust de grote drijfveer binnen onze hedendaagse geschiedenis.⁸

Schillebeeckx' interpretation of this contemporary horizon of a universal striving for salvation and emancipation is situated in the alienating contexts of the failures and terrifying threats ensuing from scientific, technological and industrial developments, the failures and threats, namely, which continue to destroy human dignity and undermine the ecological viability of life on earth, thereby producing negative contrast

⁸ Schillebeeckx, "Theologie, cultuur, politiek," *Dominikaans Leven* 46 (1990) 8-9: "What once seemed only to be of interest to religious people is now throughout the world a concern of diverse sciences and techniques, of actions, ideologies and even cultures. They all strive towards healing: the making whole or salvation of human beings and their society, in an earthly environment cleansed of all sorts of toxins. It is unmistakable that the question of a true and liveable humanity lives more than ever before among all humans. The answer to this has become even more urgent in our times since on the one hand we realize that humans fail, fall short and above all are shafted, and how on the other hand consoling and hope-giving fragments of human wholeness and self-liberation are already able to be experienced. The question of a liveable humanity has actually always already been raised within evident conditions of alienation, enslavement and many forms of human suffering. We see, too late, that evil has happened. The ensuing, pleading question of salvation, liberation from violence, previously expressed above all through the religions, has in our days more than ever become the great prayer of humanity, even apart from all religiosity. The salvation question is, on an explicitly conscious level, both politically and socially, not just religiously and theologically, the great driving force of all human history." See also *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 729 / *Christ*, 790-791; *Tussentijds verhaal*, 67 / *Interim Report*, 57-58; "God, Society and Human Salvation," 87-88; "Op weg naar een christologie," 148; "Questions on Christian Salvation of and for Man," 109; "Spreeken over God in een context van bevrijding," 8.

experiences.⁹ Schillebeeckx thus places the question of salvation and emancipation within the historical drama between systems and initiatives of human action that variably invigorate or devastate the sustainable communities and viable identities that are basic to a holistic human existence.

Within this threatened, fragile and yet tenacious desire for a liveable humanity, Schillebeeckx discerns various repercussions for the christian interpretation and experience of liberation. Confident, on the one hand, in the aspirations of human beings to overcome suffering in its regional and global proportions, Schillebeeckx identifies the conversation with these movements as offering the basis for renewing the credibility and intelligibility of christian identity.¹⁰ He is thereby concerned to articulate a viable interpretation of salvation that makes a distinctive contribution to these aspirations to overcome oppression and violence. His effort to articulate the distinctive contribution of a viable interpretation of salvation from God in and with Jesus involves at least three concerns. First, his effort seeks to counter the tendency in some groups, whether ecclesial or secular, to consider theological and christological traditions obsolete and irrelevant amidst the urgent imperatives to overcome the various forms of suffering threatening a viable humanity and ecological integrity.¹¹ Second, his effort seeks to

⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Als politiek*, 9-10 / *Christian Faith*, 1-2; *Mensen*, 21-23 / *Church*, 2-3.

¹⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 511 / *Jesus*, 623; *Tussentijds verhaal*, 68 / *Interim Report*, 58.

¹¹ This takes the form either of an outright dismissal of God or of a fetish with the historical Jesus divorced from his eschatological identification with God's reign. See Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 522-523 / *Jesus*, 636: "(...) voor ons brengt Jezus ter sprake in een tijd die het in de meeste van zijn levenssectoren – zo niet in alle – zonder God blijkt te stellen. De

counter the bias that reduces all the forms and ranges of human suffering to socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological alienations. Such a narrowing of the drama of suffering with its tendency to focus only on structural or systemic dimensions of suffering can lose sight of collective responsibilities for more personally situated afflictions related to qualitative challenges. This structuralist bias, in losing sight of concrete people and their daily concerns, risks reducing liberating efforts to exclusively structural changes through socio-cultural, political-economic or ecological kinds of

vraag die van Jezus uitgaat kan dan niet zijn de al dan niet verantwoorde bewering dat Jezus de historische belichaming is van een existentieële óf maatschappijkritische boodschap. Voor deze boodschap hebben wij, in de 20e eeuw, hoe langer hoe minder behoefte om terug te grijpen naar een mens die in de eerste eeuw van onze tijdrekening heeft geleefd; waarom ook?" See also, Schillebeeckx, "Jésus, parabole de Dieu - paradigme de l'homme," in *Savoir, faire, espérer: les limites de la raison*, II, (Bruxelles: Facultés universitaires St. Louis, 1976), 800: "La redécouverte de Jésus de Nazareth nous libère, à juste titre, d'une image de Dieu étouffante, mais elle pose d'une façon nouvelle la question de Dieu, justement pour faire comprendre Jésus de Nazareth dans la totalité de sa vie. Si Jésus n'était qu'une confirmation soit d'une auto-compréhension existentielle, soit de notre aspiration vers une amélioration socio-critique du monde, alors je ne vois comment Jésus-Christ pourrait signifier «message», l'heureux message – *euaggelion*, c'est-à-dire «la Bonne nouvelle venue de Dieu» (Mc 1, 14-15) – pour nous autres du vingtième siècle. Que nous apporterait le fait qu'un homme du premier siècle de notre ère s'avère seulement capable de confirmer les meilleures choses que nous pouvons déjà découvrir en nous-mêmes et que nous essayons d'effectuer par nos propres forces? La courte histoire de ces dix dernières années nous apprend, en outre, que, après avoir abandonné Dieu et s'être pourtant attaché à Jésus de Nazareth, l'on acquiert très vite la conviction qu'il est aisé de se passer de Jésus de Nazareth aussi, et que les procédés d'une analyse de la société (marxistes, par exemple) sont plus utiles qu'une orientation à partir de Jésus de Nazareth." More recently, Schillebeeckx puts it this way: "Hier in het westen trachten wij als christenen, theologen, ons te richten tot moderne, geseculariseerde mensen om dit geloof in Jezus Christus voor hen aannemelijk te maken; de christenen, theologen in de derde wereld daarentegen richten zich tot de verontmenselijke mens, de niet-persoon, die zich veeleer de vraag stelt, hoe men kan geloven in een goede, bevrijdende God in een wereld van lijden en verdrukking. Ik denk dat deze laatste benadering dichterbij de zorg van Jezus staat, dan de eerste. Ik denk, dat onze westerse theologie beide vormen van zorg zal moeten combineren, willen we uiteindelijk niet belanden bij een westerse emancipatie-theologie, die voorbijgaat aan het christelijk geloof en de christologie," *Als politiek*, 32 / *Christian Faith*, 28-29.

activism that in effect neglect concrete persons and thereby further alienate them.¹²

Third, the effort to viably reinterpret God's salvific activity in Jesus seeks to counter an even more disastrous bias for Schillebeeckx. It seeks to counter the religious bias that limits salvation to interioristic, sectarian or other worldly forms of escapism. Such a religious legitimization of withdrawal from historical conditions capitulates to structural evil.¹³ By abandoning the responsibility for socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological transformation, the religious renunciation of responsibility enables the proliferation of structural oppression and systemic violence. Schillebeeckx' effort to creatively articulate salvation from God in Jesus amidst these concerns leads him to ask: Why and how does Jesus distinctively bring salvation and liberation amidst the histories of suffering?¹⁴ What difference does the witness of Jesus the Christ to God's saving activity make to current processes of redemption and sociopolitical liberation? In response to these questions, the interaction between sociopolitical liberation and salvation in Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology is decisively oriented by three biblical resources: i) the historical lifepraxis, political execution and eschatological

¹² Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 18-19, 524 / *Jesus*, 24-25, 638. "De 'God van Jezus' en de 'Jezus van God'," 102-103 / "The 'God of Jesus' and the 'Jesus of God'," 112-113.

¹³ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 684 / *Christ*, 744.

¹⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 511-512 / *Jesus*, 623: "Welke plaats heeft Jezus van Nazaret in het geheel van deze menselijke lijdensgeschiedenis op zoek naar zin, bevrijding en heil?... welke inbreng heeft Jezus' boodschap en praxis bij aller poging om het mensdom te bevrijden in de volle zin van het woord?" See also *Jezus*, 18 / *Jesus*, 24; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 740 / *Christ*, 802: "Waarom Jezus Christus?" (section title); and the entire article entitled "Waarom Jezus de Christus?" especially 4 ff.; *Als politiek*, 9 / *Christian Faith*, 1: "Wie of wat brengt mensen heil?" (chapter title).

resurrection of Jesus; ii) the experience and interpretation of grace in the early christian communities; and iii) three significant New Testament metaphors. A summary of these resources is therefore warranted in responding to the question of why and how faith in the witness of Jesus the Christ to the liberating God orients the tension between salvation and emancipation. Schillebeeckx does not explicitly articulate the relationship between these three sets of resources, but they are distinctly evident in his writings, within and alongside his christological trilogy. They consolidate originary elements that are constitutive for the liberationist project in his practical-critical soteriology.

2.I.1. Jesus

Schillebeeckx does not find sufficient historical evidence to adequately reconstruct the politics of Jesus with any probable certainty. He therefore considers it very difficult to evaluate a) whether Jesus was either political or apolitical or b) what the precise politics of Jesus involved.¹⁵ The redaction and editing of early Jesus traditions by minority christian communities liable to persecution, coupled with an apologetic projection of their socio-cultural strategies of religious and political survival onto the

¹⁵ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 533-536 / *Christ*, 584-585. Even if the politics of Jesus was able to be adequately reconstructed, Schillebeeckx is quick to point out that a biblical fundamentalism that would try to directly apply them to a contemporary politics either of the right or the left would be unjustified, hermeneutically naïve and lead only to an ideological biblicism. See also "Befreiungstheologien zwischen Medellín und Puebla," *Orientierung* 43 (1979) 20.

Jesus figure, renders the critical retrieval of the politics of Jesus tenuous.¹⁶ The most one can historically infer from the available evidence is that a) the involvement of Jesus in pragmatic politics was indirect and subsidiary to his service and celebration of the reign of God; and b) Jesus did not separate issues of socio-cultural reconciliation and political-economic justice from his personal identification with the praxis of God's reign. This minimal historical knowledge of the concrete politics of Jesus thus cedes in Schillebeeckx' soteriology to a full account of Jesus as the eschatological prophet of God's inbreaking reign. If the sociopolitical repercussions of Jesus' lifestyle and person are to be delineated, they must be approached through this account.

i) The Eschatological Prophet of God's Preferential Solidarity

Schillebeeckx presents Jesus the Christ as the eschatological prophet whose life, death and resurrection decisively witness to God's inbreaking reign as a salvific initiative with and for human beings.¹⁷ Jesus, a contingent and finite human being, is utterly identified with and entirely empowered by God's inbreaking reign. Jesus is so identified with and empowered by God's inbreaking reign that his praxis intrinsically communicates and describes God's reign as a reign of justice and love among human

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 520-524 / *ibid.*, 568-572.

¹⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 116-117 / *Jezus*, 142-143; *Mensen*, 140 / *Church*, 121. See also *Interim Report*, 131; *Als politiek*, 24-25 / *Christian Faith*, 19-20; and "Jésus de Nazareth, le récit d'un vivant," *Lumière et vie* 134 (1977) 18-33; "Ik geloof in Jezus van Nazareth," *Tijdschrift voor Geestelijk Leven* 35 (1979) 456-459 / "I believe in Jesus of Nazareth," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 17 (1980) 21-23; "De levensweg van Jezus, beleden als de Christus," 142.

beings.¹⁸ Representing the eschatological community of justice and love in his ministry and person, Jesus witnesses to God's solidarity with the vulnerable who suffer.¹⁹ Communicating this solidarity, he identifies with the marginalized, the poor and disadvantaged: the active solidarity of Jesus with the vulnerable discloses "een onmiskenbare *partijdigheid* van Jezus' liefde met het oog op *universele* Gods heerschappij."²⁰ Jesus is the eschatological prophet of God's preferential solidarity.

In and through the lifepraxis of Jesus, God's reign is enacted and promised as a renewal of history. This renewal entails abolishing suffering, eliminating sickness and

¹⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 124-126 / *Jesus*, 152-154; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 585 / *Christ*, 639; *Mensen*, / *Church*, 118. See also "De 'God van Jezus' en de 'Jezus van God'," 106-107 / "The 'God of Jesus' and the 'Jesus of God'," 117; "De levensweg van Jezus, beleden als de Christus," 141.

¹⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 5-6 "Woord vooraf" / *Christ*, 18.

²⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 486 / *Jesus*, 593: "the unmistakable partisan preference of Jesus' love with a view towards the *universal* reign of God." Schillebeeckx further elaborates on this play between the particularity of a partisan preference for the poor and the universality of eschatological salvation in *Mensen*, 197 / *Church*, 178: "Immers, wie niet idealistisch denkt, moet de door het christendom verkondigde universele mensenliefde innerlijk verbinden met *solidaire partijdigheid* voor elk beschadigd en gekrenkt menselijk bestaan ... Terwille van haar universaliteit, die niemand uitsluit, is de christelijke liefde, maatschappelijk-politiek gezien, concreet partijdig, – ofwel is ze maatschappelijk-concreet niet universeel!" / "Whoever does not think idealistically must always intrinsically connect the universal human love proclaimed by Christianity with a *partisan solidarity* with the wounded and diseased human condition ... On account of its universality excluding no one, christian love is, in a sociopolitical perspective, concretely partisan – otherwise socially-concretely it is not universal!" This explains the partisan, i.e. preferential option for the poor and marginalized also endorsed by Schillebeeckx in *Mensen*, 188 / *Church*, 169: "In het huidige sociaal-politiek-economische tijdsgewricht van structureel onrecht voor de meerderheid der mensen (...) [d]e optie voor armen en verstoten is juist een innerlijke consequentie van de specifiek-christelijke universele mensenliefde." / "In the contemporary sociopolitical and economic conjuncture of structural injustice for the majority of human beings (...) [t]he option for the poor and the outcast is a direct consequence of the specifically christian and universal love for humans."

distress, negating relationships of domination and enslavement, sustaining the integrity of the ecological environment as well as restoring life to the dying and the dead.²¹ In and through the praxis of Jesus, God's reign is enacted and promised as an unexpected and abundant renewal of relationship with the living God who is sovereign over the finite initiatives of evil. In and through the praxis of Jesus, God's reign is enacted and promised as a community of justice and love that is as impartial and inclusive as it is universal: the justice and love defining this eschatological community restores dignity to and thereby empowers the outcast, the culturally excluded, the politically voiceless, the economically dispossessed, the religiously impure, as well as to those marginalized and oppressed in any way whatsoever in violation of their being human.²² This universal community of justice and love even extends so far as to invite oppressors into repentance and the restoration of right relationship. Jesus opens up lines of communication with the marginalized, uproots internalized attachments to patterns of socio-cultural alienation and political-economic enslavement, and restores a sense of effective agency to the oppressed.²³ The personal identification of Jesus with the approach and future of God's reign is so radically original to his way of life, that his

²¹ Schillebeeckx, *Mensen*, 130-131, 135 / *Church*, 111-112, 116. See also "De levensweg van Jezus, beleden als de Christus," 141.

²² Schillebeeckx, *Als politiek*, 25 / *Christian Faith*, 20. See also "Befreiungstheologien zwischen Medellín und Puebla," *Orientierung* 43 (1979) 20.

²³ Schillebeeckx, *Mensen*, 132 / *Church*, 113.

person is in a unique relation to God the creator and liberator.²⁴ As a result of this unique relation, the living God of the nations emerges in the praxis and person of Jesus as a God who is intimately and unconditionally engaged in securing a sustainable humanity for human beings, while this sustainable humanity of human beings is reoriented by this same praxis and person of Jesus towards justice and love.

Uit het nieuwe testament blijkt enerzijds dat God uiteindelijk slechts ‘gedefinieerd’ kan worden vanuit en in termen van de menselijke levensweg van Jezus, anderzijds dat Jezus als mens *in zijn volle menselijkheid* ten diepste slechts gedefinieerd kan worden in termen van zijn unieke relatie tot God en de mensen ... Voor christenen is Jezus daarom (a) de beslissende en definitieve openbaring van God, en (b) laat hij juist dáárin ons tegelijkertijd zien wat en hoe wij mensen ten slotte kunnen, moeten en eigenlijk mogen zijn ... In de mens Jezus vallen de openbaring van het goddelijke en de ontsluiting van het ware, goede en waarlijk-gelukkige mens-zijn volkomen samen in een en dezelfde persoon. Kern van heel het optreden van Jezus is dus: de op menselijkheid bedachte ‘God van mensen’ wil ons maken tot ‘mensen van God’, die dan ook, zoals God, op mensen en hun menselijkheid zijn bedacht.²⁵

²⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 219-220 / *Jezus*, 267-268; *Mensen*, 131, 137, 140 / *Church*, 112, 118-119, 121-122. See also *Interim Report*, 141; *Als politiek*, 26-27 / *Christian Faith*, 21-22; and “De levensweg van Jezus, beleden als de Christus,” 142.

²⁵ Schillebeeckx, *Mensen*, 140-141 / *Church*, 121-122: “From the New Testament it emerges on the one hand that God ultimately can be ‘defined’ only in terms of the human way-of-life of Jesus, and, on the other hand, that Jesus as a human being *in his full humanity* can be defined most deeply only in terms of his unique relation to God and to humans ... For Christians therefore Jesus is (a) the decisive and definitive revelation of God, and (b) precisely in this he allows us to see at the same time finally what and how we humans can, must and really may be ... In the human Jesus, the revelation of the divine and the disclosure of the true, good and truly-happy way of being human completely coincide in one and the same person. The core of the entire emergence of Jesus is thus: the ‘God of humans’ who is concerned for humanity wants to make us into ‘humans of God’, who then also, like God, are concerned for human beings and their humanity.” See *Interim Report*, 138; and “De levensweg van Jezus, beleden als de Christus,” 142: “Uit Jezus’ levensweg wordt voor de gelovige duidelijk, dat de God van Jezus, de God van Israël, de mens geheel aanvaardt en hem of haar in en door die aanvaarding tracht te vernieuwen in relatie tot zichzelf en de ander, in een menselijk leefbare wereld ... Jezus’ boodschap van en over God was dermate geïntegreerd in zijn handelnd, bevrijdend en communicatie-omsluitend omgaan met de medemens, dat zijn verkondiging en

In his being human, Jesus communicates through his constructive action and suffering that God is a God of solidarity for and with the healing and empowerment of human beings, especially the violated and enslaved. In his being human, Jesus at the same time communicates through his constructive action and suffering how it is that human beings can live in solidarity for and with the liberation of others, especially the violated and enslaved, and thereby renew their relationship with the justice and love which God *is*. Jesus both communicates God's existential involvement in an effective solidarity with human beings, especially the most wounded and vulnerable, and reorients preferential solidarity among human beings as a genuinely liberating solidarity that does not result in other forms of domination or exclusion. As a witness to the excessive love accessible in God's solidarity with a suffering humanity, Jesus communicates a preferential justice and unrestricted reconciliation.

ii) The Execution of Jesus

It is within the context of his praxis of God's solidarity and all its implications that Schillebeeckx approaches and situates the interpretation of Jesus' death by political torture and execution. This is a crucial point in Schillebeeckx' exegetical retrieval of the biblical soteriology that orients his liberationist project. The interpretation of the death of Jesus can not be isolated from the way-of-life and the message that preceded it. Isolating the death of Jesus from his lifepraxis results in misrepresenting its redemptive

levenswandel elkaar wederkerig interpreteren, terwijl ze, tezamen, de mens veranderen en vernieuwen, hem en haar vrij makend voor de medemens in solidaire liefde..."

significance. To represent the death of Jesus as a bloody and even sadistic sacrifice renders the interpretation of God's redemptive activity in Jesus liable to mythopoetic distortion.²⁶ The death of Jesus was the political consequence of the rejection of his praxis and person by a powerful alliance between elite religious and political interests resisting the sociopolitical repercussions of his negation of master-slave relationships in the name of God's inbreaking reign.²⁷ The death of Jesus expresses the limitless identification of Jesus with this message and praxis of resisting evil, reversing suffering and renewing sociopolitical as well as religious relationships.²⁸ Jesus was so utterly empowered by God's reign that the imminent threat of his dying did not deter him from continuing to entrust his life to the approaching and definitive manifestation of God's reign.²⁹ The kind of death Jesus was subject to also signifies the extent of Jesus'

²⁶ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 732-733 / *Christ*, 794; *Mensen*, 138-139 and 144 / *Church*, 120 and 125. See also *Als politiek*, 27-28 / *Christian Faith*, 23; and "Mysterie van ongerechtigheid en mysterie van erbarmen," 17; "De levensweg van Jezus, beleden als de Christus," 143. This eventually applies to the interpretation of the resurrection as well. As Schillebeeckx tersely puts it: "Zonder Jezus' menselijke levensweg wordt heel de christologie een ideologische bovenbouw," *Mensen*, 28 / *Church*, 8.

²⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 732-733 / *Christ*, 794; *Mensen*, 138 / *Church*, 120. See also *Interim Report*, 133; and "Ik geloof in Jezus van Nazareth," 460-461 / "I believe in Jesus of Nazareth," 24-25.

²⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 732-733 / *Christ*, 794; *Mensen*, 139 / *Church*, 120. See also *Interim Report*, 133; and "Ik geloof in Jezus van Nazareth," 461 / "I believe in Jesus of Nazareth," 25; "De levensweg van Jezus, beleden als de Christus," 143.

²⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 261 / *Jesus*, 317; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 732-733 / *Christ*, 794.

identification with the outcast and the downtrodden.³⁰ The execution of Jesus on the cross conveys his renunciation of an apocalyptic vengeance on oppressors that would heal human history through a divinely inaugurated or sanctioned violence.³¹

Jezus wilde geen messiaans-politieke leider zijn, maar dit betekent niet dat zijn boodschap en zijn levensweg geen politieke betekenis hadden. Ik noem 'subversief' daden en woorden die het gezag van sociaal-politieke instituties in feite ondermijnen. De grondkeuze van Jezus was: macht te weigeren, en zo kregen zijn woorden en daden een ongeëvenaard gezag. Zelf uitstoting en verwerping acceptierend, wil Jezus niet de leider van uitgestotenen zijn. Daarmee wil hij onderstrepen dat uitstoting geen privilege is, maar een pervers effect van een oppressieve samenleving ... Jezus' kruisdood is de consequentie van een leven in radicale dienst aan de gerechtigheid en liefde, een gevolg van zijn keuze voor arme en uitgestotenen mensen, van een keuze voor zijn volk dat onder uitbuiting en afzetting leed. Binnen een boze wereld is elke inzet voor gerechtigheid en liefde levensgevaarlijk.³²

The sociopolitical and religious repercussions of Jesus' communication of God's justice and love are subversive and threaten the systemic interests of the dominant elite of local authorities, both religious and imperial. Jesus is therefore humiliated, tortured and executed in absurd disproportion to the liberating relationships and lifestyles he

³⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Mensen*, 187 / *Church*, 168. See also *Als politiek*, 28 / *Christian Faith*, 24.

³¹ Schillebeeckx, *Mensen*, 143-144 / *Church*, 125.

³² *Ibid.*, 144 / *ibid.*, 125: "Jesus did not want to be a messianic-political leader, but this does not mean that his message and his career did not have political meaning. I would call 'subversive' actions and words which in fact undermine the authority of social-political institutions. The basic choice of Jesus was to refuse power; and so his words and actions take on an unparalleled authority. Accepting even rejection and repudiation, Jesus does not want to be the leader of the outcast. He thereby wants to stress that being outcast is not a privilege, but the perverse effect of an oppressive society ... Jesus' death on the cross is the consequence of a life in the radical service of justice and love, a consequence of his option for poor and outcast human beings, of a choice for his people that suffered exploitation and manipulation. Within an evil world, any commitment to justice and love is perilous."

mobilizes. His dying and death are therefore interpreted in terms of a sociological backlash against his unswerving fidelity to the praxis of God's reign. The death of Jesus was a suffering for others rooted in his personal validation of God's reign as a humanizing reign of justice and reconciliation among human beings.

While his dying and death are neither in themselves salvific events nor intrinsically necessary as an act of obedience to a divine demand for sacrificial compensation, Schillebeeckx brings another dimension of the salvific meaning of the death of Jesus to our attention. God does not reject Jesus, but identifies with the rejected Jesus and therefore with all the marginalized who are overruled by a dominant minority of socio-cultural and political-economic elites. Even when liberation from suffering fails to realize its desired outcome and evil proliferates, the witness of Jesus indicates that, despite such failure, God remains intimately concerned for the violated and vanquished and does not abandon them.³³ Within the death of Jesus, God's preferential solidarity with all the violated and vanquished is disclosed.

Schillebeeckx therefore maintains that, in his dying and death, Jesus discloses the intrinsic value of practices of reconciliation and justice. Even when they end in absurd failure and do not tangibly eliminate or reverse the suffering of others, they communicate love.³⁴

³³ Schillebeeckx, "Mysterie van ongerechtigheid en mysterie van erbarmen," 18; and further *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 760-769 / *Christ*, 823-832.

³⁴ Schillebeeckx, "Mysterie van ongerechtigheid en mysterie van erbarmen," 18; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 734 / *Christ*, 795; "De levensweg van Jezus, beleden als de Christus,"

Jezus' kruisdood als innerlijke consequentie van het radicalisme van zijn boodschap en verzoenende praxis, wijst er op, dat elke praxis van bevrijdende verzoening die op menselijkheid is bedacht, geldig is *in en uit zichzelf* en niet pas achteraf vanuit het eventueel volgend succes. Niet het succes telt, evenmin het falen of mislukken vooral door ingreep van anderen. Wel die dienende liefde. In Jezus' 'vergeefse' liefde, die er weet van heeft dat haar maatstaaf niet in het succes ligt maar in zichzelf als radicale liefde en identificatie, werd ons het ware gelaat zowel van God als van de mens getoond. Verzoening of bevrijding wordt pas dan geen pure wisseling van machtsverhoudingen en dus nieuwe heerschappij, als zij, hoewel vanuit een beperkte invalshoek van de historisch onvoltooide situatie, voor iedereen wil gelden ... Zij steunt op een liefde die 'het vergeefse' aandurft en de mensen niet dwingt tot wat men zelf als redding en bevrijding ziet.³⁵

By disclosing the intrinsic value of the practices of justice and reconciliation, Jesus affirms God's solidarity with struggling human beings in their effort to establish liberated relationships in society, even when such a society is not fully attained. In his dying and death, Jesus refused the messianic invocation of a divinely inaugurated violence that would shatter the powerful. In his dying and death, Jesus further endorses unconditional and sovereign love as a defining feature of the approach of God's reign,

143.

³⁵ Schillebeeckx, "Waarom Jezus de Christus?" 14: "Jesus' death on the cross, inner consequence of the radicalism of his message and reconciling praxis, indicates that every praxis of liberating reconciliation that is directed towards humanity is valid *in and of itself* and not in retrospect with respect to possible, subsequent success. It is not success that counts, not even failure or miscarriage due to the intervention of others: but the love that serves. In Jesus' 'gratuitous' love, whose measure he knows does not lie with success but in itself as a radical love and identification, the true face of both God and humans is displayed. Reconciliation or liberation is only then not simply a mere change in power relationships and thus a new domination in so far as, however much connected to the limited context of a historically incomplete situation, it is valid for each and every one ... It is based on a love which risks the 'gratuitous' and does not force human beings into what one personally sees as deliverance and liberation." See also *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 773-774 / *Christ*, 837; and "God, Society and Human Salvation," 98.

thereby indicating that praxes of liberation are never to become the basis for a new system of domination. In his dying and death, Jesus further appeals to human freedom by refusing to enforce a single, universal manifesto of emancipation as the definitive instrument of liberation for the oppressed; his limitation leaves others free to assume and define their responsibilities for resisting suffering reversing oppression. The gratuitous love disclosed by Jesus in his death reorients the praxis of liberation as an invitation into responsibility for others to the point not only of constructive action but also of productive suffering resulting from a tenacious fidelity to such liberating concerns. The gratuitous love disclosed by Jesus in his death reorients the praxis of liberation by emphasizing that the service of liberation also includes setting others free in their responsibilities by accepting the limits to one's own, thereby deconstructing any inclination to centralize an absolute control of justice in a single figure or movement. The gratuity of love disclosed in the cross of Jesus deconstructs the claim of any group or individual to appropriate God's justice into a closed system where aggressive efforts at liberation become the basis for new forms of exclusion, scapegoating and control. Schillebeeckx concedes that the trust in God's proximity even amidst failure and the recalcitrance of historical evil can be politically manipulated by interests that want to maintain their privilege by propagandizing the oppressed to accept their degrading condition as a divinely imposed destiny.³⁶ He identifies this manipulative rhetoric as the

³⁶ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 430-435 / *Jesus*, 526-532; "Mysterie van ongerechtigheid, mysterie van erbarmen," 18; *Mensen*, 148-149 / *Church*, 129-130.

direct result of an artificial focus on the death of Jesus as a salvific event in and of itself in isolation from his lifepraxis and message. Jesus' lifepraxis and message of God's reign in solidarity with the disadvantaged, centred on right relationships rooted in justice and love, remains constitutive for interpreting the event and meaning of his death. By strengthening the essential connection between the execution of Jesus and his lifepraxis, Schillebeeckx counters these attempts by elite interests to distort the redemptive significance of his death.

iii) The Resurrection of Jesus

The wholly unexpected resurrection of Jesus intensifies this solidarity of God with humans in their histories of suffering. With the resurrection, God's eschatological action authenticates and recognizes the permanent validity of Jesus' way-of-life and radical identification with God's reign.³⁷ As with the interpretation of his dying and death, the connection to the message and praxis of Jesus remains pivotal for Schillebeeckx for an adequate interpretation of the resurrection. Otherwise the eschatological reality itself of the resurrection is liable to being mythologized and hence distorted.

Daarom is de werkelijkheid van de opstanding, waardoor het opstandingsgeloof pas in het leven werd geroepen, de toets van zowel het door Jezus verkondigde *verstaan van God* als onze *soteriologische christologie*. In de verrijzenis authenticeert God de persoon, de boodschap en heel de levensweg van Jezus. Hij drukt er Zijn zegel op en spreekt tegen wat mensen Jezus aandeden. Zoals de dood

³⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 527 / *Jesus*, 642; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 734-735 / *Christ*, 796; *Mensen*, 148 / *Church*, 129. See also "De levensweg van Jezus, beleden als de Christus," 146.

van Jezus niet van zijn leven kan worden losgemaakt, mag men evenmin zijn opstanding losmaken van zijn levensweg en dood ... Allereerst moeten we zeggen dat christelijk verrijzenisgeloof inderdaad een eerste evangelische *evaluatie* van Jezus' leven en kruisdood is, met name de erkenning van de innerlijke, door niets ongedaan te maken, onherroepelijke betekenis van Jezus' verkondiging en praxis van het rijk Gods.³⁸

In this passage, Schillebeeckx belabours the significance of an adequate interpretation of the resurrection for developing a soteriology. The resurrection event has an irrevocable relationship to the lifepraxis of Jesus that is constitutive for the interpretation of the eschatological reality of the event. The resurrection is not only a pneumatic and post-historical ratification by God of the significance of Jesus' praxis and message in communicating the reign of justice and love. Through the resurrection, the praxis and message of the reign of justice and love are recognized and endorsed as provisionally anticipating God's definitive power over evil.³⁹ The resurrection is not a compensation package for work-related injuries sustained on a job that remains incomplete. The healing and empowering lifestyle of Jesus already enacts the resurrection. The historical

³⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Mensen*, 148-149 / *Church*, 129: "Therefore the reality of the resurrection, through which alone the resurrection faith is brought to life, is the test of both the *understanding of God* proclaimed by Jesus and our *soteriological christology*. In the resurrection, God authenticates the person, message and whole way-of-life of Jesus. He puts his seal on it and speaks out against what human beings did to Jesus. Just as the death of Jesus cannot be detached from his life, so too his resurrection cannot be detached from his way-of-life and death ... First of all, we must say that christian faith in the resurrection is actually a first *evaluation* by the gospel of Jesus' life and crucifixion, precisely as the recognition of the intrinsic, intact and irrevocable meaning of Jesus' proclamation and praxis of the reign of God." See also *Jezus*, 527 / *Jesus*, 642; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 734 / *Christ*, 795; *Interim Report*, 134-136; *Als politiek*, 30-31 / *Christian Faith*, 26-27; and "De levensweg van Jezus, beleden als de Christus," 146. For exegetically detailed argumentation, see "Seigneur, à qui irions-nous?" 280-282.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 146 / *ibid.*, 127. See also *Interim Report*, 135.

praxis, message and defenselessness of Jesus in his dying are a historical anticipation of the resurrection as God's sovereign power over evil and suffering. Jesus' lifepraxis, message and fidelity even into death, communicating God's solidarity with human beings as a solidarity intent upon justice and love, are a partial, advance realization of the resurrection as God's sovereign power over evil and suffering.⁴⁰ In other words, the resurrection event is not only the definitive manifestation beyond history of the actual reversal of the history of suffering; the resurrection event is already historically enacted in the praxis and message of the human being Jesus.⁴¹ The eschatological resurrection of Jesus further communicates God's reign as a universal liberation extending even to the downtrodden who have been forgotten and deprived of justice and love through humiliating deaths.⁴² The resurrection is proleptically communicated, even embodied, by the historical praxis and message of Jesus as the eschatological beginning of the reversal of suffering. In his liberating interactions that heal and empower suffering human beings, the resurrection is presented by Schillebeeckx as God's promise not to grant evil and suffering the final decision over the ultimate integrity of life. There is an intrinsic relationship between the liberating praxis of the life of Jesus and his

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 146-149 / *ibid*, 127-130.

⁴¹ Schillebeeckx, "Mysterie van ongerechtigheid, mysterie van erbarmen," 18.

⁴² Schillebeeckx, *Mensen*, 195 / *Church*, 177. See also "Ik geloof in Jezus van Nazareth," 467 / "I believe in Jesus of Nazareth," 28.

resurrection. Schillebeeckx emphasizes that this connection needs to be taken up and pursued by soteriology.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead thus eschatologically continues the actual overcoming of the history of suffering initiated in and constitutive for his lifepraxis. The pneumatic remembrance of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead entails a practical mediation that continues the eschatological reversal of suffering and evil in the contexts of contemporary cultures and societies. Schillebeeckx draws out several implications of this profound connection between the resurrection of Jesus and his lifepraxis and death. First, the critical power of faith in the resurrection of Jesus thus serves as *both* a criticism of any claim that absolutizes a finite sociopolitical movement *and* a catalyst orienting a progressive political engagement.⁴³ He disclaims both the totalizing tendency of any instrumental soteriology that absolutizes the political as well as the fideistic soteriology that renounces the political on the basis of his soteriological approach to the resurrection of Jesus. Second, faith in the resurrection of Jesus, as faith in the permanent validity of Jesus' way-of-life, entails the recognition that God opens a future to every praxis of liberation, despite failure or transience; a definitive future, namely, that clearly distinguishes it from the tragic ambiguity of finite history.⁴⁴ The soteriological interpretation of the resurrection suggests an approach to political praxis which recognizes how incomplete historical emancipations remain and yet how much

⁴³ Schillebeeckx, "Mysterie van ongerechtigheid, mysterie van erbarmen," 19.

⁴⁴ Schillebeeckx, "God, Society and Human Salvation," 99.

they are to be encouraged in view of the future vindication of justice and reconciliation promised by the ultimate communication of divine love. Third, an integral faith in the resurrection of Jesus recognizes that, however much the process of emancipation is necessary for communicating God's solidarity with the afflicted, such solidarity also extends to embrace residual sufferings of finitude which no amount of human effort will ever remove.⁴⁵ And finally, Schillebeeckx argues that political dictatorships, maintained in power by so-called Christians who celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ every Sunday, would be impossible to sustain if the powerful were at all aware of the fact that this death and resurrection are based on the message and conduct of Jesus: on his praxis of the reign of God who is concerned for human persons and societies, especially the poor and disadvantaged.⁴⁶ In sum, the conviction that the praxis, death and resurrection of Jesus form an integral and indivisible witness to God's salvific activity with and for human beings in histories of suffering is bound to have particular implications for Schillebeeckx' soteriological interpretation of the connection and difference between salvation and sociopolitical emancipation. The biblical resources supporting Schillebeeckx' interpretation, however, also include his reconstruction of the experience of salvation in early christian communities and his collage of three biblical metaphors sustaining the integrity of life.

⁴⁵ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 145-146 and 524 / *Jesus*, 177-178 and 638; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 751-752 / *Christ*, 814.

⁴⁶ Schillebeeckx, "Christelijke identiteit en menselijke integriteit," 41 / "Christian Identity and Human Integrity," 195-196.

2.1.2. Early Christian Communities

Encountering their experience of salvation in Jesus the Christ as grace, the early christian movement formed into minority communities within the surrounding contexts of diverse societies and political economies. Schillebeeckx conducts an extensive analysis and synthesis of the experiential and interpretative elements that can be retrieved from the exegesis of New Testament literatures concerning their encounters with grace.⁴⁷ Based on this analysis and synthesis, Schillebeeckx concludes that, while early christians understood the approach of God's reign to include changes in social and political structures, they actually limited these implications to the internal organization of christian communities, due to their marginalized social situations.

Hiermee is dus geenzins geloofchend, dat de boodschap en de realiteit van het komende rijk Gods – de genade – ook een politiek-maatschappelijke betekenis heeft. Alleen, de *wijze waarop* deze christenen de samenleving willen vernieuwen, blijkt historisch bemiddeld. Het nieuwe testament ontleent dus wel degelijk aan de genadevolle verschijning van Jezus Christus verwachtingen, inspiratie en oriëntatie voor de vernieuwende maatschappelijk-politieke opbouw van onze wereld. Gezien de historische situatie beginnen zij daarmee echter alleen binnen de dimensie van de kerkgemeente.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 71-589 / *Christ*, 81-644.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 516 / *ibid.*, 563: "This is not to deny that the message and the reality of the coming reign of God – grace – also has a political-social significance. Only the *way in which* these Christians want to renew society appears to be historically conditioned. The New Testament thus indeed derives expectations, inspiration and orientation for the renewing sociopolitical development of our world from the grace-filled phenomenon of Jesus Christ. Given the historical situation, moreover, they begin only within the dimensions of the church community." See also "Op weg naar een christologie," 149; and *Tussentijds verhaal*, 69 / *Interim Report*, 59.

It is very clear for Schillebeeckx that the early christian communities recognized yet were limited in their development of the sociopolitical ramifications of the grace of salvation. The confined position of early christian communities allowed them to pursue only one kind of sociological option from among many entailed by the economy of grace. The sociological determination of this option is not in itself normative, but variable according to changing historical contexts. As the historical circumstances change, so do the possibilities for variable sociological configurations of the public repercussions of grace.

2.I.3. Three Metaphors

A third strand of biblical resources that is significant for the contemporary soteriological account of the connection and difference between salvation and sociopolitical liberation is found in the collage of three biblical metaphors that Schillebeeckx draws together. This collage, which he has reiterated in numerous texts, functions as a summary of the biblical resources witnessing to God's reign and the interpretation of salvation in the early christian communities. It also functions for him as the basis for drawing out contemporary orientations. The three biblical metaphors are placed in the historical tension of an eschatological temporality that holds the present and the future in a productive tension. This tension affirms yet leaves open the creative development of concrete sets of actions oriented by the metaphors. The presentation of

the collection is thus situated within a practical mandate. Succinctly stated, these three metaphors are:

- (a) het definitieve heil of de radicale bevrijding van het mensdom tot een broederlijke en zusterlijke samenleving en leefgemeenschap, waar geen meester-knecht-verhoudingen meer heersen, smart en tranen uitgewist en vergeten zijn, wordt '*rijk Gods*' genoemd;
- (b) het volkomen heil en geluk van de individuele persoon ('sarks', lichaam of vlees, geheten in de bijbel) binnen die voltooide gemeenschap noemt de christelijke geloofstraditie '*verrijzenis van het lichaam*' (...);
- (c) tenslotte, de voltooiing van het ongeschonden, voor mensen levensnoodzakelijke ecologisch leefmilieu wordt gesuggereerd door de grote metafoor van '*de nieuwe hemel en de nieuwe aarde*'.⁴⁹

Schillebeeckx follows up this terse listing of the metaphors with a practical-critical claim: the claim, namely, that these three metaphors give a precise orientation to contemporary christian action: concern for a better society for all, notably for the marginalized, through communicative actions consisting of incessant socio-cultural critiques with respect to actual injustices; concern for bodily, psychological and social

⁴⁹ Schillebeeckx, "De levensweg van Jezus, beleden als de Christus," 147: "(a) the definitive salvation or radical liberation of humanity for a brotherly and sisterly society and life-community, where no master-slave relationships rule any longer, pain and tears are wiped away and forgotten, named the '*reign of God*'; (b) the total salvation and happiness of the individual person ('sark', body or flesh in the Bible) within the fulfilled community is named '*the resurrection of the body*' in the christian faith tradition (...); (c) finally, the completion of the pristine ecological lifsystem, so necessary to human living, which is suggested by the great metaphor of '*the new heaven and the new earth*'." See also "Christelijke identiteit en menselijke integriteit," 40 / "Christian Identity and Human Integrity," 194; "Christian Conscience and Nuclear Deterrent," 111; "Glaube und Weltverantwortung," 13; "Spreken over God in een context van bevrijding," 22; "Christelijke spiritualiteit als ziel en bevrijding van de ethiek," 416-417; *Als politiek*, 33 / *Christian Faith*, 29-30; *Mensen*, 152 / *Church*, 133-134 (which latter text uniquely adds a fourth metaphor).

well-being; and concern for the natural environment.⁵⁰ Brief as this collection is, it serves as a dense summary of the practical and critical soteriological convictions that are relevant to Schillebeeckx' account of the connection and difference between socio-political liberation and salvation.

2.I.4. Summary

In 2.I.1-3 of this chapter I delineate the biblical resources that contribute to the understanding of the interaction between sociopolitical liberation and salvation in Schillebeeckx' soteriology. Three strands of biblical resources have been considered. Characteristic of all three is the priority of God's eschatological activity in Jesus with and for human beings, especially poor and marginal people, which is biblically designated by the *approaching reign of God* metaphor. Equally characteristic of all three strands is the necessity of a historical appropriation and development of the sociopolitical repercussions of God's eschatological activity with and for human beings, especially the violated and vanquished. Eschatological salvation endorses a preferential solidarity with the oppressed or risks compromising the universal outreach of justice

⁵⁰ Schillebeeckx, "De levensweg van Jezus, beleden als de Christus," 147; See also "Christelijke identiteit en menselijke integriteit," 40 / "Christian Identity and Human Integrity," 194; "Christian Conscience and Nuclear Deterrent," 111; "Glaube und Weltverantwortung," 13; "Spreken over God in een context van bevrijding," 22; "Christelijke spiritualiteit als ziel en bevrijding van de ethiek," 416-417; *Als politiek*, 33 / *Christian Faith*, 29-30; *Mensen*, 152 / *Church*, 133-134.

and reconciliation. The following passage from *Tussentijds verhaal / Interim Report* identifies the soteriological significance of these resources and consolidates the vantage point from which to proceed:

Het nieuwe testament erkent daarin duidelijk dat de praxis van het Rijk Gods, behalve innerlijke levensvernieuwing, een vernieuwing en verbetering van de samenlevingsstructuren insluit. (...) [W]aar christenen met anderen die samenleving wel kunnen veranderen, wordt dit ook een christelijk dringende plicht, voortvloeiend uit het evangelie van Christus. Uit dit inzicht volgt de maatschappelijk-politieke relevantie van het evangelie. De politiek wordt erdoor wel onder kritiek geplaatst, in deze zin dat de identificatie van de christen met de politiek als totaal heilssysteem onchristelijk is. Het christendom weigert elke verabsolutering en verideologisering van de politiek; maar anderzijds radicaliseert het de ook politieke inzet voor de heelmaking van persoon en samenleving. Juist aan deze radicale inzet voor de mens en zijn samenleving is een bijzondere tegenwoordigheid van God toegezegd.⁵¹

This passage summarizes the sociopolitical repercussions of the witness to and interpretation of God's reign. Affirming his interactive soteriology in support of progressive political activity, Schillebeeckx articulates how the historical praxis of God's reign as a praxis of eschatological solidarity deabsolutizes any totalizing politics and radicalizes the political engagement for the transformation of society. Totalizing

⁵¹ Schillebeeckx, *Tussentijds verhaal*, 69 / *Interim Report*, 59: "The New Testament clearly recognizes that the praxis of the kingdom of God, alongside inner renewal, includes the renewal and improvement of social structures. (...) [W]here Christians along with others can change society, this also becomes an urgent task for Christians, issuing from the gospel of Christ. The social and political relevance of the gospel flows from this insight. Politics is thus definitely subject to critique, in that the identification of Christians with politics as a total system for salvation is un-christian. Christianity rejects any absolutization or ideologization of politics; but on the other hand, however, it also radicalizes the political engagement for the making whole of the person and society. A particular presence of God is indicated precisely in this radical concern for human beings and their society." See also *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 355-537 / *Christ*, 585-586; "Op weg naar een christologie," 149; "Befreiungstheologien zwischen Medellín und Puebla," 19-20; "Can Christology be an Experiment," 12-13.

forms of politics are inconsistent with the preferential justice and unrestricted reconciliation of this solidarity because they intrinsically invent fresh patterns of exclusion and alienation. Eschatological justice and reconciliation radicalize the political transformation of society because they challenge the legitimation of power and distribution of resources. The biblical resources concerning the historical figure of Jesus the Christ, the experience of grace in the early christian communities, and the collage of biblical metaphors converge in shaping the way in which Schillebeeckx' recontextualizes the interaction between eschatological salvation and sociopolitical emancipation.

2.II. Emancipation and Salvation: Identity and Difference

The detour through the biblical resources orienting Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology structure his interpretation of the interaction between eschatological salvation and sociopolitical liberation. Grounded in the interdependent tensions identified between the lifepraxis, death and exaltation of Jesus the Christ, Schillebeeckx delineates both the identity and the difference between sociopolitical liberation and eschatological salvation. The biblical radicalization of the sociopolitical repercussions of the praxis of God's approaching reign as well as the permanent criticism of all sociopolitical movements that this entails further prompts Schillebeeckx' elaboration of their identity and difference.

2.II.1. The Identity between Emancipation and Salvation

In continuity with these biblical resources, the claim that emancipative liberations are constitutive for the experience, interpretation and communication of salvation is strengthened. Stated in Schillebeeckx' formal terms, processes of liberating emancipation effecting the structural transformation of socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological relationships are the condition of possibility for a contemporary faith in salvation from God in Jesus. Such diverse and extensive emancipations render the historical reality of eschatological salvation available, meaningful and believable in contemporary societies marked by histories of suffering. There is no greater purpose or accomplishment for human beings on earth, Schillebeeckx claims, than living in solidarity with emancipative movements and collaborating in the realization of liberation from suffering.⁵² Where emancipation can reconstruct social relationships and the integrity of life through communicative socio-cultural and strategic political-economic action, for instance, Schillebeeckx universally enjoins these efforts on all human beings in the name of the God of Jesus the Christ, creator and redeemer.⁵³ Without being explicitly christian, Schillebeeckx claims that emancipative processes of liberation are essential for Christianity in so far as they constitute the specific and historically necessary forms which directly communicate an

⁵² Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 704 / *Christ*, 765.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 703 and 704 / *ibid.*, 764 and 765.

authentically human – and hence, for Schillebeeckx, an ultimately christian – love, hope and faith.⁵⁴ He also opens the possibility that autonomous processes of liberating emancipation, without being explicitly christian, might contain inspirations and orientations which, while originating from christian sources, have been thoroughly secularized within a culture and continue to socialize personal and collective initiatives without any reflexive association to explicit forms of christian witness.⁵⁵ These claims endorse the view that emancipation is constitutive for the historical reality of salvation in the practical-critical soteriology of Schillebeeckx. At this level, while there is a remaining difference between liberating emancipation and salvation from God in Jesus that maintains a productive tension, they stand in a relationship of identity with one another.

Within this recognition of the soteriological significance of liberating emancipation, Schillebeeckx advances a set of claims concerning the theological significance of the identity between liberating eschatological salvation and sociopolitical emancipation which are central to his practical-critical soteriology. These claims concern the way in which liberating emancipations sustain the material, intelligible and communicable dimensions of salvation from God in Jesus. The promises of salvation, for Schillebeeckx, cannot be mediated theoretically; they require a practical mediation in the history of suffering. The first claim identifies the historical occurrence of liberating emancipations

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 707 / *ibid.*, 768.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 518 / *ibid.*, 565.

as the constitutive material of salvation from God. The historical development of emancipation forms the material basis for encountering the promises of salvation in a practical-mediation. The second claim identifies the historical value of liberating emancipations as the basis for the intelligibility of salvation. The practical mediations of emancipation form the basis for meaningful understanding of the promises of salvation that renders them intelligible. The third claim identifies the historical development of liberating emancipations as the basis for affirming the practical credibility of salvation from God in Jesus. Assisting in the historical development of emancipation offers a basis for communicating a credible witness to the promises of salvation. These claims move Schillebeeckx' understanding of the identity between liberating emancipation and eschatological salvation from the level of a preliminary soteriological conviction to an elaborate theological position.

With respect to the first claim, Schillebeeckx asserts that God's salvific activity can never be identified except within concrete praxes that historically liberate human beings. Liberating praxis is "het materiaal of medium van Gods heilshandelen, zonder hetwelk God 'machteloos' is."⁵⁶ Sociopolitical liberation forms "een innerlijk bestanddeel van de verlossing die het rijk Gods is."⁵⁷ Schillebeeckx reiterates "daß,

⁵⁶ Schillebeeckx, "Theologie als bevrijdingskunde," 401: "the material or medium of God's salvific activity, without which God is 'powerless'."

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 401: "an inner constitutive element of the redemption which is God's reign." See *Jezus*, 520-521 / *Jesus*, 634-635; "Christelijke identiteit en menselijke integriteit," 35-36 / "Christian Identity and Human Integrity," 187-188; *Als politiek*, 14-20 / *Christian Faith*, 7-14; "Befreiende Theologie," 68; and *Mensen*, 26-32 / *Church*, 6-13.

soweit Politik wirklich menschenbefreiend ist (...), Politik tatsächlich »Material« von Gottes Heilshandeln ist.”⁵⁸ Schillebeeckx invests a considerable importance in the eschatological value of truly liberating political praxis. Sporadic indications of criteria for evaluating whether political praxes are genuinely emancipative form further arising questions. The articulation of such criteria is not developed by Schillebeeckx at any great length. Consistent with his view of God’s reign of love as a reign of justice and reconciliation, however, we can summarize by saying that progressive political praxis, in order to be liberating and salvific, must, at a minimum (i) establish justice for the disadvantaged and exploited; (ii) entail a viable reconciliation within society after the liberation struggle is ended; and (iii) avoid creating further hierarchies of oppression and exclusion. Schillebeeckx is primarily concerned to consolidate that, apart from historical movements and events of structural and systemic emancipation, there can be no fulsome historical experience of salvation. The development of these criteria is articulated more at the level of ethical norms rather sociological patterns.

With respect to the second claim, Schillebeeckx asserts that the meaning of eschatological salvation in society is attained in the autonomous meaning intrinsic to liberating developments of emancipation. Schillebeeckx maintains that “the christian concept of salvation loses its rational significance, if there is no *positive* relationship between justification or redemption *and* our liberating political praxis in the world, or if

⁵⁸ Schillebeeckx, “Befreiende Theologie,” 69: “that, in so far as politics is liberating for humans (...), politics is actually the ‘material’ of God’s salvific activity.”

there is no positive relationship between eschatological salvation and social, political and economic peace which needs to be built up by human efforts.”⁵⁹ The christian witness to salvation from God in Jesus and their Spirit is void of meaning except for within the initially intrinsic value of sociopolitical praxes that sustain justice and reconciliation in society. For Schillebeeckx there can be no meaningful participation in, let alone experience of, the promises of salvation that prescind from autonomous ranges of ecohuman meaning. The covenant promises are meaningful only as situated within the creation and the profound unity between God’s activity as liberator and God’s activity as creator.⁶⁰ This entails a real and procedural distinction between human and religious dimensions of historical interpretation.

Feiten moeten reeds geïnterpreteerd zijn als enigzins coherente, zinhebbende feiten om ‘geschiedenis’ te mogen heten. Door menselijke interpretatie worden ‘feiten’ menselijke geschiedenis. En pas dan, in een tweede ervaringsinterpretatie, kunnen ‘profane’, mensbevrijdende gebeurtnissen ervaren en uitgelegd worden als *heil van Godswege* ... Het gaat om de religieuze betekenis van bewust-menselijk, bevrijdend en communicatie stichtend handelen.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Schillebeeckx, “Christian Conscience and Nuclear Deterrant,” 112.

⁶⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 471-485, 748 / *Christ*, 515-530, 810. See also “Stilte gevuld met parabels,” 73; “Plezier en woede beleven aan Gods schepping,” 331-346

⁶¹ Schillebeeckx, “Theologie als bevrijdingskunde,” 400-401: “Facts must already be interpreted as somewhat coherent, meaningful facts in order to be called ‘history.’ Through human interpretation ‘facts’ became human history. And only then, in a second interpretation of experience, can ‘profane’ events of human liberation be experienced and set forth as *salvation from the ways-of-God* ... At issue is the religious meaning of reflexive human action that liberates and initiates communication.” In *Mensen*, 26 / *Church*, 6-7, he puts it this way: “Feiten worden pas geschiedenis binnen een zinkader, in een traditie van geïnterpreteerde feiten. Dit is het eerste niveau van zin: er wordt menselijke bevrijding voltrokken en ook ervaren. Binnen een religieuze ervaringstraditie van geloof in God wordt dat menselijke

Note that liberating events and movements are salvific whether they are religiously interpreted or not. Within this identity between eschatological salvation and truly humanizing emancipation, however, a religious dimension of meaning can emerge within the humanly constructed meaning of liberating developments. This emergent religious dimension explicitly names and narrates the gift of eschatological salvation implicit within the original liberating event. A practical-critical soteriology of the correlation between salvation and liberating emancipation, then, will take interest in the construction of the coherent meaning of original liberating events.

With respect to the third claim, Schillebeeckx asserts that faith in God's salvific activity is obscured and scandalized when divorced from or deprived of its ground in emancipation. "Faith in humankind's liberation (or redemption) without this liberation becoming apparent and tangible here and now would be equivalent to a mere ideology, without any basic credibility."⁶² To render the witness of Jesus to the divine community of justice and reconciliation fully credible, christian participation in movements of liberating emancipation communicates the possibilities of salvation through a distinct practical mediation in human action. The contemporary witness to the covenant promises renewed by Jesus can become more believable as it becomes more

bevrijdingsmoment op een tweede zinniveau geïnterpreteerd: in relatie tot God. Gelovigen belijden dat God in en door mensen redding heeft gebracht ... De *religieuze* zin van een wereldlijk proces vooronderstelt een *menselijke* zin; anders gezegd: heilsgeschiedenis is een mens-bevrijdend gebeuren. *Openbaring* veronderstelt een menselijk zinvol proces, een gebeuren dat reeds menselijk-relevant is, mens-bevrijdend, zonder directe referentie naar God." See also *Als politiek*, 16-20 / *Christian Faith*, 10-14.

⁶² Schillebeeckx, "The Christian and Political Engagement," 118.

communicable through the liberating praxis of sociopolitical emancipation. The credibility of contemporary forms of witness to the life and praxis of Jesus flourishes when communicated through efforts to liberate human beings from degrading affliction.⁶³ Without the historical mediation of liberating public praxis, the witness of faith to an eschatological future remains the empty history of a merely promised salvation.⁶⁴ There is a particular temporal effect stemming from the believable witness of a liberating praxis: a believable witness grounded in a practical even if partial mediation of salvation opens up a range of trust in the future promised to justice and reconciliation. “Op een bijzondere wijze kunnen moderne godgelovigen juist in het maatschappelijk-politieke gebeuren van zich realiserende vrijheid een voorschot proeven van Góds heil ... Zo kan de geschiedenis van de menselijke bevrijding een ‘disclosure’ worden waarin de mens God leert kennen als Degene die ’s mensen *algehele* bevrijding wil.”⁶⁵ The experience of emancipative events opens up the possibility of and even desire for an all-encompassing salvation in the future.

By rendering salvation historically real, meaningful and believable, the soteriological value of contextual processes of emancipation begins to emerge. Emancipation is the condition of possibility for the experience and interpretation of

⁶³ Schillebeeckx, *Mensen*, 187-188 / *Church*, 168-169.

⁶⁴ Schillebeeckx, “Befreiende Theologie,” 70.

⁶⁵ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 751-752 / *Christ*, 814: “In a distinct way modern believers can experience the anticipation of salvation from God in the sociopolitical events of a growing freedom ... The history of human liberation can become a ‘disclosure’ wherein humans learn to know God as the One who wishes the *whole* liberation of humans.”

salvation. Liberating political praxes furthering the development of emancipation are the condition of possibility for the communication of love in contemporary societies. This is the soteriological basis for the shift from an interpersonal to a political love that encompasses the development of Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology. Just as the resurrection of Jesus consolidates the intrinsic value of his liberating praxis of solidarity, the eschatological transcendence of the promises of salvation consolidate the salvific value intrinsic to the praxis that facilitates liberating emancipation. Just as his lifepraxis partially and provisionally communicates the incipient reality of resurrection, emancipative movements partially and provisionally communicate the promises of salvation. From this interdependence within the eschatological identity of Jesus, Schillebeeckx draws the following implication for the relationship between salvation and emancipation:

By means of continually provisional and replaceable configurations, eschatological salvation must visibly, if fragmentarily, be realized within the basic framework of our human history, both in heart *and* structures, so that (especially in our present society) the heart of love may also be mediated by the structures.⁶⁶

Schillebeeckx emphasizes the sociopolitical communication of love through social relationships that have been emancipated in a liberating praxis. Since the communication of preferential justice and unlimited reconciliation is never absolute and final, sociopolitical emancipations represent transient fragments of salvation. Historical emancipations set forth the process and content of God's liberating solidarity with

⁶⁶ Schillebeeckx, "God, Society and Human Salvation," 91; See "Waarom Jezus de Christus?" 4; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 685 / *Christ*, 745; and "Befreiende Theologie," 70-71.

struggling human beings in contexts of political-economic oppression, socio-cultural alienation and ecological instability. Sociopolitical liberations are basic to the encounter with, participation in and understanding of the gift of God's solidarity. There is a relationship of inseparable identity between salvation and emancipation, even though this remains a fragile and fragmented identity. This identity is not simple, or even theoretical: it is a threatened identity that must be established through the practical mediation of human action and creative suffering. Within these transient yet liberating fragments, the experience of salvation is available and its future open.

2.II.2 The Difference between Emancipation and Salvation

The communication of salvation through sociopolitical emancipation, however, remains provisional. Schillebeeckx reflects on how liberating developments remain transitory even under the most successful conditions.⁶⁷ Liberating emancipations are interrupted by interference from retrenching systems of domination. Sociopolitical emancipation can be eroded when random disability, disease and death impede the networks of human actions sustaining it. Global and even regional histories, moreover, remain ambivalent in the absence of both the ultimate integrity of life and the ultimate destruction of life. Indeed, a near ultimate destruction of sustainable life on earth

⁶⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 18-20, 145-146, 523-524 / *Jesus*, 24-25, 177-178, 637-638; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 703-704, 708-709, 752 / *Christ*, 764-765, 769-770, 814.

appears possible to the extent that the initiatives of historical evil, whether in ethical or strategic failure, contradict a definitive integrity of life free from suffering and violence. There are ranges of suffering that persist even when viable socio-cultural identities, just political economies and sustainable ecologies are secure. Even if a particular region can attain such positive conditions, other regions may still remain mired in systemic oppression and structural violence. Even if global levels of emancipated structures were to secure permanent levels of dignity, justice and sustain ability for all, sufferings arising from interpersonal violence, anguish and loneliness related to finitude would persist. Finally, all liberating emancipations, no matter how succesful, are always too late for the countless majority of human beings who have died deprived or humiliated, tortured or murdered. While the responsibility, from the religious perspective of eschatological salvation, to realize liberating emancipations at the service of justice and reconciliation is universal, the outcomes of such effort remain insecure and insufficient.

The inherent fragility of liberating emancipations at once raises the question of a more comprehensive rift and healing pervading social relationships. The fragility of emancipation signals that the most optimal outcomes of structural and systemic transformation remain incomplete and fall short of a total healing of human suffering.

In moderne situaties is juist de onmogelijkheid van een totale, universele en definitieve zelfbevrijding-door-emancipatie de context waarin de *vraag* kan oplichten naar de uiteindelijke zin van het menselijk leven. Het emancipatie-project wordt aldus zelf geconfronteerd met een fundamenteel vraagteken dat de dynamiek van elk historisch emancipatieproces innerlijk begeleidt ... De emancipatiegeschiedenis kan daarom *niet geïdentificeerd* worden met de geschiedenis van de verlossing-van-Godswegen, terwijl deze evenmin losgekoppeld kan wor-

den uit de menselijke zelfbevrijding ... Christelijke verlossing is een méér op de emancipatieve zelfbevrijding, waarmee ze niettemin kritisch solidair is.⁶⁸

Given the tenacity of various kinds of suffering directly related to human finitude, a complete healing and reconciliation of human beings is not forthcoming within history through the sum total of liberating praxis. While eschatological salvation includes historical emancipations, emancipation remains somewhat ambivalent as it is never quite satisfying enough. The promise of eschatological salvation extends into ranges of alienation intrinsic to basic human finitude which no abundance of structural transformation will ever be able to adequately liberate. Within the most optimal and emancipated social relationships, there is the residual alienation within personal identity stemming from the inevitable loss of relationships, declining energy and death. This clearly does not, for Schillebeeckx, justify any minimizing approach to the eschatological necessity of emancipative praxis, but it does qualify its outcomes as necessary yet insufficient for a definitive healing of suffering.

A condition of definitive and universal salvation thus eludes human effort and endurance in history. It is precisely within the fragmented identity between salvation and emancipation that the difference between them arises and asserts itself:

⁶⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 707-9 / *Christ*, 768-770: "In modern situations, the impossibility of a total, universal and definitive self-liberation through emancipation is the very context in which the *question* of the ultimate meaning of human life arises. The project of emancipation is itself confronted with the fundamental question mark which accompanies the process of emancipation from within ... The history of emancipation can therefore *not be exclusively equated* with the history of redemption from God's activity, whereas the latter cannot be divorced from human self-liberation ... Christian redemption is more than emancipative self-liberation, with which it nevertheless remains in critical solidarity."

Dit is Jezus' uitdagende boodschap, die enerzijds ruimte laat voor en stimuleert tot het menselijk bevrijdings- en emanipatieproces, anderzijds dit overstijgt in een rotsvast vertrouwen op een totaal-heil dat alleen God kan geven, en dat een transcendent wijl goddelijk antwoord is op de eindigheid zelf van ons menszijn, eindigheid onder welke index en exponent ook elke emancipatie en kritische praxis staan. Door zijn eindigheid (de metafysieke scheur in zijn wezen) is de mens een wezen wiens heil, heel-zijn en vervulling zijn aangewezen op de genadigheid en de ontferming van zijn Schepper.⁶⁹

Just as the realized salvation communicated by Jesus within his lifepraxis was interrupted by unjustifiable violence, so the liberating emancipations that communicate tangible disclosures of eschatological salvation on earth remain tenuous. They remain frustrated and liable to breakdown. Schillebeeckx frankly admits that whoever walks the path of Jesus, in solidarity with the oppressed through the liberating praxis of preferential justice and unrestricted reconciliation, will arouse opposition and even a life-threatening counterviolence.⁷⁰ A life committed to emancipative praxis inevitably confronts its limits. Within the identity between emancipation and salvation, a painful and absurd rupture intervenes. Within this rupture, the difference between them asserts itself. The promise of a total and final salvation remains the unexpected horizon of eschatological salvation, just as the raising of the crucified to new life was the

⁶⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 524 / *Jesus*, 638: "This is the challenging message of Jesus, which on the one hand leaves room for and incites the human process of liberation and emancipation, on the other surmounts it in an unshakeable trust in a total salvation that only God can give. This total salvation is a transcendent, since divine, answer to the finitude itself of our being human, a finitude under the index and exponent of which every emancipation and critical praxis stand. Through their finitude (the metaphysical rift in their being), humans are beings who are directed to the grace and mercy of God their Creator for their salvation, wholeness and fulfilment."

⁷⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 732-734 / *Christ*, 794-795; *Mensen*, 187 / *Church*, 168.

unexpected horizon of his solidarity with God. There is an indefinable but definitive salvation that reconciles and liberates the overlapping unities of person and society, but which cannot be produced by emancipative effort alone.

2.II.2.1. The Eschatological Proviso

The notion of the eschatological proviso consequently emerges as a result of delineating the differences between sociopolitical liberation and definitive salvation in Schillebeeckx' soteriology. Based on the transience of liberating emancipations as well as the ultimate alterity of definitive salvation, Schillebeeckx infers that any claim by an emancipative movement to represent a complete and total liberation is misleading, counter-effective, and eventually if not obviously tyrannical.⁷¹ There is an eschatological restraint placed on every and all liberating emancipations with the recognition that no matter how comprehensive, they will always remain partial and limited. The sociopolitical repercussions of this are extensive.⁷² The eschatological proviso entails that there can never be any claim that absolutizes, by assigning a universal and total importance any single or sum total of liberating emancipations in history. The eschatological proviso entails that there can never be any claim that sacralizes, by identifying it

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 707 / *ibid.*, 769. See also "De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze," 77.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 715-718 / *ibid.*, 776-779. See also "De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze," 77-78.

as commensurate with God's definitive eschatological initiative, any single or sum total of liberating emancipations in history. The eschatological proviso entails that no emancipative movement can be totalized such that it claims to be the universal agent of a global or even regional history. Schillebeeckx herewith counters exaggerated claims – prevalent in fascist, neo-marxist, neo-liberal or ethno-nationalist systems – that represent any particular sociopolitical movement as a historically necessary, inevitable and unalterable course of historical development. The eschatological proviso intensifies the repercussions of the difference between definitive salvation and emancipative liberation. While sociopolitical praxis in the service of justice and love partially manifests God's eschatological activity, the eschatological proviso asserts that God's eschatological activity cannot be reduced to and equated with any particular sociopolitical movement. There will always be another justice or reconciliation that needs to be achieved. Political movements, even movements of genuine socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological liberation, cannot unequivocally claim to represent the full extent of God's eschatological activity with and for humans. Every sociopolitical movement remains capable of breeding new inequalities and exclusions.

Schillebeeckx raises the question, however, if the eschatological proviso might not be taken to an extreme, thereby indiscriminately relativizing the value of all sociopolitical movements and hence serving a reactionary function by entrenching

current structures of domination.⁷³ The capacity of the eschatological proviso to relativize would also neutralize any evaluation of sociopolitical movements, thereby leaving the hegemonies of actual systems of oppression intact. This possibility arises as a consequence of detaching the significance of God's action in the resurrection of Jesus from its proper context in his lifepraxis, message and death. The eschatological proviso cannot be used to argue that salvation has no socio-cultural, political-economic or ecological repercussions whatsoever. The eschatological proviso cannot be used to nullify God's preferential solidarity with the disadvantaged and the downtrodden. The eschatological proviso cannot be used to eliminate the responsibility for transforming sociopolitical structures at the service of justice and reconciliation.

It is not the abiding ambiguities of the ultimate sociopolitical significance of fragmentary emancipations, however, that define the eschatological proviso. The eschatological proviso is defined by the outer limit of an indefinable and definitive salvation that cannot be produced by human action alone within the conditions of finitude. The eschatological proviso entails that sociopolitical activities, while they must first be radicalized towards emancipative praxes of justice and reconciliation extending into social structures that benefit the oppressed, are ultimately inadequate to a definitive communication of the full range of salvific healing and renewal.⁷⁴ In other

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 716-718 / *ibid.*, 777-779; and "De levensweg van Jezus, beleden als de Christus," 147-148.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 718 / *ibid.*, 779; "De levensweg van Jezus, beleden als de Christus," 148.

words, the eschatological proviso, far from stifling historical liberation movements, seeks to intensify their emancipative potential and redemptive power by fortifying them against harmful and counter-effective bias. The eschatological proviso maintains that history is open to liberating effort and that liberating efforts are equally liable to revision as to critique. The eschatological proviso recognizes that, where liberating efforts fail, the futility can be entrusted to God as the ultimate protagonist of history promising definitive salvation.⁷⁵ The eschatological proviso encourages emancipative praxis to continually expose itself to critique and revision.

2.II.2.2. The Eschatological Surplus

If the eschatological proviso limits and revises emancipative efforts, the eschatological surplus renews them. If the horizon of definitive salvation intensifies the transience of emancipation, it also extends the possibility of an unrealized future. There is an abiding interdependence between the eschatological abundance of the resurrection of Jesus, which extends a future to his praxis of justice and reconciliation despite the way he was executed, and those who continue to further solidarity in his Spirit. The eschatological surplus of the exaltation of Jesus with God and the sending of their Spirit renews the validity and urgency of the praxes of preferential justice and unrestricted reconciliation. This surplus inspires a resurgence of liberating activity, and refuses an

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 718 / *ibid.*, 779.

absolute submission to tragic failure that would bring a premature closure to historical possibilities. A similar relationship can be affirmed between salvation and emancipation. Just as God's reign and the resurrection of Jesus are eschatologically situated within and beyond history, Schillebeeckx advocates for an eschatological surplus beyond history that orients historical liberations even without being exhausted by them.

In this instance, definitive eschatological salvation from God in Jesus remains an affirmation of faith without any basis in objectively demonstrable probabilities from within historical experience. Definitive eschatological salvation from God in Jesus remains indefinable and the language that attempts to affirm and describe it therefore remains negative.⁷⁶ Trust in the actual reality of definitive eschatological salvation arises out of an affirmation of faith in the manifestation of the resurrected reality of Jesus. For Schillebeeckx, definitive eschatological salvation – as a salvation that completely heals the ruptures of finitude, that eliminates all suffering from history, that even reconciles the living with the dead, and that permanently secures the sociopolitical and ecological integrity of life for one and for all – remains an unpredictable and excessive gift. On the one hand, there is a realm of human suffering which no amount of human action can eliminate, since it is grounded in the inevitability of degeneration and death. Only a surprising and unpredictable renewal of life by the direct activity of God, a gift attested to through faith in the disclosure of the resurrection, can continue

⁷⁶ Schillebeeckx, *Tussentijds verhaal*, 139-140 / *Interim Report*, 122-124.

life when it is damaged to the point of death and annihilated. On the other hand, “[d]it wil geenzins zeggen,” Schillebeeckx maintains, “dat het definitieve heil ons *van buiten af* zou ‘overvallen’, los en afgezien van wat mensen in hun geschiedenis er feitelijk van terecht brengen. Het eschatologische of definitieve heil (...) krijgt gestalte (...) *vanuit* wat mensen op aarde (...) aan heil voor medemensen verwerkelijken.”⁷⁷ While the process and content of definitive eschatological salvation transcends and exceeds human finitude, it does not negate and obliterate but somehow affirms and extends emancipative praxis.

Als christen sta ik niet zozeer voor een ‘voorbehoud’ (tenzij de contouren, beperkingen en mogelijke misverstanden daarvan van te voren duidelijk omschreven zijn in voor allen begrijpelijke taal). Zoals ik het nu zie sta ik veeleer een ‘eschatologische meerwarde’ voor, een surplus, dat van Godswege een innerlijk, *positieve* band legt tussen, enerzijds, wat mensen hier op aarde van waarlijk recht voor iedereen en aan authentieke liefde voor medemensen realiseren, en, anderzijds, de uiteindelijke gestalte die God zal geven aan wat de christelijke oorsprongs-traditie het rijk Gods heet.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 731 / *Christ*, 792: “That does not in any way mean that final salvation will come upon us *from outside*, detached from and regardless of what humans in fact make of it in their history. Eschatological or final salvation (...) takes shape (...) from what humans on earth achieve as salvation for others.” See also “Befreiende Theologie,” 70-71. This conviction accompanies Schillebeeckx from his early work in eschatology; see “Het nieuwe Godsbeeld, secularisatie en politiek,” 54-55 / “Man’s Future on Earth,” 185.

⁷⁸ Schillebeeckx, “Terugblik vanuit de tijd na Vaticanum II,” 170-171: “As a Christian I don’t insist so much on a ‘proviso’ (unless the outlines, limits and possible misunderstandings thereof are clearly circumscribed beforehand in an accessible language). As I now see it I insist much more on an ‘eschatological superabundance,’ a surplus, that for God’s activity an inner, *positive* connection exists between, on the one hand, what humans here on earth realize in terms of true justice for everyone and of authentic love for other humans, and, on the other hand, the ultimate figure that God will give to what the christian originary tradition calls the reign of God.” See also “Mysterie van ongerechtigheid en mysterie van erbarmen,” 13.

While human action is not sufficient to establish definitive salvation on earth, it is necessary in order that definitive salvation might ultimately manifest itself as a salvation with and for human beings. The eschatological surplus of God's solidarity nonetheless *exceeds* the liberations that humans can achieve. While intimately connected to and even dependent on realizable liberations within history, the eschatological surplus of God's solidarity renews them when they seem most uncertain. At the same time and with equal intensity, the eschatological surplus of God's love is constantly capable of renewing and reorienting human action when it is fatigued and unsure of its future. Schillebeeckx therefore insists that the transcendent surplus revitalizes the fragmentary efforts of sociopolitical liberations in history.

While Schillebeeckx does not attempt to systematically clarify this disproportion between divine gift and human action within and beyond history, he does introduce a temporal dimension into its depth. In the affirmation of the resurrection through faith, "the believer in God knows that redemption is not in our power and that God opens, nevertheless, the future to any praxis of liberation and reconciliation, a future that is greater than our entire finite history encompasses: *in* our history the future of God is at stake."⁷⁹ Emancipation is assured a future within history and possibly beyond. The difference between sociopolitical liberations, as fragments of salvation, and definitive eschatological salvation contains at least a temporal difference: while sociopolitical

⁷⁹ Schillebeeckx, "God, Society and Human Salvation," 99. See also *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 774 / *Christ*, 838.

liberations are limited by the failures of the past and frustrations of the present, definitive salvation holds a future open to the integrity of life amidst the tragic and fragile outcomes of human striving for liberation and wholeness. This difference between the “within history” and the “beyond history” is not defined or systematically described by Schillebeeckx. The God of Jesus the Christ, the creator and liberator, remains the decisive and universal actor in the drama of history. The Spirit of their solidarity with the outcast is active in history to renew the future from within the capabilities of ecohuman responsibilities for liberation in the present. The exalted life of the subversive and executed Jesus with God extends a future not only to his lifepraxis but to any practice of justice and love, liberation and reconciliation, however failed or transient. This future is not only trans-historical and perhaps even cumulative within a historical framework, but also conclusive and ultimate. The profound connection between the lifepraxis, death and resurrection of Jesus remains pivotal in Schillebeeckx’ understanding of the difference between sociopolitical liberation and definitive eschatological salvation. This connection lends a temporal perspective to the abiding difference between sociopolitical liberations and definitive eschatological salvation.

2.II.3. Summary

Liberating emancipations are constitutive, according to Schillebeeckx, for experiencing, interpreting and communicating eschatological salvation from God in Jesus. Historical praxes of emancipation, however fragile or incomplete, are fragments of salvation, the contingent yet real immanence of eschatological salvation in history. Schillebeeckx argues that historical praxes of sociopolitical liberation render the encounter with and response to eschatological salvation from God in Jesus both historically available and intelligible, as well as communicable if not believable. Between surplus and proviso, the eschatological identity and difference that determines the interaction between liberating emancipations and definitive salvation is full of creative tensions for the soteriological interpretation of sociopolitical praxis. The God of the prophetic and exalted Jesus is “van alle waarlijk-menselijke bevrijdings- en heilsbewegingen wel de bron en het hart, maar valt met geen enkel particulier, historisch bevrijdingsgebeuren samen.”⁸⁰ Positively reiterated:

God, de Schepper, de Betrouwbare, *is* mens-bevrijdende liefde, op een wijze die alle menselijke, persoonlijke, sociale en politieke verwachtingen en vervult en overstijgt. Christenen hebben dit alles ervarend geleerd vanuit de levensweg van Jezus: vanuit zijn boodschap en zijn hiermee overeenkomende levenswijze,

⁸⁰ Schillebeeckx, “Theologie als bevrijdingskunde,” 401: “indeed the source and heart of all truly human movements of liberation and salvation, but cannot be reduced to any particular, historical event of liberation.” See also “De levensweg van Jezus, beleden als de Christus,” 147.

vanuit de concrete omstandigheden van zijn dood, en ten slotte vanuit de apostolische getuigenis van zijn opstanding uit het dodenrijk.⁸¹

The eschatological surplus and proviso endorse the transcendence of God's salvific activity and thereby intensify its sociopolitical repercussions immanent to what Schillebeeckx refers to as the history of emancipation. This creative tension between God's transcendence and immanence within history is directly disclosed in the radical unity between the resurrection, death and life of Jesus, the prophetic and mystical witness to God's inbreaking reign of preferential solidarity. Emancipation enacts and anticipates salvation in provisional fragments. Eschatological salvation promises and renews the effort towards liberating emancipation. Emancipation and salvation are in a productive relationship of identity and difference with one another that keeps them in a mutually implicating development.

2.III. Chapter Summary and Transition

By elaborating the fragmented identity and creative difference between sociopolitical emancipation and salvation, Schillebeeckx seeks to endorse an interactive soteriology that sustains practical and critical initiatives towards a progressive political

⁸¹ Schillebeeckx, *Mensen*, 141 / *Church*, 122: "God the Creator, the one in whom we can trust, is love that liberates men and women, in a way which fulfills and goes beyond all human, personal, social and political expectations. Christians have learned all this by experience from the life and path of Jesus: from his message and his matching corresponding lifestyle, from the specific circumstances of his death, and finally from the apostolic witness to his resurrection from the realm of the dead." See also *Interim Report*, 128.

praxis. This relationship of identity and difference between emancipation and salvation shapes the practical and critical intent of soteriology. Between the eschatological surplus and the eschatological proviso, Schillebeeckx constructs a soteriological interpretation of emancipation in terms of a partisan justice and limitless reconciliation. The eschatological surplus and proviso direct as well as critique christian participation in emancipative praxes in light of how this justice and reconciliation both relativize and radicalize political praxis.

This complex indwelling of identity and difference under the limits set by the eschatological surplus and the eschatological proviso, however, is not directed towards a theoretical synthesis. It is directed towards the practical and critical mediation of love.

Christelijke, kritische solidariteit met de emancipatieve vrijheidsgeschiedenis en een coalitie van de theologie met het kritische maatschappijtheorieën van het mensdom kunnen daarom hier en nu een noodzakelijke eis worden van de historisch gesitueerde caritas of christelijke liefde en van de theologie ... Maar dan moeten we wel nagaan, in hoeverre christendom en theologie hierbij hun *eigen* religieus-kritische kracht blijven ontwikkelen en niet slechts herhalen wat menselijke bewegingen en kritische theorieën reeds hebben gezegd.⁸²

The practical and critical mediation of love, participating in emancipative efforts, requires a coalition between theological and social theoretical lines of discourse. Given the leading role of the process of emancipation in shaping the understanding of

⁸² Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 712-713 / *Christ*, 773-774: "Christian, critical solidarity with the emancipative history of freedom and a coalition of theology with critical social theories about humanity and therefore become here and now a necessary demand of historically situated caritas or christian love and theology ... But in that case we must investigate how far Christianity and theology here develop their *own* religious and critical force, and do not merely repeat what human movements and critical theories have said already." See also "God, Society and Human Salvation," 91-92.

salvation, how does soteriology come to terms with interpreting the social realities of oppression and liberation? How, moreover, does the soteriological interpretation of emancipative praxis mediate its practical and critical repercussions for sociopolitical liberation? The eschatological surplus and proviso regulating a progressive political praxis functions as both a religious discourse and a sociopolitical discourse relevant to emancipation. How are these different lines of discourse articulated and placed into relationship with one another? If the experience and interpretation of salvation are dependent on the autonomous reality and meaning of sociopolitical emancipation, as Schillebeeckx insists, how is emancipation interpreted by practical-critical soteriology? Given the constitutive and intrinsic centrality of emancipation in the experience and interpretation of salvation, the task falls on practical-critical soteriology to provide an account of sociopolitical systems and the possibilities of emancipation within them in the actual contexts of oppression and alienation. The received canon of sources internal to christian religious tradition is not sufficient to this task. The account will need to have recourse to other theological sources. While liberating emancipations signify the historical reality of salvation, they remain capable of sustaining a variety of interpretations and representations. It is the task of the next chapter to examine how Schillebeeckx approaches the interaction between these various kinds of discourse in his understanding of sociopolitical emancipation.

CHAPTER THREE

The Mediation of Social Theories in Practical-Critical Soteriology

As the previous chapter indicates, the shift to politicize love and direct it into public contexts of structural transformation is grounded in Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology. By uniting even as it differentiates eschatological salvation and liberating emancipation, practical-critical soteriology develops the political communication of love in order to sustain the integrity of life in socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological systems. Practical-critical soteriology aligns the political communication of love with a constructive participation in emancipative movements that seek structural and systemic change. Schillebeeckx nonetheless recognizes the inherent complexity of the public structures and systems situating the sociopolitical communication of love. This communication of love is therefore as complex as the structural transformations of socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological systems it seeks to support. In the face of this complexity regarding structural transformation in sociopolitical systems, this chapter examines the way in which Schillebeeckx constructs the recourse of practical-critical soteriology to the mediation of social theories.

Any attempt to account for structural change in complex systems recognizes that they are constantly evolving and difficult to represent. The attempt to communicate love through these structures needs to establish some capacity for constructing and revising the approach to these structures and systems with all their variable dynamics. A constructive approach to intervening in the structures of a sociopolitical system

requires an adequate knowledge-base. By recognizing that “Op de analyse (vanuit een bepaalde invalshoek) en de interpretatie van de samenlevingsstructuren berust immers de directe aanzet voor een concreet politiek actieprogramma,”¹ he thus insists on “de slechts indirecte en dialectische politieke relevantie van het christelijk geloof en dus de noodzaak van de *bemiddeling* van de analyse en interpretatie van niet-theologische factoren.”² Soteriology has recourse to the mediation of social scientific analysis and interpretation to enhance its distinct contribution to the reconstruction of a society. This task of orienting and revising actions as well as interpretations in order to influence the outcomes of structural transformation is precisely the task of a critical social theory as envisioned by Schillebeeckx.³ In order to orient the political communication of love towards structural transformation, soteriology therefore engages social theories in the effort to practically and critically intervene in the complex forces shaping a society.

Schillebeeckx presents his practical-critical soteriology as an interactive soteriology in which religious and emancipative commitments together aspire towards a progressive political praxis. Progressive political praxis is the practical-critical effect of the interactive kind of soteriology Schillebeeckx previously outlined in terms of the

¹ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 723 / *Christ*, 784: “The direct impetus for a specific political program of action rests on the analysis (from a particular perspective) and interpretation of social structures.” See also “De christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze,” 72.

² *Ibid.*, 722-723 / *ibid.*, 783-784: “the entirely indirect and dialectical political relevance of christian faith and thus the necessity of the *mediation* of the analysis and interpretation of non-theological factors.” See also “De christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze,” 72.

³ See Schillebeeckx, “Naar een verruiming van de hermeneutiek: de ‘nieuwe kritische theorie’,” 30-50 / “The New Critical Theory,” 102-123.

productive tension between religious convictions and progressive political commitment. In light of Schillebeeckx' understanding of emancipation, progressive political praxis can be described as liberating actions which effect structural change in socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological systems so as to mitigate suffering and serve the integrity of creation. He recognizes, however that

Niettemin is de praxis, zoals ze b.v. wordt voorgesteld door vredesbewegingen van humanistische, socialistische en christelijke zijde, op zichzelf niet evident *religieus*. Ze moet opgenomen worden binnen het eigen licht van de theologie en daar bereflecteerd worden om ze in haar soteriologische waarde te kunnen zien. Dat politieke praxis niet-evident religieus is, roept, voor godgelovigen, juist op tot een theologie van de concrete praxis, tot de vraag, wat haar geloofswaarde en dus heilswaarde is; welke *positieve* relatie ze heeft met het geproclameerde rijk Gods; de politieke praxis roept de vraag op, of ze metterdaad 'agapè' realiseert, liefde-via-structuren, door een zeer gericht maatschappelijk-politiek handelen.⁴

Schillebeeckx consequently seeks to elaborate the basis for a soteriological interpretation of political and therefore emancipative political praxis. While the soteriological interpretation of progressive political praxis is regulated by the identity within difference between salvation and emancipation, this interpretation nonetheless engages the theoretical construction and practical revision of sociopolitical systems. It

⁴ Schillebeeckx, "Op zoek naar de heilswaarde van politieke vredespraxis," *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 21 (1981) 234-235: "Nevertheless, praxis is not of itself evidently *religious*, as it is presented, for instance, by humanistic, socialist or christian sides of peace movements. Praxis must be taken up within the distinct light of theology and reflected on in order for it to be seen in its soteriological value. The fact that political praxis is not evidently religious for that very reason calls believers to develop a theology of concrete praxis; to inquire into its faith-value and thus soteriological value; to ask what *positive* relation it has with the proclaimed reign of God. Political praxis raises the question whether in fact it realizes agapè, love-through-structures through a very specific sociopolitical action." See "Christian Conscience and Nuclear Deterrant," 234-235.

is only through a spirited engagement of social theories that practical-critical soteriology can interpret and advocate the basis for a progressive political praxis. This engagement of social theories assists practical-critical soteriology in orienting the public repercussions entailed by the structural communication of love. For Schillebeeckx, this engagement consolidates and directs the religious bases endorsing an emancipative political praxis into concrete possibilities of sociopolitical change.

The political communication of love thus involves different kinds of discourse appropriate to both eschatological salvation and liberating emancipation. The communication of love involves the various kinds of language appropriate to various dimensions of soteriological discourse regarding the identity between eschatological salvation and liberating emancipation. Practical-critical soteriology supports the development of progressive political praxes oriented by theological convictions and insights. Without an explicit involvement of social theories, however, the emancipative repercussions of these theological convictions and insights remain without a public representation or voice. Emancipative political praxis is pursued, therefore, in the tension between eschatological activity and human capabilities, in the tension between religious transcendence and sociopolitical immanence, and in the tension, finally, between the discursive practices of theologies and the discursive practices of social theories. Schillebeeckx therefore tries to account for how it is that theology and social theory interact with one another. This account is needed in order for a practical-critical

soteriology to support the kind of emancipative political praxis that sustains the communication of love through public movements of structural change.

3.I. Recourse to the Mediation of Social Theory

The attempt to articulate the patterns of interaction between theology and social theory is thus rooted in Schillebeeckx' interest in working out the public repercussions of political love amidst of unjust structures and alienating systems. There are several considerations which render the interaction between theology and social theory indispensable. Schillebeeckx situates his approach to the interaction between theology and social theory within three sets of concerns: i) recontextualizing the biblical witness to justice and reconciliation in contemporary contexts; ii) accurately understanding the public function of religion; and iii) appreciating the ambivalence of religious tradition as an agent of both violence and reconciliation. The effort to address these concerns motivate the recourse of practical-critical soteriology to social theories. Schillebeeckx validates the interaction between theology and social theory. He endorses the autonomy and sovereignty of both theology and social theory as two distinct lines of discourse.

3.1.1. Biblical Hermeneutics

With respect to the hermeneutical reasons demanding a more explicit interaction between soteriology and social theory, Schillebeeckx begins by acknowledging the considerable cultural distance that separates biblical from contemporary societies. The questions of continuity and innovation amidst these marked differences in historical contexts form the starting-point for his hermeneutics of tradition. Given these discrepancies between the original contexts of the biblical witness to salvation and liberation and our current contexts, Schillebeeckx argues that a direct application of biblical readings to contemporary contexts is untenable. Due to massive cultural variations, the biblical witness is only indirectly, even though radically, relevant to contemporary challenges for sociopolitical praxis.

De bijbelse werkelijkheidsinterpretatie vraagt om een nieuwe actualisering, want de werkelijkheid waarin de gelovige nu staat en waarvan hij deel uitmaakt, is concreet niet meer dezelfde als die welke in de Schrift en de eruit voortkomende traditie feitelijk geïnterpreteerd is. (Overigens vindt men dit verschijnsel reeds in de bijbel zelf: 'relectures bibliques', een 'herlezen' van de oorspronkelijke boodschap in het licht van gewijzigde historische of sociaal-culturele omstandigheden).⁵

⁵ Edward Schillebeeckx, "Het kritische statuut van de theologie," in *De toekomst van de kerk*, ed. E. Schillebeeckx (Amersfoort / Bussum: De Horstink, 1970), 60. "The biblical interpretation of reality calls for a new actualization, for the reality in which believing human beings now stand and of which they are a part is no longer concretely the same as the reality which is actually interpreted in the Scripture and its ensuing tradition. (One already finds this phenomenon, moreover, in the bible itself: 'relectures bibliques', a 're-reading' of the original message in the light of modified historical or socio-cultural circumstances." See also *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 720-721/ *Christ*, 782. For a more detailed articulation of his proportional biblical hermeneutics, see Edward Schillebeeckx, *Theologisch Geloofsverstaan Anno 1983*, (Baarn: Nelissen, 1983), 9-17; and *Mensen*, 52-63 / *Church*, 36-45.

No easy transfer from or application of an analysis of the complex interaction between the gifts and tasks of eschatological salvation in the biblical witness in relation to its original political-economic contexts can be directly extended to the current interactions between the gifts and tasks of eschatological salvation and contemporary political-economic contexts. The difficulties in historically reconstructing the political-economies of Mediterranean Hellenistic and Palestinian societies in the first century CE not only complicates any generalizations about their contexts but contributes to appreciating how incommensurate they are when compared to the contemporary contexts of advanced capitalism. Direct comparisons or applications from agrarian peasant economies to globalized neo-liberal economies are impossible to legitimate let alone carry out.

While soteriology needs to take into account the interaction between the gifts and tasks of eschatological salvation and Palestinian-Mediterranean political-economic contexts, it needs to interpret anew the possible interactions between the gifts and tasks of eschatological salvation and contemporary political-economic contexts. Practical-critical soteriology therefore recognizes various transhistorical elements in the original interaction between eschatological gift and political-economic contexts in the biblical world. Among other elements discovered in the last chapter, these transhistorical elements include: the identity and difference between gratuitous salvation and promised liberation, the radicalization of sociopolitical responsibility through a preferential justice and universal reconciliation, God's unlimited solidarity with the violated and the

vanquished, as well as the claims of the eschatological surplus and eschatological proviso. These elements invigorate the interaction between eschatological gift and current contexts just as they animated the interaction between eschatological gift and historical contexts in biblical and post-biblical traditions. The socio-cultural and political-economic variables specific to each era are vastly incongruent, hindering direct applications from the biblical text to contemporary situations.

Practical-critical soteriology must draw, therefore, on current analyses and interpretations of contemporary political-economic contexts in order to articulate what the gifts and tasks of eschatological salvation are in relation to a progressive political praxis. Schillebeeckx construes the interaction with social theory as an effort to assist theology in sorting out the historical variables so as to recontextualize the biblical orientations which are indirectly relevant to contemporary forms of political praxis. Theology requires an account of contemporary societies if it is to be critical and practical within the constantly evolving contexts of socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological relationships. If practical-critical soteriology is to be compelling and reconstructive, it requires the resources of contemporary social theories. These theories enlarge the capacities of soteriology to account for and realize its practical-critical intent directed at the structural transformation of sociopolitical systems.

3.I.2. The Public Function of Religion

In addition to this hermeneutical framework, Schillebeeckx further situates his approach to the interaction between theology and social theory within an account of the public function of religion. By the public function of religion, Schillebeeckx is concerned to delineate the indispensable yet distinct service of religion within society. Schillebeeckx observes that religious believers and agnostic secularists often engage in similar activities to renew society, such as addressing its systemic inequities and rehabilitating the sources of structural violence. Schillebeeckx asks whether religion merely offers a different interpretation of these activities, or constitutes a distinct set of approaches to them. If religion is reduced to a merely different interpretation of sociopolitical activities and offers no distinct approach to them, Schillebeeckx finds the claim of a religious tradition to perform a unique and irreplaceable service within society undermined: indifferent to the direction of sociopolitical activity, the critical force of a religious tradition ceases to be of any consequence and remains irrelevant to action.⁶ A sociopolitical practice that remains indifferent or unmodified according to whether it receives either a religious or agnostic interpretation, has absolutely no need for a specific contribution unique to religious traditions of interpretation. If religion offers no distinct interpretation of sociopolitical activity such that it orients an apparent

⁶ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 713 / *Christ*, 774. See “God, Society and Human Salvation,” 94.

approach to sociopolitical activity, it vitiates its own critical capacities. In the absence of a distinct discursive initiative specific to religion, Schillebeeckx provocatively describes the logical outcome: an escalating dismissal of the practical and critical capacity of a religious tradition to orient political praxis.⁷ Countering this reduction of religion and its outcome, Schillebeeckx insists that a religious tradition is not an interpretation of life that remains indifferent or alien to practice, any more than it is an approach to practice without any involvement of a particular interpretation of human beings and the contexts in which they live. He draws the following conclusions from this conviction:

Alleen als we de eigen kritisch-hermeneutische kracht en impuls van de godsdienst qua godsdienst erkennen, kan (bij wijze van innerlijke overvloed, implicatie en consequentie) de godsdienst een dienst aan de wereld bewijzen die *én specifiek-religieus én praktisch* (ook politiek-praktisch) *werkzaam* is in de wereld ... Daarom moet de theologie nadruk leggen op het christelijk geloof op de *specifiek-religieuze* vorm van mens- en maatschappijkritiek; daarin kan een dienst van de godsdienst aan de wereld zijn gegeven welke de theologie niet haalt uit een herhalende verdubbeling van wat kritische sociologen (wellicht terecht) reeds hebben gezegd, maar die zij haalt uit *de ervaring van het Heilige*. Godsdiensten willen over het heilige, over God getuigen; juist daarin vinden zij die legitimatie van hun spreken en handelen. In hun *dienst aan God* – godsdienst – zijn godsdiensten een *dienst aan de mens*. Zo niet, dan gaat het om een louter idealistische verdubbeling. Als we het immers hebben over religieus bewustzijn (en zijn *eigen* kritische kracht), spreken we over een

⁷ *Ibid.*, 713 / *ibid.*, 774. In the same passage, this dismissal is described in four stages: “Therefore in reality we often have the following experience. To begin with, people talk of inspiration provided by the gospel which stimulates them towards solidarity with liberation movements (which are in fact socialist). In a second phase, people see more accurately the particular rationality of this emancipation. In a third phase, they recognize the priority of emancipation in their own rationality over the proclamation of the gospel; and in a last, fourth phase all this often ends up with the rejection of the orientation and inspiration from the gospel, as being irrelevant to liberation movements.” See “God, Society and Human Salvation,” 94-95.

bepaalde gestalte van menselijk bewustzijn ... Voor de Godgelovige is de mens in de wereld het fundamentele symbool van het heilige, van God als de voorvechter van alle goed en de bestrijder van alle kwaad (...).⁸

This pivotal passage identifies the specific difference between theological and sociological types of discourse and thereby ensures the essential significance of religious interpretations of life for distinct approaches to sociopolitical activity. Within this argument for the autonomy and sovereignty of theological discourse, Schillebeeckx further locates the manifestation of the holy within the contingency of creation and therefore within human beings and the societies they construct. Schillebeeckx also notes that human beings and their societies conceal the holy, render it opaque and

⁸ *Ibid.*, 714-715 / *ibid.*, 775-776: "Only if we recognize the particular critical and hermeneutical force and impulse of religion as religion, can religion (by means of inner fullness, implication and consequence) show a service to the world which is both a *specifically religious* and *practical* (even politically-practical) *activity* in the world ... Therefore theology must stress the *specifically religious* form of the criticism of human beings and society; here there can be a service of religion to the world which theology does draws, not from a repetitive duplication of what critical sociologists have already (perhaps rightly) said, but from *an experience of the holy*. Religions seek to bear witness to the holy, to God; it is there that they find the legitimation for their discourse and action. In their *service to God*, religions are also a *service to human beings*. If not, there is nothing except idealistic duplication. When we speak of religious consciousness (and its *proper* critical force), we are speaking of a particular form of human consciousness ... For the believer, the human being in the world is the fundamental symbol of the holy, of God as the advocate of all good and the opponent of all evil (...)." See "God, Society and Human Salvation," 95-96. Unique to this passage is the appearance of a phenomenology of the holy. Since Schillebeeckx is an analogical thinker, it is significant to note that this category of the holy represents a phenomenological code for God's eschatological activity within creation. The holy represents the biblical language of God's reign, the community of preferential justice and universal reconciliation, in which God's solidarity with the exploited and abused extends the promise of healing and empowerment, even so far as to include the forgotten and the dead. The holy and God's inbreaking reign are respectively phenomenological and biblical codes expressing the mutual indwelling of creation and the covenant. This mutual indwelling of creation and covenant is the lifeline of Schillebeeckx' soteriology covering a large span of his writings all the way from "Stilte gevuld met parabels," (1972) 73 ff. to "Plezier en woede beleven aan Gods schepping," (1993) 331 ff..

absent.⁹ This arises naturally from the ontological finitude of human beings as creatures, as well as from their fallibility as ethical agents. As both manifested and concealed by human beings and the structures as well as systems determining their societies, this phenomenology of the holy grounds the specific autonomy and difference of theological discourse. The practical and critical force of theological discourse is determined by the way in which the human both reveals and conceals a way of life and pattern of relationships consistent with the community of preferential justice and universal reconciliation.

This anthropological location of the holy is intensified in the narrative particularity of stories testifying to legacies of endured suffering. The anthropological location of the holy is further intensified in the christological particularity of the lifepraxis, death and resurrection of Jesus. The practical and critical force of theological discourse is therefore determined by the witness to stories of suffering and resistance as well as to Jesus the eschatological prophet. The christological focus supports the empathic reception of stories of suffering by enduring them in the promise that the life of Jesus communicates the unceasing approach of God's solidarity with the violated and the vanquished. These independent sources of the critical and practical force specific to theological discourse differentiate the discourse and hermeneutical procedures of soteriology from sociological or political-economic theory. Schillebeeckx therefore

⁹ *Ibid.*, 715 / *ibid.*, 775. See also "God, Society and Human Salvation," 96; and "Theologie als bevrijdingskunde," 399.

refuses to tolerate the reduction of theology to social theory. Soteriology is sovereign and autonomous in the sources, implications and consequences of its practical-critical force. Practical-critical soteriology entails specific consequences for sociopolitical praxis that are not available from completely agnostic or secular sources.

Although the Enlightenment rightly critiqued the oppressive dimensions of religious traditions and therefore sought a rational basis for emancipative struggles, idealistic versions of Enlightenment rationality are not in themselves sufficiently critical to stem structural exploitation or systemic violence.¹⁰ Enlightenment rationality alone is not capable of articulating and advocating a truly preferential justice or universal reconciliation.

Schillebeeckx, however, does not turn his assertion of the autonomy and sovereignty of theological discourse into an argument to eliminate or minimize the autonomy and sovereignty of social theory in its own discipline and discourse. While social theory is no substitute for the sovereign and autonomous discourse of soteriology, it is equally true for Schillebeeckx that soteriology is no substitute for the autonomous and independent discourse of social theory. “Bevrijdend geloofshandelen vraagt niet minder maar méér kritisch-theoretisch analyse.”¹¹ Schillebeeckx seeks the diverse independence of disciplines. His move to endorse the autonomy and sovereignty of

¹⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Mensen*, 189-194 / *Church*, 170-175.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 196 / *ibid.*, 178: “Liberating action in faith does not call for less but more critical-theoretical analysis.”

theological discourse is not a move to undermine social scientific analysis or interpretation. This move serves to emphasize the distinct public influence of religious traditions as potentially distinct forces with practical and critical repercussions for sociopolitical actions.

3.I.3. The Public Ambivalence of Religion

While Schillebeeckx maintains that religious traditions can radicalize sociopolitical movements through progressive practical and critical implications, he is not deluded to think that they necessarily and in all instances perform this public function. For Schillebeeckx, the gospel traditions radicalize political praxis by relativizing and destabilizing the claims of a sociopolitical system more than by solidifying or consoling them. Schillebeeckx recognizes that, quite apart from theological views of an interactive soteriology that connects eschatological faith with emancipative political praxis, the sociology of religion establishes the ambivalent function of religion in so far as it promotes both reactionary and revolutionary politics. “In feite zien we dat godsdiensten zowel de legitimatie van bestaande verhoudingen dienen als dat zij motivaties leveren voor hervorming en zelfs revolutie. Sociologisch en historisch gezien bevordert de godsdienst derhalve twee contraire houdingen.”¹²

¹² Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 711 / *Christ*, 772: “We in fact see that religious both serve to legitimate existing relations and provide motivations for reform and even revolution. From a sociological and historical point of view, religion hence promotes two

Schillebeeckx accepts the evidence presented by the sociology of religion suggesting that religious traditions variously support conflicting forms of political praxis.

Schillebeeckx recently accentuates this ambivalence with a discussion of the collusion between christian religion and conditions of sociopolitical violence which are religiously legitimated, enabled or even deliberately promoted.¹³ Multiple causes for this are identifiable within the historical legacies of christian religious traditions. The primary theological factor in this collusion lies in the assumption that the relation to ultimate reality sustained by a particular religious tradition has an immediate and direct connection to the formulation and preservation of a particular state government of ascendent political movement. Such an immediate and direct connection between ultimate reality and a contingent, historically constructed system, argues Schillebeeckx, directly elevates the system with its structures and institutions to the absolute will of God.¹⁴ Identifying the contingent historical production of a sociopolitical system with the absolute will of God functions to absolutize the structures and institutions of the system as a divinely mandated imperative.

contrary stances.”

¹³ Schillebeeckx, “Cultuur, godsdienst en geweld: ‘Theologie als onderdeel van een cultuur,’ *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 39 (1996) 387-404; and “Godsdienst en geweld,” *Concilium* (1997) 149-163 / “Religion and Violence,” *Concilium* 4 (1997) 129-142.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 403. See “Godsdienst en geweld,” 154 / “Religion and Violence,” 134. Schillebeeckx argues that such a pattern is not intrinsic to Christianity by nature as such, but constitutes one contestable line of theological options among others that offer alternative accounts of the relation between religious faith and politics.

Wat hieruit de theologische conclusie is voor ons, moderne mensen, is zonneklaar: er is iets mis met de vooronderstelling dat de relatie tot het ultieme onmiddellijk verband houdt met de handhaving van een gevestigde orde of (als feitelijk hoewel zeldzamer alternatief) met een direct-religieus beroep op revolutie. M.a.w.: een direct verband leggen tussen het ultieme en een bepaalde ('gevestigde' of 'revolutionaire') sociaal-politieke orde op aarde is in wezen misbruik van de godsdienst en daarom menselijk en christelijk te verwerpen ... Hiermee is geenzins geloochend (wat ik steeds gesteld heb) dat het evangelie sociaal-politieke relevantie heeft, maar alleen dat er een *onmiddelijk-innerlijk* band zou bestaan tussen de christelijke Godsbelijdenis en de door ons gerealiseerde of te realiseren sociaal-politieke ordening.¹⁵

Theology has a sociopolitical responsibility to maintain a productive distance between eschatological activity and political praxis. This productive tension is located between two extremes: a strict withdrawal of the signifying power of religious traditions from sociopolitical responsibilities, on the one hand, and on the other a manipulative, in the absence of all critical distance, alignment of religious traditions with the immediate agendas of sociopolitical aims and rationalizations. Advocating this productive tension as an alternative, Schillebeeckx identifies a theological task of utmost importance for religious communities and secular societies: deconstructing any tendencies to sacralize either right- or left-wing ideologies while also deconstructing the illusory and hence perilous assumption of the sociopolitical neutrality of religious traditions.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 403-404: "The theological conclusion following from this is as clear as day: there is something mistaken with the assumption that the relation to the ultimate has a direct connection with the preservation of an established order or (as an actual but much more rare alternative) with a direct religious call to revolution. In other words: to make a direct connection between the ultimate and a particular sociopolitical order on earth is in essence a misuse of religion and is therefore to be rejected on human and christian grounds (...) This consequently is by no means to deny (what I have always maintained) that the gospel is sociopolitically relevant; it is simply to say that no *direct-intrinsic* connection exists between the christian confession of God and a sociopolitical arrangement already or yet to be realized by us." See "Godsdienst en geweld," 155 / "Religion and Violence," 134-135.

Gelovigen zullen ten slotte zodanig over God moeten spreken dat ze de ideologische functie van de oude, klassieke politieke theologieën vermijden, maar anderzijds evenmin verstrikt raken in de voorgewende of zogenaamde neutraliteit van de klassieke belijdende theologieën. Alleen dan is bevrijdend spreken over God, en dus bevrijdingstheologie, mogelijk, religieus en menselijk zinvol en noodzakelijk.¹⁶

Practical-critical soteriology assumes this task by destabilizing sociopolitical movements with critiques and radicalizing sociopolitical movements with inspirations drawn from the types of relationships conducive to the egalitarian community of preferential justice and universal reconciliation. By means of destabilizing critique and radicalizing inspiration, practical-critical soteriology strives to preserve an interdependent distance between eschatological activity and political praxis. The task of maintaining this productive distance between eschatological activity and political praxis involves a complex collaboration between soteriological understanding and a contextual analysis interpreted through social theory. The complexity of sociopolitical systems and human agency defy any immediate or simple understanding. The purpose of such a collaboration, for Schillebeeckx, remains the development of the practical and critical repercussions of eschatological faith for emancipative political praxes. As a minimum limit, any emancipative political praxis that seeks to legitimate itself through an

¹⁶ Schillebeeckx, *Mensen*, 118 / *Church*, 100: "Believers finally will have to speak of God in such a way as to avoid the ideological function of the old, classical political theologies, but on the other hand cease to become enmeshed in the purported or so-called neutrality of the classical confessional theologies. Only then is liberating God-talk and thus liberation theology possible, religiously as well as humanly meaningful, and necessary." This is one of the few oblique references to the fascist "politische Theologie" of Carl Schmitt in the writings of Schillebeeckx.

immediate and simplistic identification with ultimate reality places at risk its capacity to genuinely support liberations from injustice and exclusion. As a further minimum limit, any religious identity that seeks an immediate and simplistic escape from engaging sociopolitical responsibilities potentially undermines its eschatological capacity to represent and communicate the holy within the contingency of social relations.

3.I.3. Summary

Schillebeeckx carries these concerns into his discussion of the interaction between theology and social theory. It is helpful to recall these concerns, for they qualify his discussion of interdisciplinarity and the framework of mediation. Whether from the perspective of biblical hermeneutics, the distinctive public function of religious traditions or the sociopolitical ambivalence of religious traditions, Schillebeeckx seeks to demonstrate that theology both requires the collaboration of social theories and persists as an autonomous and sovereign discourse apart from them. Schillebeeckx refuses to reject the collaboration with social theories, as this weakens soteriology in its theological task to maintain a productive tension between eschatological faith and political praxis. Schillebeeckx equally refuses, however, to surrender the sovereignty of theological discourse such that it ceases to differentiate itself from social theory and capitulates its autonomous practical-critical potential. The political communication of

love cannot simply rely on its evangelical and apostolic sources internally derived from its existing ecclesial traditions in order to pursue its public witness.

3.II. Theology and Social Theory in *Gerechtigheid en liefde* / *Christ*

Significant as the account of this procedural interaction between practical-critical soteriology and contemporary social theories remains for the efficacy of the political communication of love through transformative structures, Schillebeeckx does not extensively elaborate on this issue in the christological trilogy of *Jezus* / *Jesus*, *Gerechtigheid en liefde* / *Christ*, and *Mensen* / *Church*. It is only in the second volume of the trilogy that a brief discussion of this procedural issue is opened up. Noting that the development of faith and the communication of love are sometimes provoked by influences outside the identifiable limits of a religious tradition and its ordinary institutions, Schillebeeckx suggests that

Christelijke, kritische solidariteit met de emancipatieve vrijheidsgeschiedenis en een coalitie van de theologie met het kritische maatschappijtheorieën van het mensdom kunnen daarom hier en nu een noodzakelijke eis worden van de historisch gesitueerde caritas of christelijke liefde en van de theologie (...) Maar dan moeten we wel nagaan, in hoeverre christendom en theologie hierbij hun *eigen* religieus-kritische kracht blijven ontwikkelen en niet slechts herhalen wat menselijke bewegingen en kritische theorieën reeds hebben gezegd.¹⁷

¹⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 712-713 / *Christ*, 773-774: "Christian, critical solidarity with the emancipative history of freedom and a coalition of theology with critical social theories about humanity can therefore become here and now a necessary demand of historically situated caritas or christian love and theology (...) But in that case we must investigate how far Christianity and theology here develop their *own* religious and critical

Schillebeeckx proposes a coalition between soteriology and social theory as instances of critical theory. This coalition reflects an active christian solidarity achieved through participating in movements of emancipative praxis. This proposal, whereby theology and social theory collaborate, presents the coalition as a necessary element for appropriately contextualizing the communication of caritative love in relation to emancipative praxis. Schillebeeckx does not, however, advance any hermeneutical or procedural features in this passage which would further describe the critical theoretical coalition between soteriology and social theory. The ensuing question as to whether there is a specific difference between their respective lines of discourse suggests that the metaphor of “coalition” offers only a minimal description of the interaction between them. Apart from upholding the distinctness of theological discourse relative to the discourse of social theory, Schillebeeckx does not offer a complete account of their interaction. The metaphor of coalition suggests a loose association brought together in a provisional alliance on the basis of a common purpose. Apart from solidarity with emancipatory movements, Schillebeeckx does not further specify what the proposal of a coalition between theology and critical social theory concretely entails at the level of discursive procedure. Other metaphors might offer the proposed coalition both a more complex horizon and therefore a gain in clarity.

force, and do not merely repeat what human movements and critical theories have said already.” See also “God, Society and Human Salvation,” 91-92.

Within *Gerechtigheid en liefde / Christ*, one other metaphor proposes to direct the interaction between soteriologies and social theories that share a practical-critical intent. As with the coalition proposal, however, the metaphor of mediation and its adjoining framework finds only a very limited development and application as presented by Schillebeeckx. Schillebeeckx presents the framework of mediation in the subsection 3.3.II., “Christian Faith and Politics,” which represents one of the culminating counterpoints of the entire Part 4, Section II, “Redemption and Liberation.” This subsection is located in between 3.3.I., “Salvation on Earth: Inner Constitutive Dimension of Christian Redemption,” and 3.3.III., “Eschatological or Definitive, yet Indefinable Salvation.” It therefore is textually situated within the thematic tension surrounding salvific emancipation and definitive salvation as delineated in the previous chapter. This literary framework reflects the thematic context in 3.3.II., where Schillebeeckx revisits the repercussions of the identity and difference between salvation and sociopolitical liberation for a critical understanding of the connection between christian faith and political action. The basic repercussion of the interdependence and difference between salvation and emancipation is twofold. On the one hand, there is the conviction that the gift of eschatological salvation is intensely relevant to political praxis, in so far as it radicalizes political praxis towards a preferential justice and universal reconciliation. Political praxis is radicalized through the awareness that all sociopolitical structures and systems are a human production and therefore capable of transformation through human agency. On the other hand, there is the recognition that

the gift of eschatological salvation destabilizes the historical configurations of political praxis, questioning their ideologies and challenging their hegemonies. It is within this textual setting, recognizing these orienting and destabilizing repercussions, that Schillebeeckx invigorates the interaction between theology and social theory by introducing the metaphor of mediation:

Ondanks zijn sociaal-politieke relevantie kan het evangelie of het christelijk geloof uit zichzelf ons *direct* geen enkel concreet politiek actieprogramma aanreiken. De stuwkracht en inspiratie, alsook een zekere oriëntatie (door afsluiten van bepaalde richtingen), welke vanuit het evangelie uitgaan op het politieke project, op de programmering van de politieke actie en tenslotte op de politieke praxis zelf, verloopt daarom dialectisch, indirect: via contrastervaringen enerzijds en, anderzijds, via de bemiddeling van een (wetenschappelijke) *analyse* van de maatschappelijke structuren en een (hermeneutische) *interpretatie* daarvan. Van maatschappelijke ervaringen is de wetenschappelijke analyse en die interpretatie van het geanalyseerde slechts de noodzakelijke, moderne verlenging. Daarom is zonder de bemiddeling van de analyse én interpretatie van deze ervaringen en van de samenleving, waarin zij ontstonden, de stuwkracht of inspiratie van het evangelie politiek krachteloos en zonder betekenis. Dan is immers een vacuüm tussen de eisen van het politiek relevante evangelie van bevrijding en de eis tot concrete inhoudsbepaling van het politieke handelen ... De conclusie blijkt klemmend: het christelijk geloof met zijn caritasinspiratie is pas dan concreet politiek relevant en actief, wanneer door de analyse en interpretatie van 's mensen ervaring en van de samenlevingsstructuren ... de historische *bemiddeling* is gelegd tussen geloof en politiek handelen.¹⁸

¹⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 720-721 / *Christ*, 782: "Despite its sociopolitical relevance, the gospel of christian faith cannot out of itself *directly* offer us a single concrete political action plan. The compelling force and inspiration, as well as definite orientation (through the exclusion of certain tendencies), which arise out of the gospel for a political project, for the planning of political action and finally for political praxis itself, therefore flows dialectically, indirectly: through contrast experiences, on the one hand, and, on the other, through the mediation of a (scientific) *analysis* of social structures and their (hermeneutical) *interpretation*. Scientific analysis and its interpretation are nothing less than the necessary, modern extension of social experiences. The compelling power and inspiration of the gospel are therefore politically powerless and meaningless without the mediation of the analysis and interpretation of these experiences and of the society in which they originated. There would always be a gap between the claims of the politically relevant gospel of liberation

In this dense passage, the interaction between theology, as the representation of gospel traditions and articulation of faith, and social theory, as the representation of sociopolitical structures and the expression of sociopolitical experiences, is presented in terms of the assistance social theory can provide theology. Social theory can assist soteriological theology in realizing its faith commitment to the political communication of love. By facilitating a concrete discernment of the contextual realities of political praxis, social theory assists theology in understanding and directing the communication of love in terms of a progressive political praxis. Social theory assists soteriology in identifying, intensifying and improving the influence of its liberating engagement in political praxis. Social theory benefits practical-critical soteriology by providing soteriology with the analytic and interpretative resources necessary for discerning the real conflicts between systems of human action that cause structural oppression and systems of human action that support the integrity of life. Social theory benefits practical-critical soteriology by providing soteriology with the analytic and interpretative resources necessary for discerning and orienting the progressive political praxis that is capable of communicating a preferential justice for the oppressed and a universal reconciliation with the excluded. Social theory is necessary for practical-

and the need for a concrete definition of the content of political action The conclusion is pressing: christian faith with its *caritas* inspiration is only then concretely politically relevant and active, when the historical mediation between faith and political action is established through the analysis and interpretation of human experience and of the structures of society..." See also "De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze," 71; and "The Christian and Political Engagement," 119.

critical soteriology so that the orienting and destabilizing repercussions of christian faith for political praxis are communicated and continually revised. The metaphor of mediation suggests that social theories establish lines of interaction between the practical as well as critical resources of soteriology and the possibilities of human action in the structural contexts of sociopolitical systems. Just as with the metaphor of coalition, however, this concise presentation of the framework of mediation does not advance a fulsome description of the way in which theology is interdisciplinary or how social theories intervene. The description of mediation does not establish with any clarity the procedures or conditions through which social theory, as an intervening agency, draws together soteriological responsibilities and political praxis in order to enhance their alignment with each other. The framework of mediation does not describe how or to what extent soteriology and social theory remain differentiated from each other as distinct types of discourse.

For Schillebeeckx, theology therefore is both independent of and dependent on social theories. In subsection 3.3.II and the surrounding subsections of *Gerechtigheid en liefde / Christ*, the framework of mediation does not succeed in clarifying whether theology assimilates or imitates social theory; and whether it simply repeats, creatively appropriates, or innovatively develops the competencies of social theories to analyse and interpret socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological systems. Various isolated and sporadic comments can be identified throughout the three volumes of the christological trilogy that assert both the dependence of theology on social theory and

the cognitive sovereignty of critical theology as a practical and critical discourse apart from social theory. A more fulsome account both of the grammar governing interdisciplinary collaboration and of the diverse types of interaction between theology and social theory is desirable. This account requires recourse to various articles published by Schillebeeckx preceding and paralleling the publication of the christological trilogy. It is within this genre of subsidiary articles that Schillebeeckx works out various categories for constructing his understanding and engagement of the interaction between theology and social theory. These articles not only complement the trilogy but, more importantly, directly discuss these procedural issues. The subsequent sections of this chapter thus address interdisciplinarity (section 3.III.) and two models of the mediation involving analysis and interpretation (section 3.IV.).

3.III. Interdisciplinarity

As indicated in the discussion on the public function of religion, the specific difference of theological discourse arises from the constitutive significance of the holy. For Schillebeeckx, however, the holy remains both manifested and concealed within the contingency of creation and the communicative agency of human beings. The only possible means of relationship with the holy is indirectly through other human beings and creation. Theology, as the language of the holy, is therefore at the same time a language of the creaturely and the human. Theology thus shares the same site of

interpretation as other disciplines of knowledge in the human and social sciences: human beings in society and in the world. Theology is a discipline of analysis and interpretation alongside other disciplines, sharing some overlapping fields of reference and signification.

3.III.1. Interdisciplinarity as Dialogue

Given both the distinctness of theological perspectives and their overlap with perspectives from multiple disciplines, Schillebeeckx finds that theology is in a situation of necessary dialogue with the human and social sciences. “Deze noodzaak van een directe dialoog is relevant zowel voor de methoden en technieken die in de theologie gebruikt worden als voor de inhoud die erin ter sprake wordt gebracht.”¹⁹ Theology requires a diversity of constantly evolving methods of analysis and reflection. It not only works with these methods, but refines them. More important, however, is the direct dialogue of theology with the content produced by the social and human sciences, for it influences the very content of theological discourse. Theology, for Schillebeeckx, cannot serve its mandate to critically reflect on faith in God’s eschatological promises in contemporary contexts when its sources are internally restricted to elements within the existing religious tradition:

¹⁹ Schillebeeckx, “Het kritische statuut van de theologie,” 58: “The necessity of a direct dialogue is relevant with respect both to the methods and procedures that are used in theology and to the content which is thereby discussed.”

De geloofswetenschap kan uiteindelijk niet geheel uit eigen bronnen putten. De andere wetenschappen reiken haar niet alleen hun methoden en technieken aan, maar ook inhoudelijke informatie die *innerlijk* en direct het geloof betreft en de christelijke boodschap die er die inhoud van is. Zonder inbreng van de wetenschappen is de zin zelf van de boodschap niet te verstaan en het christelijk geloof niet menselijk te verwoorden ... Het geloof kan zichzelf dan ook niet verstaan, wanneer het niet de gegevens verwerkt heeft van bijvoorbeeld de psychoanalytische en de kritische maatschappijtheorie ... De andere wetenschappen hebben daarom een onvervangbare inbreng bij het articuleren van het geloof ... Zonder dit contact wordt de theologie een geïsoleerde, werkelijkheids-arme tak van wetenschap, waarvan men zich met recht kan afvragen, of zij nog iets met kritische reflectie van doen heeft.²⁰

It is noteworthy that Schillebeeckx makes an explicit reference to critical social theory.

Critical social theory, as represented for Schillebeeckx by figures in the Frankfurt School such as Adorno, Horkheimer and especially the early Habermas, forms a privileged dialogue partner in his theological endeavors. In this text, Schillebeeckx accentuates that without a dialogue that rehabilitates or enlarges the very content of theological insight and reflection, theology risks placing itself in sectarian isolation and pseudo-reality. The normative biblical witness, the classics of the christian tradition or even the liturgical events of christian assemblies are not sufficient as exclusive sources of theological interpretation. Adding the newspapers to this list does not improve

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 59-61: "The science of faith cannot ultimately forge itself out of its own sources. The other sciences offer it not only their methods and procedures, but also substantive knowledge that *intrinsically* and directly affects faith and the christian message of which it is the content. Without the contribution of the sciences the meaning itself of the message cannot be understood and christian faith cannot become human ... Faith cannot understand itself unless it reworks what is given, for instance, by psychology and critical social theory ... The other sciences therefore bring an irreplaceable contribution to the articulation of faith ... Without this contact, theology becomes an isolated, reality-impooverished branch of scientific knowledge, of which one must rightly ask whether it still has anything to do with critical reflection."

matters much. Since soteriology sustains a practical engagement and critical-hermeneutical perspective in relation to the holy *within* the human and *within* the world, the understanding of the human and the world furnished by the social and human sciences has a direct impact on the theological articulation of the holy. The understanding of human beings as situated in socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological lifeworlds, which is mediated by the social and human sciences, therefore becomes constitutive for the very interpretation and hence experience of the holy within the human. Schillebeeckx did not think that this dialogue was sufficiently or adequately advanced within theological disciplines.²¹ Schillebeeckx therefore recommends that the theological engagement with and interpretation of human beings in their social lifeworlds is clearly assisted by a dialogue with critical social theory.²² With recourse to the metaphor of dialogue, this text reflects the same possibilities and limits as the

²¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

²² He affirms this primary importance of a dialogue with critical social theory not only in this text but in several others during this time of the early 1970s: "Naar een verruiming van de hermeneutiek: de 'nieuwe kritische theorie'," 30-50 / "The New Critical Theory," 102-123; "Kritische theorie en theologische hermeneutiek: confrontatie," 113-139 / "The New Critical Theory and Theological Hermeneutics," 124-155; "De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze," 68-78; "The Christian and Political Engagement," 118-127; "Godsdienstige herleving in conflict met sociale inzet," 9-29; "Kritische theorieën en politiek engagement van de christelijke gemeente," 47-61 / "Critical Theories and Christian Political Commitment," 48-61; and "Salut, rédemption, et émancipation," 274-278. For an earlier appreciation of Schillebeeckx' dialogue with critical theory, see William L. Portier, "Schillebeeckx' Dialogue with Critical Theory," *Ecumenist* 21 (Jan-Feb 1983) 20-27; "Edward Schillebeeckx as Critical Theorist: The Impact of Neo-Marxist Social Thought on his Recent Theology," *The Thomist* 48 (July 1984) 341- 367; and "Interpretation and Method," in *The Praxis of Christian Experience: An Introduction to the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx*, ed. M.Hilkert and R. Schreiter, (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1989).

metaphor of mediation in terms of proposing a framework for assessing the interaction between theology and social theory. Schillebeeckx underscores the vital necessity for theologies to interact with and integrate the analyses and interpretations actualized by the social and human sciences. This vital dialogue aims at enhancing the autonomy and sovereignty of theology as a discipline with its intrinsic rights and responsibilities. Yet nowhere in this text is there any procedural indication of how that dialogue might advance. While Schillebeeckx emphasizes that theology has not been amply active in the dialogue and thereby compromises its critical capacities to sustain faith, he also displays confidence in the role that theology can play as an autonomous and interdependent discipline. The metaphors of dialogue and mediation still invite procedural clarification.

3.III.2. Three Models of Interdisciplinarity

It is in this context of seeking to articulate the outlines of a dialogue between theology and critical social theory that Schillebeeckx further addresses the procedural aspects of interdisciplinary interaction. Taking note of the cognitive isolation, orientation crisis and dissociation from contextual realities pertaining to theology as a discipline, Schillebeeckx finds theological disciplines unable to develop responsible criteria that can orient human agency. The development of this capacity in theology constitutes an urgent imperative when facing the increasing rationalization of human

action in late modernity and ongoing wounds to the integrity of life on a planetary scale.²³ The practical and critical intent informing his soteriology thus also informs his intervention to explore the repercussions of interdisciplinarity for theology. Rejecting both the post-kantian positivistic notion of a unified science that is sufficient unto itself as well as the post-cartesian notion of a division between natural and human sciences, Schillebeeckx situates the invitation to develop a model of interdisciplinarity for theology in the contemporary pluralism differentiating analytic-empirical and hermeneutic-dialectical scientific methods.²⁴ He approaches these differentiations in analytic-empirical and dialectical-hermeneutic methods as a strength from which all the sciences, including theology, can benefit. At the heart of this effort lies the theological insight that, just as faith grounded in revelation and historical experience are mutually interdependent, theology stands in an interdependent relationship with the sciences which analytically and reflexively construct historical experience.²⁵ With this approach, Schillebeeckx seeks to rehabilitate the content-related deficiencies of theological disciplines in an effort to bolster the autonomy and sovereignty of theological discourse.

²³ Edward Schillebeeckx, "Kritische bezinning op interdisciplinariteit in de theologie," *Vox Theologica* 45 (1975) 113. Schillebeeckx repeatedly makes reference to the "marginalization of theology" (114), the "reality-deficiency of theology" (118), and of how "theology is marginalized by theologically divorcing itself from the analytic-empirical sciences" (119). Given that the most often cited scientific-interpretative theory in this text remains Habermas' critical theory, Schillebeeckx is imploring theologians to dialogue with critical theory.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 119.

Schillebeeckx discerns two prevalent models of interdisciplinarity directing the engagement of the analytic-empirical and dialectical-hermeneutical sciences by theology. The possibilities and limits of these two models are identified before suggesting an alternative model. Since his alternative builds on the strengths and weaknesses of each, the annexation and emigration models merit consideration.

3.III.2.1. The Annexation Model²⁶

With this model of interdisciplinarity, theological disciplines integrate the findings of analytic-empirical sciences by assimilating their material into theological discourse. The traditional content of theological disciplines are revisited and reformed with the assimilation of analytic-empirical findings in an effort to concretize theology through interdisciplinarity. In so far as efforts within this model attempt an additional, theological reworking of pre-existing materials from these scientific methods, Schillebeeckx finds the structure of argumentation and organization of different types of rationalities hopelessly confused.²⁷ In the absence of reflecting on the theoretical implications of assimilating empirical materials from several positivistic disciplines into theology, the notion of interdisciplinarity loses its critical focus. Whereas analytic-

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 120-121.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

empirical materials are mostly constructed in terms of generalized associations and statistical probabilities, these materials of themselves entail no reflexive understanding of the logical or heuristic models within which they are contrived and function and which stabilize their meaning. Schillebeeckx thus does not find a satisfactory answer within this assimilationist model to the question of how analytic-empirical materials can be inserted into theology's horizon of understanding. Without an accompanying effort at reflexive understanding which would interpret and organize such a procedure, Schillebeeckx argues that the surgical transplant of analytic-empirical materials from the structuring horizons of particular scientific models into the structuring horizons of particular theological disciplines is equivocal and misleading.²⁸ In the assimilation model, interdisciplinarity simply proceeds as if the various types of rationalities operative in analytic-empirical scientific methods can be transposed into theology without a guiding explanation of what these same findings might mean in theological conditions where very different types of rationality are involved. There is a corresponding lack of critical reflection on these assimilating measures through the reflexive methods of dialectical-hermeneutical methods. Theological disciplines cannot validly proceed as if they are already in the self-assured possession of the content of their discipline, which they extrinsically decorate with imported analytic-empirical materials.²⁹ Although it represents an initial effort to support theology in becoming

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 121.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

situated, intelligible and communicable with respect to contemporary contextual realities, Schillebeeckx finds the assimilation model of interdisciplinarity deficient due to its all too casual and extrinsic exchanges with the social and human sciences.

3.III.2.2. The Emigration Model³⁰

In the emigration model, rather than importing the positivistic results of other sciences into theology, theology as a discipline deliberately enters into the activities constitutive for the knowledges of the social and human sciences using analytic-empirical and dialectic-hermeneutical methods. “Volgens dit model kan de theologie haar eigen identiteit niet vinden *naast of boven* maar alleen *in-en-door* de andere wetenschappen ... Ze vervult haar eigen taak pas in en door haar presentie in de menswetenschappen.”³¹ Within this model, the theologian also becomes qualified as a critical sociologist or psychoanalyst in order to theologize from *within* the other disciplines themselves. While signaling a similar concern regarding the confusing combination of different types of rationalities specific to particular horizons of understanding, Schillebeeckx is much more positive and less reserved towards efforts

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 121-122.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 122 / “Interdisciplinarity in Theology,” 141: “According to this model, theology finds its identity not alongside or above the other sciences, but in and through them. Like the gospel, theology must exist for the other sciences as well as for itself. It fulfills its own task in and through its presence in the human sciences.”

within this model. Without a lot of explanation, he levels the allegation that, as necessary as this emigration of theological endeavor into other disciplines is, it does not constitute or exhaust the discipline of theology as a distinct kind of knowledge. The emigration of theology into and within the parameters of the other disciplines is no substitute for the independent discourse of theology.

3.III.2.3. The Model of Correlation: An Alternative³²

As an alternative to these two models, Schillebeeckx proposes a model of correlation. The model of correlation represents a methodological reflection based on his previous work with the critical theory of the Frankfurt School.³³ Taking seriously the necessity and demands of a serious interdisciplinarity with the analytic-empirical and dialectical-hermeneutic methods of the social and human sciences, Schillebeeckx' proposal of a model of correlation has two poles that he places in mutual exchange with each other. On the one hand, theological disciplines develop specific competencies employing the methods of the other sciences in order to better assist the integration of

³² *Ibid.*, 123.

³³ In "Kritische theorie en theologische hermeneutiek: confrontatie," 122 / "The New Critical Theory and Theological Hermeneutics," 135, Schillebeeckx names a section of this article with the title "Theology in *correlation* with a critical theory" (italics added). The term "correlation" is polyvalent in the oeuvre of Schillebeeckx and used extensively to describe various sets of challenges in theological hermeneutics, such as the correlation between the biblical witness and contemporary ranges of human experience.

the findings of these sciences within theology. On the other hand, theological disciplines develop a specifically unique theological discourse and cognitive identity, such that they retain a critical and productive power which they do not receive from other sources. Speaking out of his interaction with critical social theory, Schillebeeckx maintains

dat er een convergentie is tussen de emancipatieve interesse waardoor de kritische theorie geleid wordt en de vrijmakende kracht die uitgaat van het evangelie, zonder dat ze overigens samenvallen. De christelijke boodschap ontwikkelt, authentiek beleefd, een eigen specifieke vorm van vrijheid. Dit betekent dat een theoloog die zich bezint op de implicaties van het evangelie, ook eigen-christelijke motieven heeft om de kritische theorie, constitutief verbonden met een kritische praxis, tot de zijne te maken ... Maar wanneer een theoloog ook uit christelijke overtuiging de kritische theorie en praxis hanteert, wordt deze daardoor nog geen theologie; zo'n 'vertheologisering' zou trouwens indruisen tegen wat de kritische maatschappijtheorie precies wil. Alleen het feit dat de kritische theorie beoefend wordt door iemand die óók theoloog is, transformeert haar in elk geval nog niet tot kritische *theologie*.³⁴

Simply because the practitioners of theological disciplines become adept in the capabilities of other disciplines does not turn their capabilities in those disciplines into theological understanding. Theology and social theory are presented as interdependent yet distinct voices whose association with each other, however close it draws them

³⁴ Schillebeeckx, "Kritische theorie en theologische hermeneutiek: confrontatie," 125 / "The New Critical Theory and Theological Hermeneutics," 139: "that there is a convergence between the emancipative interest guiding critical theory and the liberating power which proceeds from the gospel, although they do not coincide. Authentically lived, the christian message develops its own specific form of freedom. This means that a theologian who considers the implications of the gospel engages critical theory, connected to a critical praxis, out of specifically christian motives...But whenever a theologian engages critical theory and praxis out of a christian conviction, this does not convert critical theory into theology; such a 'theologization' of theology actually clashes with the definite intention of critical social theory. The fact alone that critical theory is put into practice by someone who is also a theologian does not in any case transform critical theory into critical *theology*."

together, ultimately differentiates the one from the other and places them in their respective autonomy. Schillebeeckx reinforces this view of converging differences by claiming that “Juist deze specifiek-eigen theologische opdracht lijkt me onmogelijk zonder hermeneutisch-dialektische maar evenmin zonder analytisch-theoretische wetenschappelijkheid.”³⁵ Theological discourse enters into dialogue with the sciences (convergence), learning the conditions and limits of their lines of discourse, yet in doing so discovers and owns responsibility for its own distinct voice (difference). The correlation he proposes thus includes a complex set of methodological considerations whereby theology develops a certain level of competency in the methods of one or more of the social and human sciences. These methodological considerations in the correlation model also account for and organize the complex involvement of methods and findings from these sciences in its understanding of contemporary socio-cultural, political economic and ecological contexts which are constitutive for human identity and experience. Finally, due to its competencies within other disciplines and its capacity to account for and organize the integration of their methods and findings within its own horizon of understanding, theology clarifies its specific difference in relation to the social and human sciences. There are converging yet always distancing lines of interaction in the dialogue between theology and the social-human sciences.

³⁵ Schillebeeckx, “Kritische bezinning op interdisciplinariteit in de theologie,” 123: “Precisely this specifically-unique theological task appears impossible to me without hermeneutic-dialectical and analytic-theoretical scientificity.”

While procedural and substantive contributions from the sciences assist theology in engaging and understanding the anthropological and cosmic contexts in which the holy is manifested and concealed, they do not arrive at interacting with or interpreting the holy as such. This specific difference of theology as a discipline is grounded, for Schillebeeckx, in the manifestation and concealment, the disclosure and dissimulation of the holy within the creaturely and the human. It is the traces of the eschatological community of preferential justice and universal reconciliation within history that structure the horizon of theological understanding, determine the cognitive identity of theology and differentiate soteriological discourse from its scientific counterparts. The methods and the findings of the sciences assist theology in engaging and understanding the current intra-psychic, interpersonal, socio-cultural, political economic and ecological contexts in which the holy is located, but they do not explicitly encounter or reflexively communicate the holy as holy. To discern and communicate the holy is the specific task of theology differentiating its sovereign discourse with respect to the knowledges developed by other disciplines.

The model of correlation thus clarifies procedural issues involved in the interdisciplinary expansion of theology, both by structuring the involvement of theology with other disciplines and by differentiating the autonomy of theological discourse from the autonomous discourses of the sciences. Through this model of correlation, Schillebeeckx not only hopes to secure a more intelligible and communicable position for theology alongside diverse lines of multi-disciplinary discourse, but to radicalize the

practical sociopolitical initiatives which theology seeks to sustain. As an autonomous and sovereign discourse enhanced by its interdependence with the social and human sciences, the distinct capacities of soteriological discourse to communicate and contribute towards the bases for a progressive political praxis are enhanced. This autonomy and interdependence of theological discourse reproduces the identity and difference between eschatological salvation and liberating emancipation.

3.III.3. Summary

With the precision of procedural and organizational issues in the model of correlation, Schillebeeckx offers a position from which to approach the interaction between soteriology and social theory. This falls within the effort to sustain a practical and critical impact on sociopolitical praxis. While clarifying some of the residual ambiguities in the metaphor of dialogue as a description of interdisciplinarity, it remains to be seen how the model of correlation clarifies the metaphor of mediation.

The model of correlation suggests, however, that interpretations of sociopolitical praxis cannot simply be annexed out of their natural contexts and transposed to fit preconceived theological needs or patterns of thinking. Sociopolitical praxis has an intrinsic intelligibility as articulated by the analytic-empirical and dialectic-

hermeneutical interpretations of the sciences.³⁶ The analyses and interpretations of the social and human sciences describe the historical contexts, structures, agents, purposes and events that make up entire ranges of praxis. There is no sociopolitical praxis that theology can isolate and simply claim for its own as a discourse, even if such a praxis can be interpreted as meaningful for christian faith communities. Schillebeeckx would also insist that there are specifically reconciling and liberating types of political praxis that are meaningful for Christians on the basis of their faith, but these types of praxes remain potentially meaningful for others besides Christians since, as actions by agents amidst particular structures specific to concrete systems, these types of praxes are open to encounter and inquiry in their own right. The intrinsic rationalities in these types of praxis, even though they have their origin in specifically christian initiatives, remain open to the descriptive, explanatory, deconstructive and even reconstructive interventions of the social and human sciences.

It emerges as a clear conviction for Schillebeeckx that theology stands invited to accompany sociopolitical praxis by emigrating, at least initially, into the rationalization of such praxis in critical social theory. At the same time, theology cannot entirely abandon its own distinct voice, having passed over into the analytic and hermeneutical rationalities of social-scientific discourse, and simply repeat, imitate or extend the knowledges of various disciplines other than its own. While Schillebeeckx justifies

³⁶ Schillebeeckx, "Op zoek naar de heilswaarde van politieke vredespraxis," 235. See also "Christian Conscience and Nuclear Deterrant," 103.

these activities, he further justifies the sovereignty of theological discourse. For, as Schillebeeckx insists, sociopolitical praxis is “(...) *niet te reduceren* tot de politieke en sociale componenten; daarin staat meer op het spel. En om dit méér is het de theoloog te doen, wil hij althans iets eigen-theologisch zeggen over die politieke praxis en niet louter herhalen wat vanuit andere competenties erover gezegd is (...).”³⁷ Since creation is intensified with the gift of the covenant, not superceded or trivialized, there can be more to human action and sociopolitical praxis than the sciences alone can name or describe.

Schillebeeckx insists that the task of soteriology is to articulate the productive repercussions for sociopolitical praxis stemming from its unique discourse. This discourse communicates the mutual indwelling of creation and covenant, the inbreaking reign of the community of preferential justice and universal reconciliation, the empowerment of the wounded and forlorn with the partially realized and yet to be fulfilled promises of divine healing, as well as the mutually-implicating identity and difference between eschatological activity and liberation. Connections with these, either in solidarity or in opposition, are possible in any human action and consequently in diverse ranges of sociopolitical praxis. The analytic-empirical and dialectic-hermeneutical methods of the sciences cannot either accept or decline an engagement

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 235: “(...) *not to be reduced* to its social and political components; there is more than this at stake. And this ‘more’ is the concern of the theologian, if s/he wants to say something distinctly theological about political praxis and not simply repeat what has already been said about it from other fields of competence (...).” See “Christian Conscience and Nuclear Deterrant,” 103.

with and interpretation of these eschatological possibilities within human action. The bases for making such a decision to accept or decline remains outside the competencies specific to their horizons of understanding and conditions of rationality. Leaving aside or prescinding from these possibilities, they do articulate the intrinsic intelligibility and communicability of human action with respect to its various historical dimensions. Nor can theological disciplines assume, simply because particular ranges of sociopolitical praxis have been rationalized and either legitimated or contested by social theories, that they are bereft of eschatological possibilities. The specific autonomy and sovereignty of practical-critical soteriology lies in naming and communicating these eschatological possibilities dwelling within human action. Practical-critical soteriology can then move, through its complementary competencies in social scientific analysis and interpretation, towards rendering the eschatological possibilities of human action not only concrete and available, but intelligible and communicable in terms of the interrelated contexts, agents, institutions and structures that determine sociopolitical praxis. Practical-critical soteriology “helpt aldus uit te leggen wat het betekent om *in termen van Gods heilsbeloften* te spreken over onze dagelijkse ‘profane’ wereld en samenleving ... Juist in deze ‘uitleg’ moet de theologie interdisciplinair contact houden met alle mens- en maatschappijwetenschappen.”³⁸ Between practical-critical soteriology and

³⁸ Schillebeeckx, “Theologie als bevrijdingskunde,” 401: “helps to set forth what it means to speak about our daily ‘profane’ world and society *in terms of God’s promises of salvation* ... Precisely in this ‘setting forth,’ theology must undertake an interdisciplinary contact with all the human and social sciences.”

sociopolitical praxis, then, lies the mediation of the emancipative and cognitive stances of the empirical analyses and dialectical hermeneutics of social theories. It is interesting to note that the text on the three models of interdisciplinarity does not address the question of whether or on what basis some social theories ought to be preferred over others. Throughout his writings of this period, Schillebeeckx clearly gives preference to the critical social theory advanced in the early work of Jürgen Habermas, which combines a critical sociology with a post-kantian philosophy of practical reason and neo-marxist dialectics.

3.IV. The Mediation of Analysis and Interpretation

In returning to the metaphor of mediation, an extensive and balanced reading of the texts of Schillebeeckx identifies two different instances of the metaphor of mediation that are significant for the discussion. The first metaphor of mediation is pervasive in Schillebeeckx' writings from 1971 up to and including the publication of *Gerechtigheid en liefde* in 1977. The first instance of the metaphor of mediation, whereby the analysis and interpretation of critical social theory mediates between contextually-located sociopolitical praxis and soteriology, stems from the impact of the early Habermas' critical theory on Schillebeeckx.³⁹ The second instance of the

³⁹ Judging by the frequency of references and citations, the most influential works by Habermas in Schillebeeckx' soteriological undertaking through the 1970s are *Theorie und Praxis* (Neuwied/Berlin: Luchterhand, 1963), *Erkenntnis und Interesse* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp,

metaphor of mediation, by contrast, stems from the paling significance of Habermas' critical sociology in Schillebeeckx' later work relative to the growing influence of Latin American liberation theology.⁴⁰ The influence of the groundbreaking work in liberation methodologies by Clodovis Boff becomes especially evident in Schillebeeckx' writings after 1978.⁴¹ Consequently, these different applications of the metaphor of mediation will need to be discussed separately before any comparisons are ventured.

1968) and *Technik und Wissenschaft als 'Ideologie'* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1968).

⁴⁰ In this regard, see "Bevrijdingstheologieën tussen Medellín en Puebla," (1978) / "Befreiungstheologien zwischen Medellín und Puebla," (1978); "God, Society and Human Salvation" (1978) "Karikatuur van de bevrijdingstheologie," *Streven* 52 (1984/1985) 99-102; "Spoken over God in een context van bevrijding," (1984); "Theologie als bevrijdingskunde" (1984); and "Befreiende Theologie," (1988). The increasing significance of Latin American liberation theologies for the development of his own soteriology is already evident in *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 697-701 / *Christ*, 758-762 in so far as, of the five positions surveyed on the question of a theology of salvation history, the position of Gustavo Gutierrez is the only position to emerge with no substantial charge against it.

⁴¹ Clodovis Boff, *Teologia e prática : teologia do político e suas mediações*, Petrópolis: Vozes, 1978. Schillebeeckx cites the German translation, *Theologie und Praxis: Die erkenntnistheoretische Grundlagen der Theologie der Befreiung* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald, 1983), and in English the reader is referred to *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978).

3.IV.1. Analysis and Interpretation: Critical Theory

Schillebeeckx is attracted to the social theory of Habermas for several reasons. In its ability to renew and reflect on the interaction between theory and praxis, in affirming both the primacy of human action and the ensuing reflective role of practical reason, Schillebeeckx finds a way to rehabilitate the idealistic tendencies of a purely hermeneutical theology of tradition by developing theology along the lines of a practical reason accompanying human and religious ranges of praxis. In its ability to expose and analyze the alienating and dysfunctional relationships that exist in relations of production and the cultural definition of power relationships, Schillebeeckx appreciates the explanatory power of critical theory to address structural and systemic forms of violence in socio-cultural, political-economic and ecclesial relationships. With its differentiation and complementary association of emancipative and communicative types of discursive praxes, Schillebeeckx nourishes his commitment to redefine soteriology as a theological discourse with practical and critical intent for the structural transformation of church and society. The dialogue of theology with critical theory sets out to purge ecclesial communities and praxes of their complicity, both practical and theoretical, with violent ideologies and enabling neutralities. In sum, Schillebeeckx finds resources in the early Habermas' critical theory that offer a powerful and necessary antidote to the idealistic dissociation and interpersonal absorption pervasive in European

theologies, the then novel developments in church life of Vatican II Council notwithstanding.

The mediation of analysis and interpretation linked to a transformative praxis stands in a direct lineage from Habermas' adoption of the psychoanalytical model as an analogy for his critical theory, which proposes a particular view of the role of social-scientific knowledge in effecting structural transformation.⁴² Habermas adopted the psychoanalytic model in order to account for the therapeutic role of critical sociology and neo-marxist dialectics in remediating the pathological legacies of systemic sociopolitical dysfunction. This is the basis for the type of mediation proposed in *Gerechtigheid en liefde* (see 2.II. above) and related articles. Schillebeeckx retains the following elements as significant for his understanding of Habermas' application of psychoanalytic theory:

De psychoanalyse, die typisch verlopende socialisatieprocessen tracht te duiden met behulp van een algemeen interpretatieschema, is dus een verklaringstheorie, die in zich de direct praktische bedoeling draagt om pathologisch verlopende ontwikkelingsprocessen verstaanbaar en *op grond daarvan* geneesbaar te maken. Het procedé verloopt dus als volgt: verklaren, verstaan, genezende praxis; het is een verstaan door verklaring met het oog op een therapeutische praxis, en dit is precies het eigen interpretatiemodel, dat dus niet louter interpreterend is maar

⁴² The only evident text in which Schillebeeckx attempts to describe what he specifically means by the terms "analysis" and "hermeneutics" and their links to sociopolitical praxis is in "Naar een verruiming van de hermeneutiek: de 'nieuwe kritische theorie'," 37-39 / "The New Critical Theory," 109-111. This passage defines the use of this constellation of terms in "De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze," (1972) "The Christian and political engagement," (1972), and sub-section 3.III.2. "Christian Faith and Politics" of *Gerechtigheid en liefde* (1978) / *Christ* (1979).

constitutief ook deel uitmaakt van een praxis ... Kort gezegd wil Habermas dus: verstaan door analyse met het oog op een emancipatieve bevrijding ⁴³

Schillebeeckx thus understands this Habermasian variant of social theory to include a dialectical interaction between explanation and understanding in view of participating in transformative initiatives. Within this dialectical exchange, the procedures of explanation provide an analytic-empirical description of how, to whose benefit, and to whose loss alienating structures and oppressive systems operate. By contrast, understanding provides a dialectical-hermeneutical interpretation of these explanatory descriptions. The procedures of understanding deconstruct the hegemony and illusion of permanence associated with such structures and systems, reconstructs the histories and patterns of interaction sustaining solidarities of resistance, proposes alternatives, and reflexively organizes its interdependence with the analytic-empirical procedures of explanation. This dialectic between the procedures of explanation, i.e. analysis, and the procedures of understanding, i.e. hermeneutics, is not a superstructure extrinsically related to praxis. This dialectic arises from, accompanies and influences concrete initiatives at the interpersonal, institutional and structural levels of human agency. The

⁴³ Schillebeeckx, "Naar een verruiming van de hermeneutiek: de 'nieuwe kritische theorie'," 38 / "The New Critical Theory," 110: "Psychoanalysis, which typically tries to indicate ongoing processes of socialization with the help of a comprehensive framework of interpretation, is thus an explanatory theory with the direct practical purpose of making ongoing pathological processes of development intelligible and, *on this basis*, open to healing. This procedure thus takes place as follows: explanation, understanding and healing praxis. It is an understanding through explanation with a therapeutic praxis in mind. This is precisely a model of interpretation which thus is not purely interpretative but constitutively participates in a praxis...In short Habermas thus wants: understanding through analysis with an emancipative liberation in mind."

dialectic of scientific analysis and hermeneutical interpretation is constituted by and constitutively enters into the orientation of sociopolitical praxis. The metaphor of mediation thus proposes a first framework combining analysis and interpretation in which the understanding of sociopolitical interactions, constructed with assistance available only through an explanation of structures and systems, is oriented by and in turn orients the transformative initiatives of emancipative praxis. When Schillebeeckx claims that the sociopolitical relevance of christian faith “slechts indirect werkzaam is, nl. door de bemiddeling van een analyse én interpretatie van de samenleving,”⁴⁴ he is not minimizing the repercussions of christian faith in eschatological activity for sociopolitical praxis or diluting the christian participation in emancipative praxis, but radicalizing and intensifying them. Before proceeding to draw out what these repercussions for a progressive political praxis are, the other type of distinction between analysis and hermeneutics that falls within the metaphor of mediation calls for discussion.

⁴⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 723 / *Christ*, 784: “is only indirectly effective, i.e. through the mediation of an analysis and interpretation of society (...).” See also “De christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze,” 73.

3.IV.2. Analysis and Hermeneutics: Liberation Theology

Schillebeeckx situates this further unfolding of the metaphor of mediation in the recognition that every theology, even the most speculative or magisterial, is situated in a context. There is no single theological endeavor that is without a set of originating circumstances determined by its socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological location. There are only theologies that deny them or reflect on and own their responsibility for them.

Alle regionale vormen van theologie willen binnen een concrete situatie *het evangelie* aan het woord laten komen ... Juist dit gegeven vraagt om allerlei vormen van bemiddeling. Niet los van de inspiratie van wat latijnsamerikaanse bevrijdingstheologen in feite doen,¹² kunnen we bij bevrijdingstheologie spreken van minstens drie noodzakelijke vormen van bemiddeling: een socio-analytische, een theologisch hermeneutische en een pastoraal-praktische of / en politiek-praktische bemiddeling.⁴⁵

This passage is noteworthy for the comparisons it sets up with the previous type of interaction between analysis and interpretation. This comparison is invited at the level of the origin of inspiration, the types of relationships between terms and use of the very term “mediation” itself. Before venturing into a comparative description, however, this

⁴⁵ Schillebeeckx, “Theologie als Bevrijdingskunde,” 398: “All regional forms of theology seek within a concrete situation to let *the gospel* come into language (...) This itself asks for various forms of mediation. Not free from the inspiration of what Latin American liberation theologians in fact are doing,¹² we can speak of at least three necessary forms of mediation in liberation theology: a socio-analytic, a theologico-hermeneutical and a pastoral-practical and/or political-practical mediation.” The title of this text literally reads “Theology as the Scientific Knowledge of Liberation.” Footnote 12 in this text refers to Boff, *Theologie und Praxis: Die erkenntnistheoretische Grundlagen der Theologie der Befreiung* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald, 1983).

second framework of mediation, identifying three different types of mediation, deserves elaboration on its own terms. It is to each type of mediation, socio-analytic, theologico-hermeneutical, and practical that we now turn.

i) Socio-analytic Mediation

By socio-analytic mediation, Schillebeeckx understands the social-scientific analysis that critically attends to the injustices, poverties, discriminations and exclusions that mark oppression and exploitation in socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological systems. He identifies three directions in social analysis that require consideration: functionalistic theories, dialectical theories and semiotic theories.⁴⁶ These theories are not necessarily compatible with one another.

Functionalistic theories approach society as an organic whole whose parts are all complementary.⁴⁷ These theories reflect the priorities and perspective of the privileged and enfranchised, who have never experienced life from the underside or on the outside of what they perceive as the normal functioning of a sociopolitical system. Schillebeeckx notes that, in the actual conditions of structural oppression that mark every society on the face of the earth, whoever opts for a functionalistic model of social analysis places themselves on the side of the vested interests of the exploiters and oppressors.⁴⁸ Corresponding to the needs of the dominant and enfranchised elites,

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 398-399.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 398.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 399.

functionalist theories legitimate systemic social imbalance and inequality by representing the social totality as a reciprocal harmony.

Dialectical theories, by contrast, insist on exposing the conflicts, deconstructing the imbalances, resisting the inequalities and reconstructing alternative patterns of emancipated relations.⁴⁹ These theories view existing social systems as replete with internal discrepancies, unable to legitimate their public goals, increasingly contested by contradictory arguments based on real evidence, and self-defeating. Corresponding to the needs of the disadvantaged and their advocates, dialectical theories articulate the conflicts these populations both suffer and strive to be liberated from. Conflict theories analyse structures of domination and manipulation, how to hasten their demise and overcome the violence they spread. Schillebeeckx makes a particular effort to underline that conflict theories are not simply identical with marxist class analysis. “Dit sociologische conflictmodel is allang ontgroeid aan zijn marxistische voedingsbodem; het is een legitieme, zij het niet de enig legitieme methode om een maatschappij te ontleden.”⁵⁰ Dialectical theories attend to the practical orientations of human action and social agency.

Semiotic theories approach social systems and relations as processes of communication, a network of signs and codes communicating messages, values and

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 398.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 399: “This sociological conflict model has long since outgrown its marxist birth-place; it is a legitimate, even if not the only legitimate, method to analyse a society.”

attitudes of what it means to be human in a given socio-cultural situation.⁵¹ The social system supplies the communicative resources to generate the desired changes and renewals that arise within a society. Schillebeeckx notes that theories in this model do not really account for meaninglessness and the absurd that stifles all language; these theories presuppose that the experiences within a social system can be brought into discourse and participate in processes of communication.⁵² Semiotic theories attend to the shifts in cultural identities when discrepancies arise between their familiar signs or codes and the actual realities, whether desired or uninvited, of a community or population.⁵³ The semiotic model remains somewhat ambivalent in that it could easily accommodate either functionalist or conflict theories. While the two first models carry an attitude of justification within their analyses, semiotic theory emphasizes identity issues around consolidating, disrupting and renegotiating socio-cultural boundaries. Schillebeeckx distances himself from the model of functionalist theories, aligns himself with the model of conflict theories, yet destabilizes and balances this commitment with analyses of communication-flows, whether transparent or distorted, drawn from semiotic theories.

With this positioning amidst social theories, Schillebeeckx draws our attention to another noteworthy feature in his discussion of socio-analytic mediation: the criteria

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 399.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 399.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 399.

that determine the theologian's choice of social theory. These choices begin to play a role, not only with respect to models, but, *within* and *between* models, with respect to particular instances and hybrids of social theories. Schillebeeckx, as noted, indicates his inclination towards a hybrid social theory drawn from the dialectical and semiotic models. Schillebeeckx claims that the criteria for adopting a social theory within the framework of theological endeavor consist of a network of scientific, ethical and even ideological considerations.⁵⁴ He suggests that the basic scientific criterium concerns the capacity of a social theory to account for the widest breadth of phenomena with the most coherent explanatory capabilities.⁵⁵ With respect to ethical criteria, he proposes to select those social theories that are most consistent with the foundational convictions of the theologian with respect to ecclesial or sociopolitical praxis.⁵⁶ Finally, Schillebeeckx asserts that the issue of the theologian's personal sociopolitical investment, while related to the question of ethical convictions, precedes and constructs the assessment of the scientific capabilities of a social theory.⁵⁷ The sociopolitical interests and decisions of the theologian will determine the pragmatic and cognitive attachments that prioritize one particular set of sociopolitical contexts over others. These attachments determine which set of sociopolitical phenomena provoke analysis, and the phenomena admitted

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 399.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 399.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 399.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 399.

into perception in turn condition the evaluation of the explanatory capacity of any given social theory. By affirming the interdependence of these criteria, Schillebeeckx accepts a considerable diversity of possible socio-analytic mediations yet denies that all social theories are consistent with the ethical and sociopolitical orientations entailed by a recognition of the eschatological community of preferential justice and reconciliation.

ii) Theologico-hermeneutical Mediation

By theologico-hermeneutical mediation, Schillebeeckx understands the capacity of theology to perceive and articulate the presence and absence of the liberating God.⁵⁸ This presence and absence do not concern the presence or absence of a remote divinity whose revelation is restricted to extraordinary times and places. This dialectical presence-in-absence reside in the possibilities of human action. Perceiving and articulating this presence-in-absence is directed to discerning whether human action, at the level of institutions and structures, communicates the kinds of emancipative solidarity and transparent communication which sustain justice and reconciliation. Such solidarity and communication, in effect a political-economic solidarity and socio-cultural communication, support a justice and reconciliation which reveal the truly human face of God's activity within the contingency of historical relationships. Prior to any interventions involving distinct religious interpretations, Schillebeeckx insists that only secular histories which are positively interpreted as liberating, sociopolitical developments form potential traces of divine eschatological activity in salvation history.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 400.

De theoloog vertaalt aldus socio-analytische, profaan toegankelijke categorieën, b.v. structurele armoede en bevrijding, hermeneutisch in *theologische* categorieën, b.v. structurele zonde en christelijke bevrijding ... Het gaat om de religieuze betekenis van bewust-menselijk, bevrijdend en communicatie stichtend handelen ... Uit de hermeneutische bemiddeling bleek al, dat we in onze menselijke geschiedenis nergens heilsgeschiedenis-van-Godswege kunnen vinden *tenzij* mensbevrijdende praxis, met reeds een autonoom-eigen menselijke zin.⁵⁹

This passage emphasizes that salvific eschatological activities are located within, neither segregated in sacred sanctuaries alongside nor separated outside, autonomous and secular histories. Schillebeeckx is featuring the specifically *theological* and not merely procedural legitimation for the dependence of theological discourse on the mediations of dialectical and communicative socio-analytic theories. He claims that this recourse to socio-analytic theories invites theology to translate independent, meaningful interpretations of oppression and emancipation into their corresponding equivalents in theological discourse. By accentuating that this theologico-hermeneutical translation ensues from the recognition of the autonomous meanings invested in human action by social theories, this text emphasizes the priority of praxis and its autonomous theoretical formation with respect to theological discourse.

iii) Praxis Mediation

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 401: "The theologian thus hermeneutically translates socio-analytical, profanely accessible categories, e.g. structural poverty and liberation, into theological categories, e.g. structural sin and christian liberation ... At issue is the religious meaning of consciously human action that is liberating and generative of communication ... It appears evident out of hermeneutical mediation that we can find salvation history from God's initiatives nowhere in human history *except* in a praxis that liberates humans, with an already specific, autonomous human meaning."

Schillebeeckx is least articulate concerning the mediation of praxis in this text on theology as the scientific knowledge of liberation. He indicates that there are two different lines of praxis of primal significance to the theologian: ecclesial praxis and sociopolitical praxis.⁶⁰ Ecclesial praxis is oriented to total liberation through the gift of definitive salvation. Ecclesial praxis is concerned to keep alive the memory of the promises of total liberation, when the fallible and murdered of history, retrieved from death, again live in mutual, just relationships in a pristine creation, without tears or anxiety. This practical-critical ecclesial engagement is contrasted with the initiatives of groups committed to realizing sociopolitical liberations. Whether in the difference or identity between eschatological salvation and emancipation, Schillebeeckx persists in claiming that the covenant promises can never be encountered or appreciated in contingent, secular history *except* through liberating praxes, both ecclesial and sociopolitical.

3.IV.3. Summary

As is now evident, Schillebeeckx endorses two different frameworks through the procedural metaphor of mediation. This stems from the waning influence of the early Habermas, Schillebeeckx' relative indifference to the formal pragmatics and discourse ethics defining Habermas' advanced theory of communicative action, and Schille-

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 401.

beeckx' growing association with Latin American and EATWOT liberation theologies. Common to both frameworks is a reflexive organization of the network consisting of context, praxis, social theory and theology.

At first, these two frameworks present startling differences in language: rather than analysis and interpretation *within* social theory, as in the first framework, we have a contrast in the second between analysis and hermeneutics. Not only is there a shift involved in contrasting analysis with hermeneutics instead of with interpretation, there is a further shift whereby the differentiation between analysis and hermeneutics is no longer a differentiation *within* social theory but *between* socio-analytical and theologico-hermeneutical lines of mediation. These shifts, however, are more apparent than substantive. For instance, similar types of issues previously addressed in the first framework between analysis and interpretation resurface in the discussion of socio-analytic mediation in the second framework. The interaction between explanation and understanding characterizing the first type is implicitly operative in the distinctions between semiotic, dialectical and functionalist models; what divides these models is the particular kinds of exchanges between explanation and understanding that define one particular model as more interested in stabilizing functions, structural conflicts, or communication flows than another. Understanding organizes its explanatory activities in a particular direction, and specific kinds of explanatory activities prefer particular kinds of understanding, such that one such arrangement between explanation and understanding is more focused on political-economic structures and the other on socio-

cultural identities. This only serves to emphasize that the cognitive identity of the arrangement between explanation and understanding is conditioned by the practical interests of the researcher and their eco-social location. And so even in the second framework, Schillebeeckx betrays his basically Habermasian conviction that scientific discourse can never prescind from and is always in part determined by the sociopolitical stances of the theologian. A significant difference regarding the two frameworks arises, however, when one considers that in the second framework under the influence of liberation theologies, Schillebeeckx identifies the plurality of social theories that represent potential resources for theology. In the first framework, Schillebeeckx does not reflect on the plurality of options regulating the interaction between analysis and interpretation, and exhibits his preference for the particular version of critical theory advocated by the early Habermas. Finally, both texts share the same constellation between praxis, social theory and theology in so far as social theory acts as a link connecting soteriology and sociopolitical praxis with each other.

3.V. Chapter Summary and Transition

For Schillebeeckx, the emancipative communication of love sustained by practical-critical soteriology finds its appropriate expression and concrete efficacy in relation to specific contexts only through the mediation of the scientific analyses and hermeneutical interpretations available through diverse hybrids of dialectical and

semiotic social theories. These theories analyse and interpret the rival structures of alienation and liberation which are in conflict within socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological systems. These theories mediate between soteriology, with its practical-critical efforts to render the communication of love emancipative, and the oppressive institutions and structures deliberately produced by dominant forces in the systems of a society. By providing an analysis and interpretation of socio-cultural and political-economic systems, critical social theories supply soteriology with an workable representation and realistic entry into the contexts of injustice and exclusion. By providing a reliable representation and realistic entry into the actual systems of oppression at work in specific contexts, critical social theories increase the capacity of soteriological theology to initiate, support and renew the emancipative communication of love. In doing so, they assist soteriology with resources vital for replacing structures of alienation with structures of liberation in socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological systems. Consistent with the political communication of love, social theories can enhance the efficacy of soteriology to identify, resist and rehabilitate the structural causes as well as pervasive effects of systemic violence.

With this succinct formulation of a framework of mediation to describe the interaction between theology and social theory, Schillebeeckx emphasizes that theology is interdisciplinary by theological as well as public necessity. Theology depends on social scientific and humanistic disciplines out of consistency with its own intrinsic necessity as a historically situated discourse located within sociopolitical experiences.

Soteriology extends its practical and critical intent on the basis of the knowledges constructed by social-scientific analyses and practical philosophical interpretations. Through recourse to dialectical and semiotic theories that provide a reliable analysis and balanced interpretation exposing the constraints and vulnerabilities of oppressive systems, soteriology can orient emancipative political praxes towards justice and reconciliation. The correlation with dialectical and semiotic social theories is therefore an indispensable procedure for any soteriology that seeks to be practical and critical. In his earliest articulation of the soteriological responsibility to mediate between eschatological faith and a progressive political praxis, Schillebeeckx writes:

De bemiddeling – van de utopie, van de wetenschappelijke tijds- en maatschappij-analyse en de interpretatie daarvan, en tenslotte van het ethos – is nodig, om het geloof in het rijk Gods te ontwikkelen op het register van de menselijke, maatschappelijke en politieke geschiedenis. Zonder deze eigen, zelfstandige bemiddeling ontstaan de gevaarlijkste en naïefste kortsluitingen.⁶¹

This chapter has tried to come to terms with the interdisciplinary challenges for soteriological discourse arising from its collaboration with the mediation of social theories and their pivotal interventions. In the next chapter I address Schillebeeckx' understanding of the symbolic mediation of a liberating political praxis. This passage suggests that the symbolic mediation of human action involves the ways in which

⁶¹ Schillebeeckx, "De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze," 72: "The mediation – of utopia, of the scientific analysis as well as interpretation of the times and society, and finally of the ethos – is necessary, in order to develop faith in God's reign at the level of human, social and political history. Without this specific, independent mediation the most dangerous and naïve short circuits arise."

sociopolitical languages project a utopia and represent an ethos in order to provide a specific orientation to sociopolitical praxis.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Mediation of the Sociopolitical Imagination in Practical-Critical Soteriology

Alongside the decisive interventions of social theory, Schillebeeckx recognizes that an account of the sociopolitical imagination assists the public mandate of practical-critical soteriology to sustain emancipatory ranges of praxis in society. The procedural collaboration with social theories, however crucial, remains a necessary but insufficient support for furthering the public mandate of practical-critical soteriology. Schillebeeckx thus takes into account not only the mediation of social theories but the further mediations of the sociopolitical imagination in communicating a preferential justice and universal reconciliation. In the face of the diversity of mediations forging the capacities of practical-critical soteriology to orient emancipatory action, this chapter examines the way in which Schillebeeckx accounts for the role of the imagination in sustaining a liberating and hence progressive political praxis.

Schillebeeckx' account of the sociopolitical imagination is a pervasive feature in the formation of the practical-critical intent of his liberationist soteriology. A significant text from 1972, entitled "De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze," marks a decisive initiative in his articulation of the sociopolitical imagination and historical institutions necessary for mediating the public repercussions of eschatological salvation.¹ Situated in close proximity to the growing trajectory of his

¹ Schillebeeckx, "De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze," *op.cit.*, which translates as "The Progressive Christian and his Choice of Political Party." This text appears partially translated, considerably rearranged and significantly interpolated with other

extensive christological project resulting in the trilogy, this text eventually finds itself recapitulated with minor modifications in subsection 3.3.II. of *Gerechtigheid en liefde / Christ*, “Christian Faith and Politics.” This subsection represents one of the culminating counterpoints of the entire Part 4, Section II, “Redemption and Liberation.” This subsection is located in between 3.3.I., “Salvation on Earth: Inner Constitutive Dimension of Christian Redemption,” and 3.3.III., “Eschatological or Definitive, yet Indefinable Salvation,” and therefore is textually situated within the thematic tension surrounding emancipating salvation and definitive salvation as delineated in the chapter “Salvation and Emancipation in Practical-Critical Soteriology” above. This article thus indicates the salient contours in his approach to the role of sociopolitical imaginations and institutions in mediating the public repercussions integral to the connection between eschatological salvation and emancipating liberation. In this context of a reflection on the repercussions of eschatological faith for a progressive political praxis, Schillebeeckx writes:

De bemiddeling – van de utopie, van de wetenschappelijke tijds- en maatschappij-analyse en de interpretatie daarvan, en tenslotte van het ethos – is nodig, om het geloof in het rijk Gods te ontwikkelen op het register van de menselijke, maatschappelijke en politieke geschiedenis. Zonder deze eigen, zelfstandige bemiddeling ontstaan de gevaarlijkste en naïefste kortsluitingen.²

materials under the title “The Christian and Political Engagement,” *op.cit.*. The resultant differences are so substantial that the latter can rightly be considered a separate text.

² Schillebeeckx, “De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze,” 72: “The mediation – of utopia, of the scientific analysis as well as interpretation of the times and society, and finally of the ethos – is necessary, in order to develop faith in God’s reign at the level of human, social and political history. Without this specific, independent mediation the

This text articulates the pivotal roles of utopia and an ethos in developing the connections between eschatological faith and a sociopolitical engagement, roles which will be clarified in this chapter. Another text from the same year, intensifying Schillebeeckx' soteriological commitment to the political communication of love through sociopolitical action, reinforces these roles:

M.a.w. alleen door de bemiddeling van de politieke fantasie, van de wetenschappelijke analyse en interpretatie van tijd en maatschappij, en tenslotte van het menselijke ethos kan het christelijke geloof in het rijk Gods enige tekening krijgen op de tijdelijke plattegrond van de menselijke geschiedenis, individueel-psychisch en persoonlijk, maatschappelijk en politiek.³

A reference to the political imagination is introduced as a variation on the previous reference to utopia, while the reference to an ethos is repeated. The final version of these texts is recapitulated in subsection 3.3.II.D. of *Gerechtigheid en liefde / Christ*:

De bemiddeling van de politieke fantasie, van de wetenschappelijke tijds- en maatschappij-analyse en de interpretatie daarvan en tenslotte van het ethos is nodig, om het geloof in het rijk Gods concreet te ontwikkelen op het register van de menselijke, maatschappelijke en politieke geschiedenis. Zonder deze eigen, zelfstandige bemiddeling ontstaan de gevaarlijkste en naïefste kortsluitingen.⁴

most dangerous and naive shortcuts arise.”

³Schillebeeckx, “Naar een ‘definitieve toekomst’: belofte en menselijke bemiddeling,” in *Toekomst van de religie: religie van de toekomst*, ed. Tijdschrift voor Theologie, (Brugge / Utrecht: Emmaus / Desclée de Brouwer, 1972), 54: “In other words, only through the mediation of the political imagination, of the scientific analysis and interpretation of time and society, and finally of the human ethos can christian faith in the reign of God find some bearings on the temporal map of human history, both social and political as well as individual and interpersonal.”

⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 721 / *Christ*, 782: “The mediation of the political imagination, of the scientific analysis of society and the times as well as their interpretation, and finally of the ethos is necessary in order to concretely develop faith in God’s reign at the level of human, social and political history. Without this specific, independent

This juxtaposition of textual variations on a theme suggest that, whatever else it may signify, the sociopolitical imagination at least constructs and conveys a utopia. These texts also accentuate the role of an ethos accompanying the utopian imagination.

Alongside the interventions of social analysis and interpretation, utopia and ethos are integral to the mediation of the liberating repercussions of eschatological faith for political praxis. This chapter therefore delineates Schillebeeckx' interpretation of the sociopolitical imagination, and proceeds by securing a preliminary clarification of the terms "utopia" and "ethos" (4.I.). It subsequently handles his evaluation of the institutional bases for a progressive political praxis in terms of an analysis of political parties and christian churches in constitutional democratic states in the next chapter.

4.I. Utopia and Ethos

Schillebeeckx does not directly theorize the concept of the political imagination as such. His account of the concepts of a utopia and a political ethos, however, insinuate significant features of the function of the sociopolitical imagination. In the variations on the pivotal passages above which introduce this chapter, we see how Schillebeeckx formulates the three kinds of mediation essential to the public communication of justice

mediation the most dangerous and naïve shortcuts arise." *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 718-726 / *Christ*, 779-787 basically recapitulates, with some omissions and minor interpolations, the text of "De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze." Since the earlier article from 1972 is more complete, it will serve as the text of reference for section 3.I..

and reconciliation. The concepts of utopia and ethos are emphasized by Schillebeeckx in his outline of these three mediations in the original text, “De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze.” Unlike the mediation of analysis and interpretation from the various scientific disciplines, which receives an elaborate handling by Schillebeeckx in this original text, the mediation of utopia and the mediation of an ethos receive little direct development in “De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze.” While recourse to other texts, notably in the christology-trilogy and elsewhere, can remedy this deficit concerning the concept of utopia, the same cannot be claimed so easily for the concept of a political ethos. The reconstruction of these concepts must begin with the textual evidence.

4.I.1. Ethos

The notion of ethos is retrieved by taking into consideration the actual textual passages where it occurs and by tracking any associated concepts. This notion is integral to Schillebeeckx’ understanding of the mediations necessary for communicating the practical-critical implications of soteriological discourse. The term reappears in subsection 3.3.II.D of *Gerechtigheid en liefde / Christ* as a trace of its prior use in “De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze,” but receives no further clarification or development. It is in the latter, earlier text that the use of the term is concentrated and where the probabilities of a telling disclosure are relatively strong.

In this text, the first use of the term identifies a political ethos in the sense of the identity of a sociopolitical system. Schillebeeckx introduces the term “politieke ethos” immediately after describing his definition of politics and politicization.

In dit perspectief heeft binnen het politieke ethos van een democratisch bestel en binnen het maatschappelijke pluralisme de politieke partijvorming inderdaad de betekenis van een concentratie van macht, die zich evenwel zal moeten legitimeren, zowel door haar democratische instelling als door de politieke relevantie van haar inhoud.⁵

In the context of describing politics as the exercise of power for shaping the future and politicization as the participation in that exercise, this passage identifies that the political ethos is something more extensive than the formation of a political party. The notion of a political ethos is associated with the legitimation process of a political institution through democratic procedure and the political relevance of its objectives for the future direction of a society. This passage presents the notion of a political ethos in terms of the framework in which a democratic legitimation process takes place. This framework, it is suggested, concerns the procedural and substantive legitimation of the exercise of power by a political party for the purpose of shaping the future of a society. This passage implies that there are resources in the framework provided by the political ethos that concern the procedural and substantive aspects of democratic legitimation.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 68: “In this perspective, the formation of a political party, within the political ethos of a democratic order and within societal pluralism, in fact means the concentration of power, which must however legitimate itself both through democratic process as well as through the political relevance of its content.”

The next use of the term surfaces in relation to the public initiatives of christian communities and their sociopolitical responsibilities. Schillebeeckx defines the practical-critical function of faith in terms of deconstructing entrenched power structures and ideologies. This is achieved through utopia-critical and ideology-critical interventions in the politics of a society.

In die zin brengt zij de maatschappelijke status quo onder kritiek, en evenzeer de heersende politieke machten en ideologiën. Men kan het aldus formuleren: het christelijk geloof functioneert als een utopisch-kritische en ideologisch-kritische kracht t.a.v. de polis en haar politiek. Daarenboven is daarin tevens medegegeven een actieve en constante zorg van de christen voor de gaafheid van het politieke ethos.⁶

The practical-critical interventions of faith are directed at the dominant sociopolitical imagination of a state. Directed towards the active sociopolitical imagination regulating the politics of the state, the practical-critical interventions of faith introduce critiques of the central utopias and ideologies determining the use and legitimation of power. The political ethos is thus placed in contrast with the ruling utopias and ideologies in a society which are under soteriological critique. Schillebeeckx insinuates that issuing challenges to the sociopolitical imagination of the state partially expresses the responsibility of Christians for the integrity of the political ethos. By exercising a utopia-critical and ideology-critical function with respect to the political imagination of

⁶ *Ibid.*, 70: "In this sense the [church] brings the social status quo under critique, as well as the dominant political powers and ideologies. One can therefore put it this way: christian faith functions as a utopia-critical and ideology-critical force over and against the state and its politics. This, moreover, at the same time includes an active and constant concern on the part of Christians for the integrity of the political ethos." See "The Christian and Political Engagement," 119.

a society, faith traditions support the vitality of the political ethos. If the political ethos is strengthened by utopia-critical and ideology-critical interventions, then the political ethos at least implicitly depends on the functions of the sociopolitical imagination. The functioning of the sociopolitical imagination is thereby associated with the quality of the political ethos. If the sociopolitical imagination is distorted by ideologies and utopias, then the political ethos disintegrates; if the sociopolitical imagination is purified through utopia- and ideology-criticism, then the political ethos is enhanced.

The final significant disclosure of the meaning of ethos, in this early text, occurs with the use of the term in a passage concerning the anthropological vision animating the future of a society. This reinforces the connection between the sociopolitical imagination and the political ethos, for it is the sociopolitical imagination that images what it means to be human in a given society. Schillebeeckx points out that any sociopolitical project shaping a future either consciously or unconsciously relies on an anthropological vision or image defining what it means to be human within a larger social world. These anthropological images determine the organizational and communicative patterns of a society with its structures and institutions.⁷ Analysis and interpretation are necessary, he insists, for exposing the dominant anthropological vision

⁷ *Ibid.*, 75. See *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 724-725 / *Christ*, 785-786; and "Theologie als bevrijdingskunde," 393. Schillebeeckx recognized the pivotal role of these anthropological images under the influence the work of Marcuse and C.B. MacPherson; for his introduction of this concept, see "Het nieuwe Godsbeeld, secularisatie en politiek," 59, fn. 13 / "Man's Future on Earth," 206, fn. 13; and "Naar een verruiming van de hermeneutiek: de 'nieuwe kritische theorie'," 40-41 / "The New Critical Theory," 113.

of a society and thereby offering critical distance in order to replace this with alternate visions. Schillebeeckx asserts that analysis and interpretation, while exposing the contours of an anthropological vision, are not themselves in a position to discriminate between various kinds of images. Noting that fundamental differences in anthropological images can arise despite the analysis and interpretation of social structures, Schillebeeckx proceeds to argue that a political ethos will have to ask itself what kind of anthropological vision it endorses.⁸ The determining anthropological vision, a function of the sociopolitical imagination which exceeds the analysis and interpretation of structural relationships in a society, remains the responsibility of the political ethos. In addition to discerning its regulative image of being human, the political ethos is responsible for prioritizing the kinds of initiatives most responsive to the concrete needs of the alienated and wounded members in a society whose future remains fragile.⁹ The political ethos appears to involve the sociopolitical imagination in constructing the symbolic network of a society with respect to its basic anthropological images and evaluation of needs.

In retrospect, the textual evidence in this article is not extensive but remains provocative for the understanding of the role of an ethos. In the absence of a direct description and with a probable retrieval based on internal inference, the text supports the view that a political ethos is produced by the sociopolitical imagination through a

⁸ *Ibid.*, 75-76. See *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 725 / *Christ*, 786.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

network of images that establish the identity, priorities and legitimation of power in a society. Establishing the identity, priorities and legitimation of power in a society, the political ethos functions as the symbolic network that orients the structures of socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological systems.

Intertextual evidence imported from the larger Schillebeeckxian oeuvre contributes very little clarification of the meaning of a political ethos.¹⁰ The text in which the term is used with the most frequency and the strongest associations remains “De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze.” The only further recourse at this point is to put the notion of a political ethos in a larger intertextual perspective. The centrality of the notion of the symbolic network of anthropological images in the political ethos resonates with Schillebeeckx’ eventual recognition of the positive function of ideology. This resonance between the symbolic network of anthropological images and the positive function of ideology suggests that the political ethos which Schillebeeckx endorses is akin to this positive function of ideology. In his engagement of the young Habermas’ critical theory immediately prior to the composition of “De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze,” Schillebeeckx acknowledges that

‘Ideologie’ heeft vele betekenissen ... Op het ogenblik zijn de ongunstige betekenissen van het woord zo overheersend dat het geen zin meer heeft te proberen de ook gunstige betekenissen ervan ingang te doen vinden; dat zou alleen maar misverstand wekken ... In het eigen spraakgebruik van de kritische maatschap-

¹⁰ The only extant use of the term “ethos” that I have found, related to the sociopolitical repercussions of eschatological faith, in “Christian Identity and Human Integrity,” 189, but the Dutch original has the term “ethiek,” not “ethos.” See “Christelijke identiteit en menselijke integriteit,” 37.

pijtheorie betekent 'ideologie' een vals bewustzijn, d.i. een speculatieve bewering waarvoor men empirisch of historisch geen enkele grond kan aanwijzen en die zodoende een verbroken relatie tot de werkelijkheid heeft.¹¹

Schillebeeckx does not indicate what the positive connotation of ideology might be; nor does he propose the use of synonyms with a conceptual equivalency. He prefers to restrict the use of the term ideology to the negative connotation of a false consciousness, yet he recognizes that recourse to other terms is recommended. In his early texts, Schillebeeckx does not pursue any further what the positive concept of ideology might contribute, nor does he suggest synonymous substitutes. Is it possible that the concept of an ethos linguistically functions, in the wake of this recognition and restriction, as a substitute for the positive connotation of ideology?

The only evidence to suggest that this might be the case surfaces much later in the work of Schillebeeckx. As we shall see, while the term "ideology" and its cognates is polyvalent for Schillebeeckx, his use of the term is widely restricted to connote a disturbance in communication and corresponding imbalance in social power. There is a striking exception to this pervasive trend which appears in his later work at a time when his interest in Latin American liberation theologies was increasing at least in direct

¹¹ Schillebeeckx, "Naar een verruiming van de hermeneutiek: de 'nieuwe kritische theorie'," 46-47, fn. 33 / "Notes," in *The Understanding of Faith*, ed. E. Schillebeeckx, (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, 1974), 163, fn. 90: 'Ideology' has many meanings ... At this time the unfavorable meanings of the word are so predominant that it would be meaningless to try to find acceptance for its further favorable meanings; that would only create more misunderstanding ... In the terminology of critical social theory, 'ideology' means a false-consciousness, that is to say a speculative claim for which one cannot empirically or historically offer any single reason and which therefore has a broken relationship with reality."

proportion to the degree that his explicit interest in Habermas' critical theory was diminishing. In his clearest and most direct articulation of the positive meaning of ideology, Schillebeeckx asserts:

Onder 'ideologie' versta ik in eerste instantie iets positiefs (...) In positieve zin noem ik 'ideologie' een geheel van beelden, voorstellingen en symbolen die een samenleving creëert om haar eigen identiteit te verantwoorden. Ideologie is de reproductie én confirmatie van eigen identiteit via 'funderende symbolen' (symbolisch zin-universum). Deze ideologische functie van identificatie en veiligstellen van eigen identiteit kan echter pathologische vormen aannemen en zo komt men tot verschillende negatieve vormen van 'ideologie', op uiteenlopende wijze ontleed door Karl Marx, Nietzsche en Freud en nadien vele anderen. De functie van de ideologie wordt pathologisch, vooral in zoverre die legitimatie wordt vertekend, gemanipuleerd en gemonopoliseerd door heersende groepen in de maatschappij ... Maar omdat de groep niet een valse visie van zichzelf kan geven áls ze niet eerst is geconstitueerd op het niveau van de symboliek, is deze ongunstige betekenis van ideologie niet oorsponkelijk. Juist *omdat* elke gemeenschap een symbolische structuur bezit, kunnen deze symbolen óók leugenachtig en pathologisch worden.¹²

¹² Schillebeeckx, *Theologisch Geloofsverstaan anno 1983*, (Baarn: Nelissen, 1983), 17-18: "By 'ideology' I understand in the first instance something positive (...) In the positive sense I name 'ideology' a whole of images, representations and symbols that create a society in order to account for its own identity. Ideology is the reproduction and confirmation of its own identity via 'founding symbols' (a symbolic universe of meaning). This ideological function of the identification and consolidation of an identity, however, can assume pathological forms and so one ends up with the various negative forms of 'ideology,' analyzed in divergent ways by Karl Marx, Nietzsche and Freud and many others thereafter. The function of ideology becomes pathological especially in so far as the legitimation is taken over, manipulated and monopolized by dominant groups in the society ... But since society cannot give itself a false vision unless it is first constituted at the level of symbol, this unfavorable meaning of ideology is not original. Precisely *because* a community has a symbolic structure can these symbols also become deceptive and pathological." It is interesting meanwhile to note that, while pages 6-17 of *Theologisch Geloofsverstaan anno 1983* are recapitulated in *Mensen*, 52-63 / *Church*, 33-44, the final pages 17-21, which advance a more complex understanding of ideology and its criticism, are excluded from this restatement of a biblical hermeneutics of recontextualization in *Mensen / Church*. For the positive definition of ideology, see also "God, Society and Human Salvation," 92; and "Die Rolle der Geschichte in dem, was das neue Paradigma genannt wird," in *Das neue Paradigma von Theologie*, ed. H. Küng and D. Tracy, (Zürich: Benziger, 1986), 82 / "The Role of History in What is Called the New Paradigm," in *The Language of Faith*, ed. R.

This unique passage on the positive meaning of ideology resonates with some of the features of the political ethos previously detected. Just as the political ethos is associated with the framework in which a society represents and institutionalizes its relationships of power, so an ideology represents the symbols and images that account for the identity of a society. Just as a political ethos constructs the anthropological images that determine social relationships and prioritize human needs, ideology produces the foundational images and symbols that determine the values of a society and its structural relationships. Both the political ethos and ideology are concerned with the legitimation process in a society. Although the compatibility of the concepts of political ethos and ideology is grounded in defining features common to both, there is no explicit statement supporting a strict identification of the terms with each other.

The parallels, however, are highly suggestive and at least permit advancing the credible proposal that a political ethos represents what is later positively designated as an ideology. Alongside utopia and social theoretical mediations, Schillebeeckx advocates for the mediating role of a political ethos in sustaining the public mandate of practical-critical soteriology. In the absence of any further development of the term political ethos, I am advancing the possibility that the political ethos functions within

Schreiter, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1995), 243. Schillebeeckx does not identify which influences effected this substantial shift in perspective, but one surmises the impact of at least Paul Ricoeur (cf. "Science et idéologie," *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 72 [1974] 328-356). While echoes of the notion of ideology as a constellation of symbols resurfaces in his account of language at the outset of *Mensen*, 36-37 / *Church*, 17, the notion is presumed rather than directly described.

some of the parameters of what Schillebeeckx later designates as a positive ideology in its foundational social function.

4.I.2. Utopia

Even more than with the concept of an ethos, the term “utopia” is stated but remains deprived of any further textual basis for recuperating its conceptual content in “De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze.” The few notes that can be made about the concept of utopia in this text remain sparse. Unlike the term “ideology,” which is used only with negative connotations,¹³ the term “utopia” is used with various connotations.¹⁴ While reference to the ideology-criticism in the public intervention of faith communities¹⁵ is directly associated with the destructive capacities of ideologies,¹⁶ references to the utopia-criticism¹⁷ in those same public interventions is not directly associated with any supposedly destructive capacities of utopias. The references in this

¹³ Schillebeeckx, “De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze,” 70, 77, 78.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 70, 72, 78.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 70, 78.

text to “utopia” remain either positive¹⁸ or neutral.¹⁹ Unlike its counterpart, ideology-criticism, which is a criticism directed at ideologies, utopia-criticism appears to be a criticism launched by a utopia, and not necessarily directed at utopias. This suggests that unlike the concept of ideology, which is located outside of and in opposition to eschatological faith, the concept of utopia can function as an expression integral to and from within the communication of eschatological faith. In this text, the adjective “ideologisch-kritische” always conveys a critical distance from the ideologies governing sociopolitical systems. The adjective “utopisch-kritische,” by comparison, insinuates a critical distance provided by a utopia that opens up possibilities for constructive change.

The basis for extrapolating a conceptual clarification of what Schillebeeckx means by the concept of utopia in this early text remains tenuous. Writing of the eschatological expectation of a radically better future whose onset must be concretized in a society and therefore drives Christians into political action, Schillebeeckx approximates but does not explicitly identify a concept of utopia.²⁰ Schillebeeckx claims that the utopia-critical function of eschatological faith both i) offers no direct basis on which to build a political theory or institutional action plan; and ii) destabilizes every totalitarian tendency to absolutize an existing configuration of power or ideology as the

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 72

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 70.

universal agent for global history.²¹ The function of a utopia in the social imagination, it is suggested, resides in its ability to disrupt and reorient the current politics and politicization of a society. It is not aligned as an element of the symbolic network determining a sociopolitical system but emerges aligned with the critical resources of faith in the eschatological community of preferential justice and reconciliation.

The concept of utopia receives its clearest articulation by Schillebeeckx in *Gerechtigheid en liefde / Christ*. This text brings a theoretical precision to the concept of utopia. Such precision in turn facilitates an improved understanding of the role of a utopia in assisting the threefold mediation between eschatological faith and emancipating political praxis which also involves a political ethos and socio-human knowledges. In this second volume of the christological trilogy, Schillebeeckx asserts that utopias are viewpoints

die betrekking hebben op aanwijsbare en identificeerbare historische tendenties en werkdadig zijn juist doordat ze theorie en praxis verbinden. Het mens- en maatschappijbeeld van de gehuldigde utopie wordt een ethisch imperatief. Uit de utopie de relatie tot de praxis weghalen maakt ze tot een louter *visioen*, terwijl de eigen kracht ervan toch in haar utopisch-kritische en praktische pressie ligt. De in feite gehuldigde utopie heeft aldus een *hermeneutische*, een *kritische* en een *oriënterende* waarde; zij verbindt rationaliteit met verbeeldingskracht. De pressiekracht die in de geschiedenis (in welke richting dan ook) is uitgegaan van utopieën is moeilijk meetbaar, evenwel niet te onderschatten.²²

²¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

²² Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 609 / *Christ*, 665: “which refer to tangible and identifiable historical tendencies and are effective precisely in that they connect theory and praxis. The image of society and of being human in an espoused utopia becomes an ethical imperative. To remove the relation to praxis from utopia reduces it to a mere *vision*, while its specific force lies in the utopia-critical and practical pressure it exerts. An actually embraced

This passage consolidates several defining features in the concept of utopia. A utopia projects a constellation of images in such a way that the existing structure of relationships in a society begins to shift or at least be disturbed and challenged. A utopia orients the sociopolitical system in a particular direction issuing from its imaginative capacities. Judging by its subversive capabilities, a utopia can disrupt the legitimation of the existing alignments of power in a society, unsettling the entrenched interests of dominant elements and deconstructing their apparent necessity. As a network of images projecting alternatives to the existing structures of power, a utopia enacts one of the primary capacities of the sociopolitical imagination. A utopia modifies the sociopolitical imagination by exposing the arbitrary nature of the dominant network of images.

4.I.3. Summary

One of the aims of Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology is to delineate the repercussions of the dialectic between salvation and emancipation for a progressive

utopia thus has a *hermeneutical*, a *critical* and an *orienting* value; it connects rationality with the imagination. The influence issued by utopias in history (regardless of their direction) is difficult to measure, but not to be underestimated." See also "Toekomst van de wereld en van onze samenleving," *Politieke Dokumentatie* 9 (1978) 217. The texts *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 680-681 / *Christ*, 740-741; "Questions on Christian Salvation of and for Man," 120-121; and "Theologie als bevrijdingskunde," 397 reiterate that a utopia projects an alternative social system for the future, communicates a particular view of life in society, and cannot be scientifically demonstrated by positivistic analysis.

political praxis. These repercussions for a progressive political praxis entail an account of the institutional distribution and legitimation of power; or more specifically, entail a redistribution and at least a *delegitimation* of power. A progressive political praxis involves itself in contesting the procedural and substantive applications of power. Schillebeeckx directs the account of the sociopolitical imagination towards a consideration of the roles of a political ethos and a utopia in shaping praxis. Intertextual evidence strongly suggests that the political ethos functions in the sociopolitical imagination as a positive ideology by providing the founding symbols and images that guide collective action and public institutions. A utopia functions by disrupting and reorienting a society with alternatives. Since some of the limits and possibilities of public institutions to carry forward a sociopolitical praxis are determined by the imagination, Schillebeeckx' assessment of various kinds of utopias and ideologies deserves examination.

4.II. Utopias and Ideologies in the Sociopolitical Imagination

Schillebeeckx does not explicitly theorize the sociopolitical imagination as such. The connection between the imagination and human action, between the sociopolitical imagination and a consequent praxis, however, is implicitly affirmed throughout his attempts to develop the public repercussions of practical-critical soteriology. This connection is implicit in the extensive discussions of utopias, ideologies, utopian-

critical interventions and ideology-critical responsibilities that arise throughout the christological trilogy and related writings. These discussions inevitably concern the dialectic between eschatological faith and the integrity of sociopolitical life that animates Schillebeeckx' liberation christology.

4.II.1. Utopias

Schillebeeckx' account of utopia as a function of the sociopolitical imagination is more transparent relative to his opaque approach to ideologies. His description of the function of utopia and his classification of different utopias is relatively more explicit and organized in contrast to his approach to ideology and ideologies. For Schillebeeckx, the public repercussions of eschatological faith are in part worked out through a utopia. He therefore identifies various types of utopias, examines the different ways projected utopias function and evaluates their diverse implications. His soteriology endorses the partially realized and fully promised eschatological community of preferential justice and reconciliation as a practical-critical utopia. This utopia agitates the sociopolitical imagination and challenges the distribution of power in current sociopolitical systems.

4.II.1.1. Three Types of Utopias

Schillebeeckx draws our attention to three types of utopias: conservative utopias, progressive utopias and rationalist utopias.²³ This typology of utopias is situated amidst regional and global responsibilities to develop a future overcoming the legacies of massive histories of suffering. All three types of utopias manifest a particular concern for the future. They are differentiated on the basis of the way they diversely construct the connection between the imagination, human action and future expectation.

Conservative utopias try to forge a future based on a return to norms selectively derived from a stylized picture of the past.²⁴ These utopias are traditionalist in the sense of making past traditions a normative model for future social cohesion. The future organization of social relations is forced to conform to the normative model that selectively represents an idealized version of past traditions. The integrity of the future is guaranteed by faithful imitation and adherence to the fixed picture of the past.

Progressive utopias also draw on selective memories of the past. In contrast to traditionalist utopias, however, the projected future of progressive utopias draws norms out of a selective remembrance of past tradition in order to break with the destructive

²³ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 605-614 / *Christ*, 661-670. See also "Toekomst van de wereld en van onze samenleving," 214-218.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 606-607 / *ibid.*, 662-663. See also "Toekomst van de wereld en van onze samenleving," 214-215.

legacies of the past.²⁵ These innovative utopias do not try to make the future conform to or imitate the past; they seek rather to radically innovate a different future out of a remembrance of the broken dreams, unfulfilled desires or unrealized promises of the past. A remembrance of the violated and the vanquished in the past activates and inspires an alternative set of social relations in order to overcome the destructive legacies of previous societal structures.

In contrast to conservative or progressive utopias, rational utopias view the future as the product of scientifically guided and deliberately calculated human effort. The future is constructed through the application of scientific and technological capabilities which are rationalized through political decisions.²⁶ This application consists of a prognosis of the future through the scientific analysis of current situations, a projection of possible future outcomes based on the calculated consequences of different lines of human action, and a calibrated organization of short-term and long-term activities in order to increase the probability of desired outcomes. While rational utopias share the conviction with progressive utopias that history, being produced by and therefore contingent upon human actions, is open-ended rather than restricted by the past, they shift the basis for the orientation of the future from an ethical or cultural remembrance of the past to a positivistic manipulation of bio-economic forces.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 607 / *ibid.*, 663-664. See also "Toekomst van de wereld en van onze samenleving," 215-216.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 609-610 / *ibid.*, 666-667. See also "Toekomst van de wereld en van onze samenleving," 217-218.

Schillebeeckx appreciates various elements from yet repudiates all three types of utopias. By relying on a selective memory of the past, both conservative and progressive utopias tend to be dogmatic: they enforce a master plan for the future of society that cannot be tested or criticized.²⁷ As self-enclosed and therefore not accountable outside their particular language-game, conservative and progressive utopias risk absolutizing a limited network of integrating memories and symbols. This arbitrarily limits human action and threatens to undermine the basis for a public consensus. They are potentially divisive with extremist stances that lead to newly organized forms of social exclusion. Rational utopias, however, are not much closer to attaining consensus positions for social cohesion. Incapable of articulating let alone validating ethical norms in the discernment of goals and outcomes, they capitulate decision-making to the most dominant interest and its pervasive influence.²⁸ Their synchronic calculus provides no basis on which to legitimate or contest the distribution of power and goods in a society, thereby capitulating to the political economic agendas of industrial interests that manage the sciences and technologies.²⁹ The positivistic and instrumental types of rationality defining this type of utopia are incapable of furnishing

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 612 / *ibid.*, 669.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 610-611 / *ibid.*, 668. See also "Toekomst van de wereld en van onze samenleving," 218.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 612-613 / *ibid.*, 669.

the ethical basis for democratic procedures and incompetent in evaluating the relative value of various goals and outcomes. Schillebeeckx therefore concludes that

De geschiedenis volgt geen logische evolutie! ... Toekomst kan nooit louter teleologisch, technologisch of ontwikkelingslogisch geïnterpreteerd worden. De toekomst overstijgt de menselijke rationaliteit, niet slechts voorlopig maar in beginsel ... Het gevolg hiervan is, dat een louter teleologische opvatting van de geschiedenis volgens het middel-doel model de mensheid in vervreemdende frustraties stort en hem uiteindelijk tot vertwijfeling en defaitisme brengt.³⁰

The positivist utopia is self-defeating, for the exclusive application of instrumental rationalities defining this approach subordinates all social purposes to scientific-technocratic interests. This undermines the capacities of human action and endurance to pursue a genuinely humanizing future.

All three types of utopias excessively try to control the future of society by various strategies of manipulation. They overestimate the degree to which the idealistic projection of an image of the future can determine the actual outcome of human action in the future.³¹ It is the idealistic construction of their projections that Schillebeeckx takes particular issue with. By selectively constructing an idealized version of the past to which the future must conform, by selectively restricting the expectation of a future based on the failures of the past, or by capitulating to the mechanistic calculation of the

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 613 / *ibid.*, 669-670: "History does not follow a pattern of logical evolution! ... The future can never be purely interpreted on the basis of a teleological, technological or developmental logic. The future transcends human rationality, not only provisionally, but in principle ... The consequence of this is that a purely teleological conception of history according to the means-ends model plunges humanity into alienating frustrations and ultimately leads it to despair and defeatism."

³¹ *Ibid.*, 608 / *ibid.*, 665.

future, these utopias arbitrarily limit the sociopolitical imagination, restrict human action and thus confine the distribution of power in a society. One could argue that they have a broken relationship to historical praxis, since they arbitrarily absolutize either the selective memories of the past or the positivistic calculus of ends and means. Schillebeeckx distances himself from these utopias since they are dissociated from the real contexts of oppression and actual possibilities of liberation. A practical-critical soteriology necessarily takes issue with the theological implications of these utopias. They fundamentally deny the possibility of a different kind of future on the basis of faith in the eschatological activity of divine solidarity with the oppressed. These utopias lack the flexibility, let alone capacity, to recognize the possibility of a promise extending an unrestricted future to the historical praxes of healing and empowerment.

4.II.1.2. Towards an Eschatological Utopia

Although Schillebeeckx does not openly name a fourth type of utopia in opposition to these three types, he in effect proposes an alternative: eschatological utopia. This is evident in some pivotal passages where the term “utopia” is directly applied to the inbreaking and promise of the eschatological community of justice and reconciliation within history. On the basis of liberating events and emancipating praxes which indirectly verify the practical and critical validity of the promises of definitive salvation, the unity in difference between eschatological salvation and emancipation,

forms the basis for construing the naming of God's reign as the projection of a utopia. Schillebeeckx contends that the promise of God's solidarity with the oppressed and the humiliated, partially realized both in the historical praxis of the crucified-and-exalted Jesus and in the historical praxes of those who live in his Spirit of preferential justice and universal reconciliation, can function as a utopia in the sociopolitical imagination conditioning human action.

This naming of the insertion and promise of God's reign in history as a utopia is consistent throughout Schillebeeckx' writings. In a cluster of significant articles preceding the initial publication of *Jezus / Jesus*, Schillebeeckx clearly identifies faith in salvation, grounded in the witness of Jesus the Christ to God's inbreaking reign, as the basis of a christian utopia. In a political society, Schillebeeckx claims, the christian expectation and beatitudes play the part of an effective utopia which continually exercises pressure on sociopolitical matters.³² Such a utopian pressure is the permanent source of criticism of sociopolitical structures.³³ This expectation is grounded in the

³² Schillebeeckx, "Theologische draagwijdte van de magisteriële spreken over sociaal-politieke kwesties," 156 / "The Magisterium and the World of Politics," 158. Schillebeeckx often identifies the Beatitudes as the projection of a utopia; see *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 541-542 / *Christ*, 591-592. In "Het evangelie van armen voor rijken," *Tijdschrift voor Geestelijk Leven* 36 (1980) 356-362, Schillebeeckx emphasizes that, especially in its beatitudes and particular parables, the Lucan gospel projects a utopia involving the redistribution of wealth within the community and therefore the elimination of power differentials on the basis of financial capabilities.

³³ *Ibid.*, 158 / *ibid.*, 161. See in this respect "Naar een 'definitieve toekomst': belofte en menselijke bemiddeling," 52-53: "Eschatologische endvoltooiing of definitieve toekomst is slechts, als in een profetisch teken ('signum prognosticum'), historisch aanwijsbaar in de consequent christelijke praxis, die toekomst verschaft on de afgeschrevenen ... Mystiek en wereldbevrijding komen bij de profeet Jezus uit één en dezelfde bron: zijn ervaring van het

symbol of the reign of God as the future of the resurrected community which, as future, has already begun in the historical praxis of Jesus. In and through the historical praxis of Jesus, the resurrected community of justice and reconciliation is partially realized, its ongoing expectation communicated and its completion anticipated. On the basis of encountering the witness of this praxis, both through a critical remembrance of Jesus and through the contemporary praxis of christian communities that live in the Spirit of his solidarity with the violated and the vanquished, representations and expectations are nourished in contemporary contexts for liberating reconstructions of socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological relationships.³⁴ The imperatives for a society of justice and love in a comprehensive solidarity become more compelling. These representations and expectations function as a utopia in the sociopolitical imagination of a community by continually initiating the possibility of new patterns of relationships and structures for the future of a society. These representations and expectations, Schillebeeckx emphasizes, are not a wishful fancy but grounded in the actual encounter with the justice and love communicated by Jesus and his Spirit.

Identifying the symbolic capabilities of the reign of God and its associated network of images as a utopia is sporadic yet prevalent throughout a wide range of

contrast tussen de levende God en de lijdende mensengeschiedenis ... Vanuit dit ervaren contrast tussen contemplatieve (en ook praktische) zin-beleving en menselijke geschiedenis van kwaard en leed, confronteert Jezus ons met blijkbaar menselijk onmogelijke, utopische eisen ... Als in een visioen anticipeert Jezus daarin het gerealiseerde rijk Gods ... Zulk een profetische belofte is een permanente, maatschappijkritische kracht (...)."

³⁴ See Schillebeeckx, "Spreken over God in een context van bevrijding," 7-10.

Schillebeeckx' writings. One finds references to “ (...) de vrijmakende ‘utopie’ van de Godsheerschappij op aarde (...) ;”³⁵ to the “ (...) zeer concrete maatschappij-utopie (...)” issuing from the gospel of Luke;³⁶ to the dream and promise of a better society entailed by the “ (...) ‘utopie’ van het rijk Gods (...) ;”³⁷ and to “een utopie vanuit Jezus’ verkondiging van het rijk Gods als rijk van gerechtigheid en liefde (...)”³⁸ Schillebeeckx does not offer a systematic account of the utopia of God’s reign. A proposal nonetheless emerges from consistent signals scattered throughout his writings: the reign of God metaphor and its associated network of images can function as a utopia in the sociopolitical imagination. Such regnocentric metaphors and related images do not immediately represent a theoretical construct artificially imposed on the future. They accompany historical praxes of preferential justice and universal reconciliation. This articulation of an eschatological utopia forms one of the essential components of the public mandate of practical-critical soteriology.

The origin of the eschatological utopia is grounded by Schillebeeckx in the historical praxis of Jesus that communicates fragments of liberation with and for others.

³⁵ Schillebeeckx, “De toegang tot Jezus van Nazaret,” 53: “ (...) the emancipating ‘utopia’ of the reign of God on earth (...)”

³⁶ Schillebeeckx, “Het evangelie van armen voor rijken,” 359: “(...) very concrete ‘utopia’ of society (...)”

³⁷ Schillebeeckx, “Christelijke identiteit en menselijke integriteit,” 37 / “Christian Identity and Human Integrity,” 189: “ (...) the ‘utopia’ of the reign of God (...)”

³⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Mensen*, 203 / *Church*, 185: “ (...) a utopia out of Jesus’ proclamation of the reign of God as a reign of justice and love (...)” Schillebeeckx has dropped the application of quotation marks around the term in this recent text, somewhat normalizing its use.

This origin is an important source in Schillebeeckx for the differentiation between the eschatological utopia and the deficient types of utopias he identifies elsewhere. The eschatological utopia is grounded in the tangible and identifiable historical events of the practices of Jesus and those who continue to live in his Spirit. While other utopias have their origin in idealistic visions, the eschatological utopia is already yet only partially realized in the historical form of the life praxis of Jesus, thematized in terms of his message of the inbreaking of God's reign. The origin of the projection of an alternative future for society, affecting its structures of power, is located in the practical initiatives of Jesus related to his praxis of the reign of God, rather than in the imposition of an arbitrary schema absolutizing an ideal. Schillebeeckx synthesizes his proposal of an eschatological utopia originating from the lifepraxis of the crucified and exalted Jesus in a significant passage. This passage concludes his chapter on christology in *Mensen als verhaal van God / Church: The Human Story of God*. It therefore offers a literary closure to the explicit development of his practical-critical soteriology in the trilogy:

Die religieuze ervaringstraditie ziet in de praxis van het rijk Gods als toekomst voor alle mensen, zoals deze in Jezus' spreken en daden reeds tegenwoordig werd, een *praktisch* vooruitgrijpen op een universeel rijk van gerechtigheid, vrede en liefde ... Het verhoopte en nog onvermoede Gezochte – in het nieuwe testament uitgedrukt in krachtbeelden als rijk Gods, universeel broeder- en zusterschap, hemels gastmaal, vrijheid der kinderen Gods, universeel rijk van gerechtigheid en vrede – is in de christelijk-religieuze ervaringstraditie niet een vage en volkomen uitstaande utopie, evenmin een theoretisch vooruitgrijpen op een totale zin van de geschiedenis. Het Verhoopte is veeleer aanschouwelijk geanticipeerd in een levensweg en levenspraxis: die van Jezus wiens persoon, boodschap en praxis, ondanks historische mislukking op het kruis, door zijn opstanding uit de doden door God werden bevestigd als inderdaad een praxis van het rijk Gods (...) Naar christelijke geloofsbelijdenis is in Jezus een niet-

theoretische, maar wel een praktische prolepse of anticipatie van *de nieuwe wereld* gegeven ... Daarom wekt die levensweg niet alleen irritatie op wegens het steeds nieuw ontstane onrecht, maar ook inspiratie tot alternatief, zin-realiserend en bevrijdend handelen. Ten slotte geeft, om haar inhoud, die levensweg, boven all pragmatisme uit, oriëntatie en richting aan het handelen van christenen in de wereld ... Het heil dat als belofte voor allen in Christus is gefundeerd, wordt universeel, niet dank zij de bemiddeling van een abstracte universele idee, maar uit kracht van zijn cognitief, kritische en bevrijdend karakter in en door een consequente praxis van het rijk Gods.³⁹

This summary passage from the culminating volume in Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology offers an distinguished perspective for the discussion of utopia on many counts. Striking are the references to the grounding of an alternative future for society

³⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Mensen*, 194-195 / *Church*, 175-176: "The religious experience-tradition sees in the praxis of the reign of God as a future for all humans, as this already becomes present in the words and deeds of Jesus, a *practical* anticipation of the universal reign of justice, peace and love ... The hoped-for and still unceasingly yearned-for – expressed in the New Testament in powerful images such as the reign of God, universal brother- and sisterhood, heavenly banquet, freedom of the children of God, universal reign of justice and peace – is not a vague and completely detached utopia, nor a theoretical anticipation of the total meaning of history. The Hoped-for, rather, is visibly anticipated in a lifestyle and lifepraxis: that of Jesus, whose person, message and praxis, despite historical failure on the cross, are indeed affirmed, through his resurrection by God from the dead, as a praxis of the reign of God ... According to the christian confession of faith, a non-theoretical, but practical prolepsis or anticipation of *the new world* is given in Jesus, in which salvation is promised to humans deprived of salvation, to suffering and overwhelmed humans, even to the dead ... This lifestyle therefore not only awakens irritation over the always recently arisen injustice, but also inspiration towards an alternative, meaning-giving and liberating action. Finally, beyond all pragmatism, this lifestyle gives an orientation and direction to the action of christians in the world ... The salvation which is grounded as a promise for all in Christ becomes universal, not through the mediation of an abstract universal idea, but through the power of its cognitive, critical and liberating features in and through an effective praxis of God's reign." This passage is anticipated in *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 730 / *Christ*, 791: "Veeleer zag hij in en door eigen, historisch en dus beperkt of eindig gesitueerde, *fragmentarische praxis* van 'weldoende rondgaan', van genezing, bevrijding van heersende, demonische machten, en van verzoening, een ver visioen van definitief, volkomen en universeel heil oplichten – het rijk Gods. In die zin leefde Jezus niet vanuit een utopisch, ver visioen of vanuit een 'ideeël' reeds voltrokken voltooiing van alles in God, maar erkende hij in zijn concrete praxis van goeddoen een *praktische anticipatie* van ooit te voltooien heil." See also *Tussentijds verhaal*, 139-140 / *Interim Report*, 123-124.

in the historical praxis of Jesus. Remarkable is the constitutive role of the symbols and images communicating this historical praxis for current orientations in human action at a sociopolitical level. Noteworthy too is the emphasis on the praxis of the reign of God as a practical anticipation of the future in so far as this kind of praxis inserts a contextual initiative into the structures of a sociopolitical system. The resurrection of Jesus does not minimize but rather intensifies the practical anticipation of preferential justice and reconciliation as an alternative future for historical societies. The capacity of the actions and suffering of the resurrected Jesus to communicate and anticipate a radically revised and renewed future for society justifies the claim that Schillebeeckx endorses an eschatological utopia. The criticisms of both an abstract and a theoretical utopia are not inserted into this passage as random literary accidents. Schillebeeckx constructs an explicit comparison with deficient forms of the utopian imagination associated with contemporary critical theories. This deliberate comparison reinforces the claim that Schillebeeckx is seriously concerned to communicate the eschatological utopia as an indispensable dimension of the public responsibility of practical-critical soteriology.

This concern to differentiate the eschatological utopia and thereby prevent it from being enmeshed with deficient forms of the utopian imagination is evident throughout his christology, beginning with the first volume of the trilogy, *Jezus / Jesus*. Schillebeeckx insists that without a pneumatic encounter with the resurrected Jesus, an encounter which endorses the community of justice and love by validating the lifestyle

and praxis of Jesus, the memory of the prophetic ministry of the executed Jesus dwindles into a miserable and illusory utopia.⁴⁰ An untrustworthy, since disastrous, memory of the prophetic failure of Jesus offers the basis for nothing but an unreliable wish for the still unrealized triumph of good over evil in history. Without a regenerative remembrance of the resurrection of Jesus, the memory of the historical praxis of Jesus becomes a sheer yet frustrated gesture of protest against the prevalence of evil.

Schillebeeckx finds the reduction of utopia to the level of a sheer protest against evil inadequate, since it is unable to articulate trustworthy expectations of change and unable to mobilize human action in a particular direction.⁴¹ He therefore repeatedly criticizes Marcuse's utopia: as an abstract utopia of protest, it ultimately represents a withdrawal from sociopolitical responsibility since it is incapable of imagining concrete alternatives or energizing contextually situated movements of sociopolitical change.⁴² Along with this criticism of an abstract utopia, Schillebeeckx equally criticizes the theoretical utopia of a purely formal pragmatics. In the initial phases of sorting out his encounter with Habermas' early critical theory, Schillebeeckx claims that Habermas' anticipation of social reconstruction was not based on a positive theoretical ideal, but

⁴⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus, / Jesus* 112-113 and 270.

⁴¹ Schillebeeckx, "Kritische theorieën en politiek engagement van de christelijke gemeente," 55 / "Critical Theories and Christian Political Commitment," 77.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 55 / *ibid.*, 77; *Jezus, / Jesus*, 112; "Ons Heil: Jezus' leven of Christus de verrezene?" 163-164; and *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 664 / *Christ*, 723.

functioned purely negatively as a formal denunciatory critique of society.⁴³ This neutral evaluation of the utopia-critical intention of Habermas' critical theory, however, subsequently shifts into a definite criticism. By theoretically postulating an ideal speech situation in which dialogue and consensus decision-making are free from all manipulation and violence, Schillebeeckx claims that Habermas in effect proposes an idealistic utopia. While communication without constraint is always desirable, Schillebeeckx does not consider this a sufficient condition for the emancipating orientation of praxis. Christian eschatological traditions, by contrast,

geven aan het 'emancipatie'-begrip, dat op zich abstract, utopisch en inhoudloos is, concrete vulling en inhoud, welke dan (zij het niet zonder bemiddeling van de menselijke, analyserende én interpreterende rede) richting en oriëntatie vermogen te geven aan de emancipatieve vrijheidsbeweging ... christenen [richten] zich op de concrete levenspraxis van Jezus – zowel het leven als de dood en verrijzenis van Christus – en zij vinden daarin niet alleen de grond van de belofte en van de daaruit ontspruitende kritiek, maar tegelijkertijd *oriëntatie* voor hun bevrijdend handelen in deze wereld: Jezus, de Christus, is voor hen de maatstaf van de emancipatieve interesse. Dat wil zeggen: het perspectief van het rijk Gods (...) is voor christenen juist geen 'utopie', maar reeds als *praxis* historisch voor-gegeven: zij is reeds gerealiseerd in de zeer concrete gestalte van de levenspraxis van Jezus. Van deze praxis is zijn verkondiging van het rijk Gods de thematisering. Dit vertegenwoordigt dus een *praktische* anticipatie van het ideaal geslaagde 'goedeleven' binnen een a priori ontworpen, van alle dwang vrije communicatiegemeenschap. Het christendom wil (in telkens wisselende historische situaties) 'Jezus achterna gaan' in diens bevrijdend handelen.⁴⁴

⁴³ Schillebeeckx, "Naar een verruiming van de hermeneutiek: de 'nieuwe kritische theorie'," 45-46 / "The New Critical Theory," 118-119.

⁴⁴ Schillebeeckx, "Kritische theorieën en politiek engagement van de christelijke gemeente," 57-58 / "Critical Theories and Christian Political Commitment," 79: "provide the concept of 'emancipation,' which is in itself abstract, utopian and vacuous, with a very concrete content. This content in turn is able (although not without mediation from human, analytic and interpretative discourse) to give orientation to the movement of emancipative freedom ... Christians focus on the concrete lifepraxis of Jesus – the life as much as the death and resurrection of

Schillebeeckx suspects that a merely theoretical hypothesis, despite its admirable support for communicative freedom for the sake of emancipation, itself remains incapable of offering the operational basis from which to rehabilitate the sociopolitical imagination and sustain the structural transformation of socio-cultural and political-economic systems. By proffering an ideal, it does not clarify the practical basis for an alternative future for society. In other words, Habermas' critical theory can only criticize but not, in the absence of the representation of a viable alternative, reconstruct existing social relations. Schillebeeckx emphasizes the practical and normative contribution of eschatological faith to emancipating freedom, in so far as it grounds such praxis in the reliable and partially realized promise of the community of preferential justice and universal reconciliation. While Schillebeeckx dissociates the eschatological orientation of emancipating praxis from the notion of a utopia, this initiative is specific to the deliberate contrast with the purely theoretical utopia of Habermas' ideal speech situation. The rejection of utopia is not a categorical repudiation of the utopian function of the sociopolitical imagination, but a particular negation of its Habermasian development.

Christ – and they find therein not only the basis of the promise and critique that emerges therefrom, but at the same time an *orientation* for their liberating action in the world. For them Jesus, the Christ, is the norm of emancipative interest. That is to say: the perspective of the reign of God (...) is not merely a 'utopia' for Christians, but is already given historically as a *praxis*: it is already realized in the very concrete historical form of the life-praxis of Jesus. His proclamation of the Kingdom of God is the thematization of this praxis. This thus represents a *practical* anticipation, and not, as with Habermas, a purely theoretical anticipation of an ideally initiated "good life" within an a priori community of communication free from all coercion. Christianity seeks (in always changing historical situations) 'to follow Jesus' in the service of liberating action." See also *Jezus*, 508 / *Jesus*, 618-619.

Resting on his conviction that the witness to a ratified praxis of healing and empowerment at the service of preferential justice and universal reconciliation can function reconstructively in the sociopolitical imagination for a progressive political praxis, Schillebeeckx' argument against the deviant forms of utopia is twofold. At variance with Marcuse's utopia of the great refusal, the eschatological utopia is not abstract and wishful but trustworthy and concrete. At variance with Habermas' utopia of a perfect speech situation, the eschatological utopia is not theoretical and hence idealistic with no point of contextual insertion in historical contexts. It is grounded in a practical and embodied anticipation of a concrete future alternative. The eschatological utopia which Schillebeeckx endorses arises from the practical priority of the concrete solidarities enacting justice and love. With its intrinsic capacities to anticipate a better future by actually sustaining liberating movements, the praxis of solidarity surpasses the critical-practical capacities of any merely suggestive gesture of protest or merely academic postulate of a communication free of constraints. Due to its practical and contextual insertion into sociopolitical relationships, the eschatological utopia has a well-defined ability to disrupt and reorient the current politics and politicization of a society. This practical and contextual insertion not only demands a vigilant analysis of oppressive structures, but extends the firm conviction that the development of a more just and reconciled society is genuinely possible into the sociopolitical imagination.

4.II.1.3 Summary

Practical-critical soteriology proposes an eschatological utopia as part of its public mandate to sustain an emancipating political praxis in contemporary sociopolitical systems. This proposal of an eschatological utopia not only confirms the decisive importance of the sociopolitical imagination in conditioning emancipating praxis, it forges the sociopolitical imagination as the basis for contesting and legitimating the institutional distribution of power determining socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological relationships. The praxis of preferential justice and unrestricted reconciliation, both remembered and currently pursued, informs the utopian imagination. Transposed into symbols and images by the utopian imagination, the public communication of the praxis of preferential justice and unrestricted reconciliation becomes capable of sustaining an alternative future for a society. In its relation to human action, the imagination not only conditions but is conditioned by a liberating praxis. A dialectical exchange obtains along two lines: first, between human action and the productive imagination; and second, within the productive imagination, between memory and projection. Along with the mediations of a political ethos and social scientific theories, the projection of an eschatological utopia by the sociopolitical imagination plays an indispensable role in the public communication of love.

4.II.2. Ideologies

In contrast to the relatively stable and circumscribed use of the term of “utopia,” Schillebeeckx’ use of the term “ideology” is less defined, less disciplined and more polyvalent. Originally inspired by the early critical theory of Habermas, Schillebeeckx’ use of the category of ideology reproduces the same possibility and limit as its use in classical and neo-Marxist traditions. On the side of possibility, Schillebeeckx’ understanding of the concept of ideology attests to its central importance for an interpretation of politics and politicization: “One thing, however, that Marx and Engels appreciated about ideology was its inexorable linkage with politics. That idea, paradoxically, is both a persuasive and an unanticipated legacy of Marxism to current understandings of ideology.”⁴⁵ On the side of limit, Schillebeeckx’ understanding of the concept of ideology betrays the view that an ideology consists of “pernicious constructs which transformed malevolent private interest into a false public good. Ideology was thus transformed into a weapon of base politics, to be denied, attacked or transcended by righteous political systems.”⁴⁶ Schillebeeckx’ understanding of ideology also reflects this neo-Marxist limit pervading the early critical theory of Habermas.

⁴⁵ Michael Freeden, “Stormy Relationships: Ideologies and Politics,” *The Journal of Political Ideologies* 2:1 (1998) 7.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

4.II.2.1. Describing Ideology

Under the influence of Habermas' early critical theory, Schillebeeckx describes ideology as "een vals bewustzijn, d.i. een speculatieve bewering waarvoor men empirisch of historisch geen enkele grond kan aanwijzen en die zodoende een verbroken relatie tot de werkelijkheid heeft."⁴⁷ An ideology is a device of the imagination and public rhetoric that renders invisible the pathology of existing social structures which empirically and historically entrench violence and oppression. An ideology therefore removes these structures and their harm from public debate and deconstruction. An ideology has a broken relationship to reality because it hides these structural relationships and obfuscates how they function. The relationship to reality, moreover, is broken because, as a device of dominant interests who benefit from violence and oppression, an ideology legitimates exploitative social structures with the disguise of necessity. If an ideology were to attempt to justify itself on the basis of empirical or historical evidence, it would be massively contradicted by critical sociological analyses and dialectical interpretations of sociopolitical imbalance. An ideology hence represents the instrumental and strategic claims of the systemic network of oppressors.

⁴⁷ Schillebeeckx, "Naar een verruiming van de hermeneutiek: de 'nieuwe kritische theorie'," 47 fn. 33: "a false-consciousness, that is to say a speculative claim for which one cannot empirically or historically offer any single reason and which therefore has a broken relationship with reality." This definition partially resurfaces in *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 608 / *Christ*, 665, where he defines ideology as "een vals bewustzijn (...) dat in een gebroken verhouding staat tot de reële gegevens van onze menselijke geschiedenis."

For Schillebeeckx, this legitimating and hegemonizing capacity of ideology as a deviant function of the sociopolitical imagination manifests itself also at the level of sociopolitical rhetoric. At the level of language, an ideology represents a distortion “which, because of unconscious desires or unexamined social position, disguises what really ought to be put into words.”⁴⁸ In this sense, an ideology enacts the linguistic strategy of camouflaging the attachment or investment of an individual or group to a particular interest that benefits their position of systemic privilege. In the absence of any further operative definition of ideology,⁴⁹ these instances of definition, reflected in the extensive use of the term “ideology” and its cognates, solidifies the meaning of this notion. Throughout his writings, Schillebeeckx emphasizes the responsibility of theological discourse to engage in the critique of ideologies, to expose and deconstruct their hold on both sociopolitical systems and the identities of christian churches as well as traditions.⁵⁰ Since this chapter is directed towards the consideration of a progressive political praxis in sociopolitical systems, the focus on Schillebeeckx’ handling of

⁴⁸ Schillebeeckx, “The Magisterium and Ideology,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 19 (1982) 9.

⁴⁹ As noted in section 3.I.2.1. (see footnote 23 above), Schillebeeckx indeed endorses a positive definition of ideology. This positive definition of ideology is not in evidence or otherwise operative in Schillebeeckx’ widespread use of the term “ideology” and its cognates. This observation holds for the use of the term and its cognates throughout the christology-trilogy as well as in the related writings articulating various aspects of his practical-critical soteriology.

⁵⁰ For Schillebeeckx, the critique of ideologies forms a necessary element of theological hermeneutics. See “De functie van de theologie in de kerk,” 61-62 / “Die Kritik in der Theologie,” 66-67; “Kritische theorie en theologische hermeneutiek: confrontatie,” 127-129 / “The New Critical Theory and Theological Hermeneutics,” 141-143; and especially *Theologisch Geloofsverstaan Anno 1983*, 18-21.

ideologies will be limited to his critique of ideologies in sociopolitical systems, prescinding from its responsibility to expose and deconstruct the dissimulating hold of ideologies on the identities of christian churches and traditions.

4.II.2.2. Ideology as False Consciousness

With respect to his concern for a progressive political praxis and the integrity of a sociopolitical system, Schillebeeckx' application of the category of ideology displays two parallel tendencies: on the one hand, he applies the category of ideology to sociopolitical systems and the functioning of institutions; on the other hand, he applies the category of ideology to theological positions that reinforce the hegemony of dominant socio-cultural or political-economic interests in oppressive systems. Within the first tendency, he generates critiques related to three different types of false consciousness and to various historical ideologies.

4.II.2.2.1 Three Types of Distortion

Within the critique of false consciousness, his opposition is directed at three interrelated distortions: first, the distortion involved in the theoretical claim to know the total meaning of history; second, the distortion involved in absolutizing or attaching the importance of historical totality to a historically limited movement or system; and third, the distortion involved in asserting that total salvation and the definitive liberation from all suffering will be found in successful sociopolitical emancipation.

Regarding the first distortion, Schillebeeckx reproduces the position of Habermas.⁵¹ The ideology of theoretically claiming to possess the total meaning of history strikes at the question of freedom or determinism in sociopolitical action. If a total meaning of history were, even in principle, possible to obtain, sociopolitical action could be predetermined and the freedom to initiate an emancipating praxis undermined. Following Habermas, Schillebeeckx reasons that, since human action can produce historical movements whose future outcomes are not in advance predictable, the meaning of history fundamentally remains open-ended. “Habermas trekt hieruit de conclusie, dat het een onverantwoorde ideologie is om speculatief een totaalzin voor héél de geschiedenis toponeren, of dat nu geschiedt in de filosofie of in de theologie ... Dat de geschiedenis door vrije en redelijke mensen maakbaar is (...) kan dus geen

⁵¹ Schillebeeckx, “Naar een verruiming van de hermeneutiek: de ‘nieuwe kritische theorie’,” 43 / “The New Critical Theory,” 116.

abstract-theoretische, speculatieve uitspraak zijn die geldt voor alle tijden.”⁵² This open-ended potential of an undefinable outcome to history remains central to Schillebeeckx’ conviction that constructive sociopolitical responsibility is a foundational imperative of human action.

While Schillebeeckx recognizes the ambivalence of history and the ambiguity of emancipating efforts on a global basis, he defends the possibility, both in light of the arguments of Habermas and in light of the faith conviction which promises an irrevocable future to all praxes of justice and love, that regional and global histories can be different than the legacies of violence and oppression indicate. There is an undefinable and illimitable capacity within human action to develop a praxis and movement that is vastly differentiated from the dominant system to the point that every system can be destabilized and deconstructed. While the empirical evidence scornfully suggests, as Schillebeeckx recently wrote, that “[v]an verlossing en bevrijding is over de hele wereld weinig te bespeuren! ... ,”⁵³ the empirical evidence also suggests that the outcomes of historical developments are not fixed and determinate. Although this does not provide demonstrative certainty regarding the future outcome of history, the open-endedness of history lends credibility to the theological conviction that the

⁵² *Ibid.*, 43 / *ibid.*, 116: “Habermas draws from this the conclusion, that it is an unjustified ideology to speculatively posit a total-meaning for all of history, whether this happens in philosophy or theology ... [T]here thus can be no abstract-theoretical, speculative claim that is valid for all times, since history is made by free and reasonable human beings.”

⁵³ Schillebeeckx, “Dokumentatie: godsdienst en geweld,” 160 / “Documentation: Religion and Violence,” 140: “there is little redemption and liberation to be seen in the world!”

eschatological surplus entailed by the promises of God's solidarity in Jesus with the oppressed and the humiliated can renew human action in ways contradicted by the massive legacies of suffering. "Vóór en ná Jezus blijft elk theoretisch totaal-systeem een ideologie; onze mensengeschiedenis blijft volkomen open. Maar de praxis van het eschatologisch rijk is in deze wereld, in onze geschiedenis wel degelijk mogelijk gemaakt. De geschiedenis staat onder *een belofte* (...)." ⁵⁴ It is the partially realized emancipating praxis of preferential justice and universal reconciliation that demonstrates the possibility that history might yet be otherwise for the violated and the vanquished. Praxes of emancipation, oriented by the normative imperatives of partisan justice and unrestricted reconciliation, in effect anticipate a different future for historical societies on earth, both regional and global. And where these praxes fail, it is the promise of an unexpected future that grants them an extended validity despite the tragedies and humiliations refuting their efforts.

The second type of ideological distortion, arising when a historically limited movement or system is absolutized, solicits the most vehement and sustained rejoinders from Schillebeeckx. He accepts that critical philosophers have shown that ideology and totalitarianism, whether fascist or communist or neo-liberal, inevitably result when

⁵⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 546 / *Jesus*, 670: "Both before and after Jesus every theoretical total system remains an ideology; our human history remains totally open. But the praxis of the eschatological reign is actually made possible in this world, in this history. History stands under *a promise* (...)." ⁵⁴

the claim is made, either in theory or in practice or both together, that an individual, a group or system absolutely represents or directs the necessary development of history.⁵⁵ Schillebeeckx redirects this argument with the insight that every individual, group or system is contingent and finite. He thereby introduces the theological dimension of his critique of this absolutizing ideology.

Dit christelijk geloofsinzicht stelt, dat er geen binnen-historisch universeel subject van de geschiedenis is. Dit inzicht is slechts een nieuwe articulatie van een oude geloofswaarheid, nl.: individu, noch gemeenschap, noch de gehele mensengeschiedenis hebben hun uiteindelijke zin in en uit zichzelf maar uit God. Hoezeer de christen inziet, dat de individuele mensen tezamen met anderen hun lot en toekomst effectiever in de hand kunnen nemen dan vroeger, het benoemen van 'de mensheid' tot universeel subject van de geschiedenis kan hij slechts als fictieve abstractie veroordelen.⁵⁶

With the religious recognition of creaturely contingency and finitude, every claim by a group or segment of society to represent and manifest the ultimate purpose or absolute normative agency for a society or even for all of history is disclosed in all its excess.

The inevitable result of such an excess – whereby one generation is subordinated and

⁵⁵ Schillebeeckx, "Kritische theorie en theologische hermeneutiek: confrontatie," 121 / "The New Critical Theory and Theological Hermeneutics," 133; and "De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze," 77.

⁵⁶ Schillebeeckx, "De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze," 77: "This insight of christian faith claims that there is no intra-historical universal subject of history. This insight is but the new articulation of an old truth of faith, namely: neither individual, nor community, nor the whole of history have their ultimate meaning in and of themselves but rather from God. However much the Christian realizes that individuals come together with others in order more effectively to take their destiny and future into their hands than previously, the identification of "humanity" as a universal subject of history can be condemned as a purely fictitious abstraction." See also "Mysterie van ongerechtigheid en mysterie van erbarmen," 13; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 708 / *Christ*, 768; "Befreiungstheologie zwischen Medellín und Puebla," 19-20; "God, Society and Human Salvation," 97-98; "Op weg naar een christologie," 149; *Tussentijds verhaal*, 69 / *Interim Report*, 59.

ultimately sacrificed to another, or one class to another, or one race to another, or one sex to another – is sheer violence. The eschatological proviso functions to destabilize and relativize any inclination by any kind of group or movement to see itself as the embodiment of an absolute value or purpose. The eschatological proviso deconstructs any identification of the absolute with an ontologically contingent and historically finite agency.

The third distortion resides in the claim that a complete emancipation of a sociopolitical system achieves the total salvation and definitive liberation of that society from all suffering. “Om de sociaal-politieke niet-identificeerbaarheid van de zin van de universele geschiedenis kan de gelovige de reële bevrijding van het mensdom dan ook niet vereenzelvigen met wat, met wetenschappelijke en technische hulp, de politiek daarvan in onze geschiedenis kan realiseren. Deze totaal-bevrijding impliceert weliswaar dit politieke handelen maar overstijgt het tegelijkertijd.”⁵⁷ There are ranges of salvation that no sociopolitical liberation, even the most globally comprehensive one, would be able to accomplish. Even after the most successful, regionally complete and globally comprehensive sociopolitical liberation of humankind, there will be ranges of suffering that call for a more complete salvation. There are ranges of suffering that seek

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 78: “On account of the sociopolitical non-identity of the meaning of universal history, the believer cannot equate the real liberation of humanity with the liberation that politics, assisted with scientific and technological help, can achieve. This total liberation implies but at the same time surpasses such political action.” See also *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 658 and 708 / *Christ*, 717 and 768; “Op weg naar een christologie,” 149; *Tussentijds verhaal*, 69 / *Interim Report*, 59.

the fulfilment of the covenant promises amidst an ongoing desolation exceeding the scope of sociopolitical action. Schillebeeckx denounces as an ideology any tendency to overestimate the importance of sociopolitical liberation, however necessary and imperative these remain for eschatological faith.

4.II.2.2.2. Historical Ideologies

The critique of ideologies arising from these three types of distortion form the conceptual framework for Schillebeeckx' critiques of historical ideologies: the ideologies, namely, of classical marxist,⁵⁸ utilitarian individualism,⁵⁹ neo-liberal

⁵⁸ Schillebeeckx has a complex relationship to different kinds of marxism (differentiating between its political-economic analyses, its historical contributions to the development of christian traditions, its anthropology, philosophy of history, etc.). Judging by the relative number of references, marxism is the historical ideology which he takes most seriously as a dialogue partner. His relationship to various kinds and elements of marxism is intricate, ranging from the recognition of its contributions towards the creation of now-cherished, christian traditions, to the relative validity of some but not others of its sociological analyses, and finally including a repudiation of its anthropology, philosophy of history, and absolutizing extremes, both in theory and in practice. See "Het nieuwe Godsbeeld, secularisatie en politiek," 55 and 58-60 / "Man's Future on Earth," 186 and 192-194; "Naar een verruiming van de hermeneutiek: de 'nieuwe kritische theorie'," 39, 40 and 46 / "The New Critical Theory," 111-112, 113 and 119-120; "De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze," 77-78 "Kritische theorieën en politiek engagement van de christelijke gemeente," 48-49 and 52 / "Critical Theories and Christian Political Commitment," 72 and 76; "Mysterie van ongerechtigheid en mysterie van erbarmen," 12-13; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 647-656, 656-659, 698, 701, 721 and 726 / *Christ*, 706-715, 715-717, 758, 762, 782, and 787; "Befreiungstheologie zwischen Medellín und Puebla," 8, 17 and 19-21; "Evangelische inspiratie en politiek," 43; "Questions of Christian Salvation of and for Man," 119; "Spreeken over God in een context van bevrijding," 8; "Theologie als bevrijdingskunde," 389, 390 and 399; *Als politiek*, 73 / *On Christian Faith*, 76; "Terugblik vanuit de tijd na Vaticanum II," 155. While Schillebeeckx at times differentiates between classical marxism, marxist-leninism and neo-marxism, the description of these differences remains abbreviated. While considering a critical correlation with some aspects of marxism to be a legitimate development of the public mediation of liberationist soteriologies, he declines

advanced capitalism,⁶⁰ and national security.⁶¹ Detecting the three interrelated distortions at work in each of these, Schillebeeckx variously critiques these historical ideologies for their legitimation of structural violence and alienation.

4.II.2.2.3. Theology as Ideology

In addition to the critiques of the ideological distortions of false consciousness and various historical ideologies, Schillebeeckx advances a critique of ideology directed at different types of theological tendencies and their sociopolitical repercussions. His basic concern here is to conscientize theologians to the sociopolitical repercussions of their discourse. All forms of discourse are embedded in unconscious motives and explicit allegiances, eco-social locations and political-economic interests that condition their communication. Theological discourse is no exception to this condition of contextual insertion. Schillebeeckx therefore undertakes an examination of different forms of false consciousness in theological discourse. He thus identifies latent forms of

the view that this represents the only valid correlation (see *Als politiek*, 73 / *On Christian Faith*, 76).

⁵⁹ Schillebeeckx, "Evangelische inspiratie en politiek," 45-46; "Op weg naar een christologie," 146; *Tussentijds verhaal*, 65-67 / *Interim Report*, 56-57;

⁶⁰ Schillebeeckx, "Theologie als bevrijdingskunde," 394-395; "Terugblik vanuit de tijd na Vaticanum II," 168-169;

⁶¹ Schillebeeckx, "Bereid tot het evangelie van vrede," 102 and 105 / *Eager to Spread the Gospel of Peace*, 206 and 209; *Mensen*, 203 / *Church*, 185.

monophysitism or docetism in their contemporary manifestations, such as when the death and resurrection of Jesus are interpreted apart from his historical lifepraxis. To trivialize his historical life praxis and minimize its consequences for a comprehensive interpretation of the execution and exaltation of Jesus constitutes a strategy of dissipating the sociopolitical repercussions of his praxis of the reign of God. Any attempt to fasten on the divinity of Jesus at the expense of his humanity, any attempt to separate the divinity of Jesus out of his humanity, any attempt to christologize Jesus to the neglect of his praxis of preferential justice and unrestricted reconciliation, any attempt to focus on a liturgical Christ and forget about his historical solidarity with the violated and vanquished establishes a broken relationship to the reality of oppression and liberation.

Zó 'neutraliseren' we de kritische kracht van Gód zelf, en dreigt het gevaar dat wij naast de vele ideologieën, die de mensheid reeds rijk is, er alleen een nieuwe ideologie verkrijgen: de christologie! Ik vrees soms, dat wij met de scherpe kant van onze belijdende geloofsuitspraken over Jezus de kritische visie van zijn profetie, die wel degelijk sociaal-politieke consequenties heeft, botmaken. Eenzijdige vergoddelijking van Jezus, d.i. hem uitsluitend naar Gods zijde verwijzen, is inderdaad een historische lastpost en spelbreker en een gevaarlijke herinnering aan een provocerende, levende profetie wegwerken uit onze geschiedenis.⁶²

⁶² Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 546 / *Jesus*, 671: "We thus 'neutralize' the critical power even of God and run the risk of adding, to the many ideologies with which humankind is already enriched, a new ideology: christology! I fear at times that with the sharp edge of our confessional articulations of faith about Jesus we are making the critical vision of his prophecy, which without a doubt has its sociopolitical consequences, blunt. A one-sided divinization of Jesus, exclusively relegating him to God's side, in effect eliminates from our history the dangerous memory of a provocative, living prophet, a historical nuisance and rebel." See also "De toegang tot Jezus van Nazaret," 52-53; and *Mensen*, 123-124 and 146-147 / *Church*, 104-105 and 127-128.

Schillebeeckx therefore endorses historical-critical and sociological exegetical approaches to the reading of the biblical witness as the theological basis for interpreting the death and resurrection of Jesus in the context of his lifepraxis. To separate these constitutive dimensions of his life and identity distorts the Jesus traditions and negates their sociopolitical repercussions. The consequence of this is nothing short of an ideological collusion of theological discourse with exploitative sociopolitical systems, since it has withdrawn the significance of christian eschatological traditions from public responsibilities and remains in denial about its socio-cultural and political-economic insertion in a system dominated by vested interests.⁶³ The divorce between the historical Jesus and Christ of faith has the further effect of divorcing confessional language from a reflexive praxis, creating a situation where christian communities might communicate a language of remembrance that is disengaged from all praxis: they talk without going the walk and therefore function ideologically to leave unjust sociopolitical structures intact.⁶⁴ When theological discourse minimizes the historical praxis of justice and reconciliation defining Jesus' relationship to God and to humans, obviously colludes with dominant sociopolitical systems, undermines the public responsibility of religious traditions and indulges in contradictions between language

⁶³ Schillebeeckx, "Kritische theorie en theologische hermeneutiek: confrontatie," 115, 117, 126 and 127-128 / "The New Critical Theory and Theological Hermeneutics," 127, 129, 140 and 141.

⁶⁴ Schillebeeckx, "Nieuwe Godsbeeld, secularisatie en politiek," 55 / "Man's Future on Earth," 186 and 202; "Naar een 'definitieve toekomst': belofte en menselijke bemiddeling," 48 and 52; *Jezus*, 542-525 / *Jesus*, 639; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 757-758 / *Christ*, 820.

and action, theological discourse functions ideologically by reinforcing a distorted relationship to the realities of alienation and emancipation in current contexts, both regional and global.

If Schillebeeckx faults theological false consciousness for separating faith and progressive political praxis, he also criticizes theological discourse when it tends in the opposite direction towards sacralizing emancipating movements and drastic revolutions. If the first tendency drives a wedge between eschatological faith and progressive politics, the second tendency fuses and eliminates the creative tensions between them. Schillebeeckx counters this tendency in two related but distinct conversations: first, with respect to biblical sources and the messianic interpretation of the lifestyle of Jesus; and second, with respect to contemporary interlocutors promoting a theological justification of sociopolitical revolution. For Schillebeeckx, Jesus is decidedly represented as an eschatological prophet with sapiential Davidic-messianic features, distinguishing him from a nationalist, Davidic-messianic (counter-)imperial political leader.⁶⁵ Contrary to existing apocalyptic traditions during his lifetime, “(...) de lucide keuze van Jezus was: zijn weigering van elke messiaanse ideologie, die enerzijds de onderdrukten bevrijdt, maar anderzijds alle onderdrukkers ongenadig vernietigt (...).”⁶⁶ Consistent with extricating the historical Jesus as represented in the biblical witness from types of

⁶⁵ Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, 420-422 / *Jesus*, 513-515.

⁶⁶ Schillebeeckx, *Mensen*, 143-144 / *Church*, 125: “(...) the clear choice of Jesus was: the refusal of every messianic ideology, which liberates the oppressed on the one hand but on the other mercilessly annihilates all the oppressors (...).”

messianic political leadership directly appealing to the use of violent force, Schillebeeckx maintains his current distance from a contemporary theology of revolution. While Schillebeeckx recognizes that the social obligation of self-defense might well entail the participation of Christians in revolutionary political movements where structural violence against the downtrodden is extreme, he refuses to engage in a theological legitimation of violence aiming at the structural transformation of social relations. Revolutionary violence, he claims, cannot be covered by the promises of the covenant: "As Christians we must nevertheless say, this is not the kingdom of God with its universal peace, nor could bloody methods be the methods of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God cannot take responsibility for them ... A theology of revolution seems to be an ideology ... An ethics of revolution is possible, but there can be no theology of revolution."⁶⁷ Violent activities appear to complicate and contradict the reconciliation marking the eschatological community of justice and love.

One of Schillebeeckx' main concerns regarding a sacralizing or divinizing theological discourse that ideologically legitimates a sociopolitical system arises from his reading of various Latin American liberation theologies. There is a tendency in some to subscribe not only to neo-marxist methods of analysis but also to neo-marxist methods of precipitous sociopolitical action. His question is "of deze modern-

⁶⁷ Schillebeeckx, "The Christian and Political Engagement," 127. See also "Het nieuwe Godsbeeld, secularisatie en politiek," 62-63 / "Man's Future on Earth," 198-199. His comments in these texts form a mild riposte to the European debates of the late 1960s and early 1970s; cf. E. Weil and R. Welth, *Diskussion zur »Theologie der Revolution«*, (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald, 1969).

christelijke pogingen niet een nieuwe *sacralisering* kunnen betekenen, ditmaal niet meer van de status quo, maar van de politieke eis tot – ook revolutionaire – *verandering*.”⁶⁸

Schillebeeckx acknowledges that when a theology out of intrinsic eschatological imperatives takes partisan sides with the poor and disadvantaged, it is challenged to theorize the institutional basis of sociopolitical change. “Es geht um die Spannung zwischen einem radikalen Einsatz für die Armen – der auch eine theologische Forderung ist – einerseits und der christlichen Unmöglichkeit einer Sakralisierung und Verabsolutierung der Politik andererseits. Hierüber hören wir seitens der Befreiungstheologie wenig.”⁶⁹ Schillebeeckx is not leveling an accusation, but registering a complaint. His concern is that in the absence of a reflexive mediation, a biblical fundamentalism liable to ideological distortion might assert itself that ignores the critical correlation required for the mediation between liberating gospel traditions and contemporary socio-economic situations.⁷⁰ Schillebeeckx admits that theological discourse implicates itself in a great deal of complexity when struggling with the ambiguities of the relation between a reflexive praxis of radical social change. His

⁶⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 713 / *Christ*, 774: “whether these modern christian efforts might not signify a new *sacralization*, this time no longer of the status quo, but of a political demand for – even revolutionary – *change*.” See also “God, Society and Human Salvation,” 94; and “Befreiungstheologie zwischen Medellín und Puebla,” 19-20.

⁶⁹ Schillebeeckx, “Befreiungstheologie zwischen Medellín und Puebla,” 20: “It is a matter of the tension between a radical engagement for the poor on the one hand – which also is a theological demand – and on the other the christian impossibility of a sacralization or absolutization of politics. We hear very little about this from liberation theology.”

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

concern is that without a sufficient awareness of the eschatological proviso that introduces a productive tension between eschatological salvation and emancipating praxis, theological discourse might lend itself to a facile collusion with sociopolitical movements. Such collusion might, even while aspiring to constructive change, initiate new forms of alienation and exclusion. The soteriological tradition of liberation might then be coopted by instrumental strategies, abandoning the autonomous and distinct repercussions of its practical and critical discourse to sociopolitical action.⁷¹ Schillebeeckx disparages the first ideological tendency supporting an ideological collusion with oppressive sociopolitical systems. His critical stance towards the tendency of a theological legitimation of radical social change remains empathic amidst disagreement.

4.II.2.3. Summary

These diverse applications of the category of ideology display the versatile role this notion plays in Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology. While Schillebeeckx does not explicitly identify the role of the critique of ideologies in his description of the three types of mediation necessary for the mediation between eschatological faith and progressive politics,⁷² the critique of ideologies is actively involved in the public

⁷¹ Schillebeeckx, "God, Society and Human Salvation," 93.

⁷² See (texts cited above) "De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze," 72; "Naar een 'definitieve toekomst': belofte en menselijke bemiddeling," 54; and *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 721 / *Christ*, 782.

mandate to establish preferential justice and unrestricted reconciliation. The critique of ideology contributes to maintaining a productive tension between eschatological salvation and emancipating political praxis. The critique of ideologies represents the function of the eschatological proviso in the sociopolitical imagination. It conclusively emerges from this that the public mediation of practical-critical soteriology must involve ideology-criticism.

It emerges from this that Schillebeeckx' view of ideologies remains consistently negative. Ideologies are a disease of the political imagination according to the principal application of the category to human action and sociopolitical systems. The category of ideology thus separates sociopolitical deviance from emancipating praxis. An ideology reflects

a certain kind of politics, a non-democratic, closed, intolerant and violent politics which was outside the norms of the Western political heritage at its best, and anathema to the ethics which responsible scholars ought to espouse. Ideology/ies hence functioned as an exclusionary term, indicating the type of social thinking which was unacceptable to the post-second world war West ... There were now two forms of politics, one in which force, unquestioned hierarchy, irrational conduct and monolithic structures predominated. That form was serviced by ideologies whose role it was to gird politics with commensurate linguistic and ideational inflexibility. The second form was one in which compromise, rational co-ordination, consent and pluralism prevailed. Politically, the latter term described itself as 'democracy', but there was no corresponding umbrella term for the ideas of such systems. The word 'ideology' was not available to describe them; indeed, their common denominator was attained through negation: they were 'anti-' or non-ideological'.⁷³

⁷³ Michael Freeden, "Stormy Relationships: Ideologies and Politics," *op.cit.*, 8.

This observation captures the spirit and intent of Schillebeeckx' introduction of the categories of ideology and ideology-critique in his soteriology. With very rare exceptions, Schillebeeckx uses the term ideology to agitate against the cognitive practices supporting the destructive politics of dominant interests in a society. The notion of a political ethos plays the role, for Schillebeeckx, of an umbrella term for the matrix of images, ideas and values representing a democratic system.

The extent to which the language of ideology is restricted to the notion of a dissimulating practice is also indicated by the absence of this language when Schillebeeckx endorses democratic socialization⁷⁴ and democratic socialism / socialist democracy.⁷⁵ He contends that the liberating struggle

(...) niet alleen een economische bevrijding van uitbuiting omdat, maar even noodzakelijk de democratisering van alle beslissingen die het lot van het mensdom op het spel zetten ... Socialisme zonder personalisme en democratisering is een aantasting van leefbare echte menselijkheid. Maar evenzeer is de roep om vrijheid en democratisering zonder socialisering in feite een verkapt egoïsme en uiting van een eis om vrije ruimte voor schraapzucht. Een christen zal daarom die politiek willen steunen, die inderdaad de economische condities wil humaniseren, juist daarom ook *socialiseren* ten bate van állen, maar bovendien ook de sociaal-politieke instituties wil democratiseren.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 605 and 727 / *Christ*, 661 and 788.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 727 / *ibid.*, 787-788.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 727 / *ibid.*, 788: "(...) involves not only an economic liberation from alienation, but also necessarily the democratization of all decisions that are at play in the destiny of humankind ... Socialism without personalism and democratization is an attack on genuine, sustainable humanity. But the call for freedom and democracy without *socialization* is in fact equally a covert egoism and the expression of a demand for the free domain of avarice. A Christian will therefore want to support the politics which in fact seeks to humanize economic conditions, precisely also in order to *socialize* for the benefit of all, and finally also seeks to democratize sociopolitical institutions." Schillebeeckx basically endorses the critical

This is the only passage, quite brief, in which Schillebeeckx identifies the orientation of a progressive politics whose intent is to surpass the distortions of various historical ideologies. Schillebeeckx does not theorize about the function of the sociopolitical imagination implicit in advocating for a socialist democracy. This further substantiates the observation that a gap exists between a wholly pejorative theoretical consideration of the category of ideology as a representation of oppressive politics, and the entirely positive, contextual appreciation of democratic socialism as an alternative projection regulating the institutional distribution of power in a society. By endorsing a democratizing socialism, Schillebeeckx seeks to condition the sociopolitical actions involved in contesting and legitimating the distribution of power. The call for a democratizing socialism expresses his sociopolitical imagination and the kind of progressive politics he wishes to advocate. Schillebeeckx does not name the function of the sociopolitical imagination when it tries to legitimate a sociopolitical system based on a socialist democracy. As soon as the sociopolitical imagination tries to legitimate an alienating sociopolitical system or contest a genuinely socialist democracy, it is branded as ideological. While the same sociopolitical imagination tries to legitimate a society based on socialist democracy, the language articulating what the imagination is doing appears to be lacking in soteriological discourse. Such are the possibilities and limits of his prevailing use of the category of ideology.

democracy of Habermas; see "Naar een verruiming van de hermeneutiek: de 'nieuwe kritische theorie'," 43 / "The New Critical Theory," 116; "The New Critical Theory and Theological Hermeneutics," 135.

4.III. Chapter Summary and Transition

This section on utopias and ideologies attempts to delineate and assess the function of the sociopolitical imagination in Schillebeeckx' effort to sustain a progressive political praxis. Several pertinent observations emerge regarding Schillebeeckx' account of the sociopolitical imagination and its interaction with sociopolitical praxes as well as systems. The categories of utopia and ideology are not organized together or placed into relationship with each other. They function independently of and without reference to each other in practical-critical soteriology. On one occasion, Schillebeeckx claims that utopias can be ideological, that is to say, utopias can support a broken relationship to the structural realities of oppression and liberation.⁷⁷ On another occasion Schillebeeckx claims that the era of globalization has produced a growing disbelief and intolerance for ideologies and utopias.⁷⁸ Apart from these incidental occurrences, the two categories never interact with each other in his representation of the sociopolitical imagination and its influence on sociopolitical action as well as systems. A second observation arises from a difference regarding the way in which utopia and ideology function in the sociopolitical imagination. While utopias can

⁷⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 608 / *Christ*, 665.

⁷⁸ Schillebeeckx, "Terugblik vanuit de tijd na Vaticanum II," 168-169. He is speaking here post-1989 with particular reference to Eastern Europe and its reassociation with central and northern Europe around the time that the proposal of a European Union is gaining in momentum. As a global statement, this statement doesn't hold even for a moment, and contradicts his analysis of neoliberalism in the same article.

distort the relationship between political praxis and the future, the eschatological utopia can constructively project an alternative future for society. Ideologies, by contrast, can only ever distort the relationship between praxis and current sociopolitical structures: Schillebeeckx never endorses anything even remotely resembling an eschatological ideology, or an ideology of the eschatological community of justice and reconciliation. This would require a significant rehabilitation of the concept of ideology in his practical-critical soteriology. A third observation arises regarding the difference in the temporality structure of utopia and ideology: whereas utopias construct a projected future in order to reorient current ranges of sociopolitical action, ideologies distort the present realities of structural alienation in order to distract and frustrate reconstructive action for the future. Whereas utopias open up the future by introducing innovations that would differentiate it from the present, ideologies attempt to eliminate the future in order to maintain an unconscious repetition of current structural disparities. Finally, the sociopolitical imagination, in its constructive-utopian, utopia-critical and ideology-critical functions, shares a place of relative importance among the three mediations Schillebeeckx activates in seeking to develop the sociopolitical repercussions of the identity and difference between eschatological salvation and emancipation. The other mediations – the analysis and interpretations of dialectical and semiotic social theories, as well as the role of an ethos – qualify and condition the contribution of the sociopolitical imagination to a progressive political praxis seeking to communicate the preferential justice and unrestricted reconciliation intrinsic to God's solidarity with the

oppressed and the vanquished. The sociopolitical imagination has a decisive role to play, mostly by deconstructively contesting, to a much lesser extent by legitimating the distribution of power and resources in a society. The sociopolitical imagination makes a mostly deconstructive and to a lesser extent reconstructive contribution to the development of a progressive political praxis. In order to develop Schillebeeckx' approach to the redistribution of power and resources in terms set by the eschatological utopia of justice and reconciliation and an accompanying critique of ideologies in the sociopolitical imagination, my thesis finally turns to a consideration of his evaluation of public institutional agencies pursuing a progressive political praxis.

CHAPTER FIVE

Progressive Political Praxis and Practical-Critical Soteriology

The public mandate of practical-critical soteriology flows from its intrinsic and constitutive commitment to sustain the political communication of love through a preferential justice and universal reconciliation that subvert systems of domination with relationships of mutual responsibility and equality. The notion of a progressive political praxis expresses this public mandate intrinsic to practical-critical soteriology. In support of this public mandate, the previous chapters delineated the central importance of the sociopolitical imagination as well as the procedural correlation between soteriology and two types of social theories. These mediations are practical-critical and enhance the public capabilities of soteriological discourse to sustain liberating praxes in contexts of oppression.

These procedural mediations, however, remain a necessary but insufficient support for the public mandate of practical-critical soteriology. Alongside the decisive interventions of social theory and the projection of an eschatological utopia, Schillebeeckx further recognizes that an account of sociopolitical institutions must accompany the public mandate of practical-critical soteriology to sustain emancipative ranges of praxis. The public mandate of practical-critical soteriology to shape and be shaped by emancipative praxes involves institutions in addition to the interdisciplinary and imaginary mediations. Schillebeeckx thus takes into account the institutions which communicate love through a preferential justice and universal reconciliation. In the face

of the diversity of mediations forging the capacities of practical-critical soteriology to orient emancipative action, this chapter examines the way in which Schillebeeckx accounts for the role of institutions in sustaining progressive political praxes.

5.1. Progressive Politics

Schillebeeckx distinguishes between a progressive politics and a progressive politicizing. Before specifying their progressive dimension, he clarifies his basic understanding of politics and politicizing. Schillebeeckx understands politics to involve i) the effort towards the purposeful formation of a future society through the exercise of power; and, in the exercise of power, ii) the realization and ramifications of government.¹ In a more ethical, less procedural tone, Schillebeeckx also defines politics as a “concrete politieke praxis, d.i. het geheel van de economische, sociale en politieke activiteiten, die als onmiddellijke bedoeling hebben een sociale en politieke ordening in het leven te roepen die steeds billijker, steeds menselijker is, voor allen; dit gaat niet zonder strijd om macht.”² Politics concerns the creation of a society through a coordinated praxis that establishes relationships of power which determine the

¹ Schillebeeckx, “De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze,” 68. See *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 719 / *Christ*, 780.

² Schillebeeckx, *Als politiek*, 75 / *On Christian Faith*, 78: “concrete political praxis, that is the whole complex of economic, social and political activities, whose immediate purpose is to generate a social and political order that is ever more just, ever more human, for all; this does not come about without a struggle for power.”

distribution of resources and goods within and between societies. In contrast to politics, Schillebeeckx understands politicization to refer to the increasing effort to influence the purposeful formation of a future society both through the extensive leverage of government and through the participatory efforts of citizens to influence the form, policies and competence of governments.³ The politicization of politics thus entails the democratic legitimization of the concentration of power through institutions such as a constitution, political parties and various levels of governments. Such legitimization involves establishing the relevance of the policies of an institution and submitting them to transparent processes of decision-making that remain accountable. It is in the context of this institutional politicization of politics that Schillebeeckx situates his reflection on political parties and the repercussions of eschatological faith for politics.

Within this understanding of politics and politicization, Schillebeeckx begins to identify the progressive dimension of politics and politicization as the awareness that human creativity actively shapes the future of a society.⁴ A future society is the product of the sociopolitical imagination and sociopolitical action involving planning and implementation. Whenever someone “denkt aan en handelt voor de creatieve uitbouw van een komende, betere wereld en samenleving,” writes Schillebeeckx, “kan men hem,

³ Schillebeeckx, “De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze,” 68. See *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 719 / *Christ*, 780.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 69. See *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 719 / *Christ*, 780-781.

globaal genomen ‘progressief’ noemen.”⁵ Schillebeeckx thus initially defines the progressive dimension in terms of a temporal and practical orientation towards the future. He admits that this level of progressive identification as a temporal and practical orientation remains politically ambiguous. Neo-liberal extremists can also be described progressive under these terms! Despite describing progressive as a temporal and practical orientation, “Daarmee is als zodanig niets gezegd over de progressiviteit van haar antropologische inhoudelijkheid.”⁶ Simply identifying the future orientation of the politicization of politics determines very little concerning the content, the purposes and the imagination animating a sociopolitical movement. Schillebeeckx recognizes that “Progressiviteit als zodanig is immers een tamelijk leeg en formeel begrip. Er is onkritische en er is kritische progressiviteit.”⁷ The temporal and practical sensibilities of a future orientation to reform a society in themselves do not establish the content of initiatives and anticipated outcomes.

Given this ambiguity, Schillebeeckx has recourse to the connection between eschatological salvation and liberation in order to emphasize that christian faith entails a trust in the possibility of a radically better future. This trust manifests itself in a real effort to advance the liberation of human beings from all kinds of sociopolitical

⁵ *Ibid.*, 70: “thinks and acts for the creative development of a coming, better world and society, one can globally call him ‘progressive’.”

⁶ *Ibid.*, 70: “With this there is nothing said as such about the progressivity of its anthropological content.”

⁷ *Ibid.*, 74. “Progressivity is as such always a fairly empty and formal concept. There is uncritical and critical progressivity.”

alienations and oppressions.⁸ “Dit christelijk geloof in een radicaal-progressieve wereldverbetering drijft de christen ook tot politiek handelen.”⁹ On the basis of involving the diverse and necessary mediations of the indirect relevance of christian faith for emancipative politics, Schillebeeckx further specifies that

De christen moet solidair zijn met het historisch bevrijdingsproces van het mensdom en dus met politieke partijen die elke discriminatie, verknechting en persoonlijke en institutionele uitbuiting uit de wereld willen helpen door een situationeel verantwoord politiek actieprogramma.¹⁰

A progressive politicizing of praxis is demanded by the public mandate of christian solidarities and convictions. These solidarities and convictions align the practical and critical initiatives of Christians with liberation movements. The progressive element is not secured through the mere orientation of action towards purposeful outcomes defining a future society. This is established only through the emancipative objectives which implement the structural changes defining those outcomes. Progressive politics and politicization thus consist of an emancipative politics and politicization. An emancipative politics is one which seeks to direct the future of society through the

⁸ *Ibid.*, 70. For a lucid presentation of the connection between human action and the temporal future in an eschatological perspective, see the early work by Schillebeeckx entitled “Het nieuwe Godsbeeld, secularisatie en politiek,” *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 8 (1968) 44-65 / “Man’s Future on Earth,” in *God the Future of Man*, ed. E. Schillebeeckx, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), 167-206.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 70: “This christian faith in a radical-progressive betterment of the world also drive Christians towards political action.”

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 74. “Christians must be in solidarity with the historical liberation process of humanity and thus with political parties that want to remove discrimination, enslavement and personal as well as institutional exploitation from the world with the help of a contextually responsible political action program.”

institutional exercise of power by dismantling oppressive structures. An emancipative politicization entails reorienting the formation, policies and competence of governments in their exercise of power. Such a reorientation seeks to minimize socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological alienations by advancing preferential forms of justice and reconciliation for the oppressed. Schillebeeckx is moving the repercussions of the public mandates of practical-critical soteriology into issues concerning the legitimation of sociopolitical institutions with their power to implement policies and practices determining the future of society.

Schillebeeckx indicates that the kinds of christian agency advocating an emancipative politics and politicization are at least twofold. On the one hand there are politically conscientious faith communities or churches which, not identified with or constrained by any single political party or system, are free to undertake critical initiatives against partisan developments and institutions.¹¹ These ecclesial institutions can introduce utopia-critical and ideology-critical resources into the public exercise of power related to its formation, policies and competence at the level of parties and governments. Due to their autonomous identity grounded in the connection between eschatological salvation and liberation, such faith communities and churches can direct their resources at deconstructing the certainties, the rhetorical strategies and the strategic objectives of secular sociopolitical institutions and governments. The second kind of christian agency advocated by Schillebeeckx concerns the participation of Christians in

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 73-74.

building a political consensus with broad capabilities.¹² Christians do not participate in these movements on the basis of exclusive confessional beliefs. They participate in these movements on the basis of public political convictions which consistently express their solidarity with preferential justice and reconciliation. Schillebeeckx thus differentiates the institutional bases of christian initiatives in rehabilitating a progressive politics with emancipative commitments.

5.II. Public Institutions and Progressive Political Praxis

A progressive political praxis aims at contesting and reconstructing how power is legitimated and distributed in a society. While the capacity to contest and reconstruct how power is legitimated and distributed in a society involves the sociopolitical imagination, it inevitably involves the question of sociopolitical agency. The sociopolitical imagination, whether in its utopia-critical or ideology-critical initiatives, is embodied and communicates through particular contexts of sociopolitical agency, whether it be the agency of citizens, public intellectuals, special interest groups, media networks, independent civil organizations, political parties or various levels of government. Schillebeeckx situates his approach to the question of sociopolitical agency within his conviction that emancipative liberation is the condition of possibility for eschatological salvation. The implication for sociopolitical agency is that the

¹² *Ibid.*, 74.

experience of eschatological salvation therefore entails an emancipative network of socio-cultural and political-economic institutions. It is the responsibility of this network of institutions to distribute power and resources in the sociopolitical community, both regional and global, such that all human beings are empowered to access and reciprocate their share in what makes life liveable and whole.¹³ This gets at the heart of what Schillebeeckx means when he insists on the communication of love through structures in a system. It also gets to the heart of whether the public witness of eschatological faith is available, meaningful and believable within the complexity of social relationships.

Schillebeeckx centres his approach to sociopolitical agency on two different kinds of institutional agencies that participate in contesting and reconstructing the legitimation if not the very distribution of power and resources: political parties and christian faith communities. On the premise of both the irreducible sociopolitical relevance of eschatological faith traditions and the recognition that this responsibility is indirectly mediated, Schillebeeckx focuses on two lines of sociopolitical agency:

(...) van de ene kant: een politiek relevante of politiek actieve kerk of geloofsge-meenschaap, die vrij, niet gebonden aan een politiek systeem of politieke partij, zich als kerk utopisch-kritisch én ideologisch-kritisch opstelt: als het kritische bewustzijn van de maatschappij en van al haar politieke partijen. (Al zal het zich kritisch opstellen van de kerken meer direct zijn gesteund op concrete contrast-ervaringen dan op wetenschap, toch schuilt hiermee tegelijk een gevaar van pseudo-profetie of van profetisme 'aan het verkeerde adres'.) [V]an de andere kant: christenen verenigen zich mét anderen die gezamenlijk (fundamenteel)

¹³ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 696-697 / *Christ*, 757.

eenzelfde politieke consensus delen, m.a.w. christenen verenigen zich politiek niet op basis van een katholieke of christelijke min of meer gemeenschappelijke geloofsovertuiging, maar op basis van een gemeenschappelijk politieke overtuiging.¹⁴

The public repercussions of practical-critical soteriology thus work themselves out in two different lines of sociopolitical agency: ecclesial and partisan. This final section to the chapter on progressive political praxis thus takes into account Schillebeeckx' reflections on the role of church communities and political parties in influencing the structural transformation of the distribution of power and resources in sociopolitical systems.

¹⁴ Schillebeeckx, "De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze," 73-74: "[O]n the one hand: a politically relevant or politically active church or faith community, which, free and unbound to any political system or political party, can as church present itself utopian-critically and ideological-critically: as the critical consciousness of a society and of all its political parties. (Even though the critical presentation of the churches is more directly based on contrast-experiences than on science, this nevertheless at the same time shelters the danger of a pseudo-prophetic intervention or a prophetic intervention 'at the wrong address'. [O]n the other hand: Christians unite with others who together (foundationally) share a common political consensus; in other words, Christians associate themselves politically not on the basis of a catholic or christian faith-conviction held more or less in common, but on the basis of common political convictions." This text is inserted, with minor revisions, in section 3.II.2.2.D of *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 723 / *Christ*, 784. This distinction between the sociopolitical agency of churches and a public sociopolitical agency built on the basis of rational consensus also pervades the discussion of faith and politics in *Als politiek*, 72-80 / *On Christian Faith*, 75-84.

5.II.1. The Institutional Agency of Political Parties

Schillebeeckx' reflections on political parties and a progressive political praxis is partially situated in the historical context of questions surrounding the viability of confessional political parties in the Netherlands and elsewhere in continental Europe.¹⁵ Schillebeeckx displays an ambivalent and unpartisan attitude towards confessional political parties, extending no special treatment to them that would favor them on principle or exempt them from regulative principles of rational consensus decision-making within the electoral politics of a sociopolitical system. The question of the viability of confessional parties nonetheless forms the immediate historical context behind his broader reflections. His reflection on political parties is concerned to i) establish a discussion of criteria relevant to the choice of a political party; ii) establish an orientation of public policy that concretizes the stance of a political party; and iii) relativize the importance of a confessional political party.

Given his theological arguments endorsing an active solidarity with the marginalized and excluded, Schillebeeckx situates the discussion of criteria relevant to the choice of political party within a soteriological commitment to emancipative movements that advocate preferential forms of justice and reconciliation. This leads

¹⁵ See Schillebeeckx, "Het nieuwe Godsbeeld, secularisatie en politiek," 60 / "Man's Future on Earth," 195; "De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze," 68; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 722-723 / *Christ*, 783-784; and "Evangelische inspiratie en politiek," 43.

him to propose that Christians must give first consideration to and prefer those political parties which, through contextually specific action programs and public policies, strive to overcome structural injustice and violence.¹⁶ On the basis of consistency with their eschatological faith, Christians will choose political parties whose policies and commitments address and overcome the injustices and violence of different kinds of discrimination, enslavement and exploitation at work in socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological relationships. Schillebeeckx is not so idealistic, however, as to assume that there always will be clearly-defined or even desirable options available in terms of the particular political parties actually existing in any given sociopolitical system. Political parties with explicit preferential options for the disadvantaged simply may not exist. Political parties might present a rhetoric of public policy redressing structural injustices which remains seriously contradicted by their overall practice. A political party might present some policies and practices consonant with justice and reconciliation, but also other policies and practices that are regressive and compromising. He mentions that a party may call itself progressive but actually be quite neo-conservative.¹⁷ Amidst this inevitable ambiguity, Schillebeeckx proposes that

¹⁶ Schillebeeckx, "De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze," 74 and 78. See *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 724 / *Christ*, 785. In *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 724 / *Christ*, 785, Schillebeeckx also adds "Christenen mogen daarom, vanuit het evangelie, door hun bepaalde politieke keuze – zij het door neutraliteit – geen partij trekken voor een politiek waarin door structurele of persoonlijke dwang zwakkeren worden opgeofferd en ongerechtigheid wordt bestendig ... Vanuit de evangelische invalshoek moeten de christenen partijgangers en pleitbezorgers zijn van armen, de ontrechten, de nergens vertegenwoordigden."

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 74-75.

Christians as citizens examine the overt or covert anthropological images that define the sociopolitical imagination of a given party and the quality of sociopolitical system they represent.¹⁸ Even if the choice of a party cannot be clearly defined on the basis of explicit policy and practice, because of ambiguity or inconsistency, the anthropological images at the origin of the identity of a political party will offer a point of entry for practical deliberation. The foundational anthropological images determining a given party's priorities and approaches in the legitimation of power will itself be either more or less consistent with a commitment to alleviate structural injustice and encourage reconciliation across the differences of ethnicity, race, class and gender. In their choice of political party, Christians need to be critical of the utopias and ideologies that surface in the anthropological images directing the policies or practices of a political party, and be prepared to contest them. Finally, in the absence of conditions that clarify real partisan options for representing the soteriological mandates of an emancipative political praxis, Schillebeeckx urges Christians as citizens to opt for a party which in the interim represents the least unjust public policy and the most disinterested bias in support for those that are oppressed.¹⁹ Amidst the tragic and the banal, clear convictions are not always matched by clear courses of action.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 75. See *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 724-725 / *Christ*, 785.

¹⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 726 / *Christ*, 787.

At the level of orienting the public policies and actions of a political party (and in principle, by extension, a state government that might be formed by any given party or coalition thereof), Schillebeeckx directs Christians to an awareness of their responsibility as citizens for the development of a political consensus. A political consensus, established on the basis of an unrestricted access to rational dialogue, requires research as well as debate. A political consensus defines the identity of a political party by directing its actions. As the basis for policy and action concerning the legitimation and distribution of power as well as resources in a sociopolitical system, such a consensus plays an immense role in consolidating the sociopolitical imagination and further establishing the priorities of a sociopolitical movement and its partisan politics. A modest but decisive task for Christians in developing such a consensus lies in legitimating the convictions of a preferential justice and inclusive reconciliation through a scientific analysis and interpretation of structural relations combined with a critique of ideologies and the utopian projection of a future.²⁰ Christians can thereby insist on measures of transparency, of accountability and of responsibility transcending self-interest in the formation of the political consensus that defines the identity and priorities of a political party.

Schillebeeckx supposes that Christians involve themselves in political parties primarily as citizens, whether internally as members or externally as critics. He

²⁰ Schillebeeckx, "De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze," 78.

anticipates, however, that they will also represent christian convictions in public discourse, not on the basis of church affiliation or religious tradition, but on the basis of reasonable political discourse. This discourse, as rational, rests on argumentative debate and involves analyses mediated through well-researched and knowledge-based discussions. One of the purposes of public discourse, for Schillebeeckx, is the formation of a sociopolitical consensus. As the basis for a particular set of political praxes, a consensus has an autonomous rationality, specific content and contextually defined purpose; it thereby transcends an exclusive religious appropriation and refuses being annexed as the exclusive preserve of a religious group.²¹ Schillebeeckx thus insists that, in so far as they are citizens participating in public movements and civil society, Christians need to appreciate and engage the autonomy of political discourse while representing their commitments to justice and reconciliation for the dispossessed:

*De autonomie van de politieke rede opeisen (...) lijkt me, vanuit het belang van zowel de politiek als het christelijk geloof, volstrekt noodzakelijk. Zonder erkenning van die autonomie raken christenen vlug verstrikt in autoritair en betweterig clericalisme, waarvan de geschiedenis voldoende heeft aangetoond hoe funest dat was en is voor zowel een doelmatig burgerlijk bestuur van de samenleving als de vrijheid van de kerk.*²²

²¹ Schillebeeckx, "Op zoek naar de heilswaarde van politieke vredespraxis," 235; "Christian Conscience and Nuclear Deterrant," 103; and "Christelijke identiteit en menselijke integriteit," 36-37 / "Christian Identity and Human Integrity," 189.

²² Schillebeeckx, *Als politiek*, 73-74 / *On Christian Faith*, 76-77: "To insist on the *autonomy of political discourse* (...) seems to me, given the importance of both politics and christian faith, absolutely necessary. Without this recognition of autonomy, Christians quickly end up enmeshed in an authoritarian and pedantic clericalism, the history of which has shown clearly enough how disastrous it was and is both for the effective civil government of society and for the freedom of the church." See also *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 710 / *Christ*, 771; and "Befreiungstheologie zwischen Medellín und Puebla," 20.

Schillebeeckx thus rejects biblical or magisterial fundamentalisms as inimical to the integrity of sociopolitical discourse in either contesting or constructing the legitimation of power through an institutional network. Christians have a particular responsibility to agitate for a preferential justice and liberating reconciliation throughout the complexity of structural relationships defining a sociopolitical system; within this eschatological responsibility, Christians, as citizens, articulate and advance their emancipative options through a public discourse that is scientifically researched and knowledge-based.

In the context of this commitment to the autonomy of political discourse, Schillebeeckx' reflection on identifying with a political party finally takes into account whether Christians have a particular responsibility, as Christians, to either create or support a confessional party. Since the relevance of eschatological faith for political praxis and sociopolitical identities is indirect and subject to multiple mediations, christian religious identity as such does not function as the criteria for the choice of a political party. Schillebeeckx draws the conclusion that there is

(...) politiek en religieus gezien, eigenlijk geen directe binding tussen de (confessionele) partij en het christelijk *geloof*, wel tussen deze partij en een bepaalde sociale grootheid waaruit men concreet recruteert: katholieken of christenen (niet: het katholieke geloof of het christelijke geloof). Een theoloog moet zich dan ook meestal gek zoeken om in een christelijk of katholiek partij-programma iets authentiek-christelijks te vinden – wat daar soms voor doorgaat is meestal een conservatieve interpretatie van een geloofsinhoud – waaruit blijkt dat de grondslag van een confessionele partij niet een godsdienstige maar een politieke consensus is, m.a.w. niet confessioneel.²³

²³ Schillebeeckx, "De progressieve christen en zijn politieke partijkeuze," 72: " (...) actually no direct connection, from a political or religious perspective, between a (confessional) party and christian *faith*, or even between such a particular party and the particular social

In this passage, Schillebeeckx draws our attention towards several interrelated issues. In the absence of an immediate or self-evident connection between the sociopolitical relevance of christian faith and partisan politics, Schillebeeckx argues that the common ground that unites a confessional party is a secular, not a religious, consensus. Eschatological faith implies an emancipative commitment for the disadvantaged and excluded; Schillebeeckx does not readily find this in the traditions of contemporary European confessional parties. The absence of such a commitment indicates at least a highly selective representation of christian religious traditions that possibly generates a political consensus along the lines of a conservative utopia. It indicates, moreover, that the basis for the cohesion of the identity of such a party is likely either ideological or interest-laden factors which are not capable of religious legitimation from within the public mandate of practical-critical soteriology. Finally, since the relevance of eschatological faith for politics is always indirect and mediated, it is pluralistic on account of the conflict of interpretations intrinsic to such multiple mediations, even at the level of social-scientific theory alone.²⁴ Whereas confessional parties leave the impression that religious convictions are the immediate basis for a unified partisan

constituency out of which one concretely recruits: Catholics or Christians (not: the catholic faith or the christian faith). A theologian must then also usually look like crazy in order to find something authentically christian in a christian or catholic party program – what sometimes presents itself here is usually a conservative interpretation of a faith teaching. This goes to show that the basis for a confessional party is actually not a religious but a political consensus, in other words, something non-confessional.” See *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 722 / *Christ*, 783; and “Evangelische inspiratie en politiek,” 43 and 47.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 72-73. See *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 723 / *Christ*, 784.

alliance, the historical evidence suggests that common secular convictions are more operative in such alliances and that religious traditions actually set off a conflict of interpretations regarding their sociopolitical repercussions. Schillebeeckx claims on a historical basis that confessional parties are relatively more dissociated from liberative eschatological traditions than non-confessional counterparts.²⁵ Finally, Schillebeeckx also presents a pragmatic consideration that weakens the importance of confessional parties: confessional parties are often constrained in communicating their positions since the religious convictions they represent are a matter of division among christian citizens in civil society.²⁶ Even if a confessional party might generate a noteworthy political consensus through proper means of public discourse, its own capacity to effectively communicate and coordinate a consensus might be endangered by the religious contention aroused by its ideological orientation.

In effect, Schillebeeckx' consistent position is that confessional parties have a very limited and tenuous justification. They lessen the integrity of rational discourse as the basis for public consensus by using religious traditions to legitimate extrinsic interests or ideological tendencies. They masquerade policies and practices determined by political-economic interests for religiously identified convictions that, dissociated from liberating eschatological insights, function ideologically to distort social relations. He at most concedes that a confessional party has a pragmatic legitimation in the case of

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 73. See *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 723 / *Christ*, 784.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 73. See *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 723 / *Christ*, 784.

a state system that violates the basic rights and freedoms of Christians as citizens on the basis of their religious affiliation.²⁷ Other than this extreme situation, Schillebeeckx finds the reality of a confessional political party very problematic.

In sum, Schillebeeckx offers an interpretation of institutional agency that is limited to the soteriological evaluation of the identities of partisan political organizations and the governments they potentially form. His interpretation of institutional agency does not extend to the institutional differentiations between legislative, executive or judicial dimensions of sociopolitical systems. His interpretation of institutional agency is also limited to the national context or intra-national context of an individual sovereign state; it does not address the complexities of international sociopolitical systems. Furthermore, his interpretation of partisan political agency prescind from political-economic analyses which establish how alliances between political organizations and dominant corporate establishments in structural disparities actually condition the identities of political parties in any given state. Within these limits, he establishes clear criteria for the discernment of partisan political affiliations. The public mandates of practical-critical soteriology insist on indirectly sustaining the development of a political consensus. It seeks to indirectly develop a consensus through the combined contributions of an eschatological utopia, an intact ethos and social scientific knowledges, in order that this consensus in turn endorse a redistribution of power capable of enacting a preferential justice, for the defenseless that

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 72. See *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 722 / *Christ*, 783.

have a threatened or silenced voice, and a healing reconciliation, for the disenfranchised who seek an equitable share of social goods yet who remain alienated. Schillebeeckx confidently expects that, on the basis of its multiple mediations through cognitive and imaginative resources, emancipative eschatological traditions and autonomous political discourse can enter into a productive tension with each other. On the basis of this productive tension, he expects to secure the institutional basis for a progressive political praxis at the level of partisan political movements in a constitutionally democratic state which sustains a different kind of justice and reconciliation empowering the oppressed.

5.II.2. The Institutional Agency of Church Communities

In the spirit of finding “een brok *negatieve ecclesiologie*, kerktheologie in mineur, nodig (...)”,²⁸ this section undertakes to examine the sociopolitical agency of christian faith communities. As indicated in this chapter, Schillebeeckx describes the sociopolitical agency of the church in terms of its prophetic capacity to critique the broken ideologies and utopias of dominant sociopolitical systems while projecting an eschatological utopia of justice and reconciliation in a society through a credible witness grounded in its praxis. This critique of broken ideologies and utopias also performs a purgative function within the identity of the churches, purifying their witness and

²⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Mensen*, 19 / *Church*, xix: “a bit of *negative ecclesiology*, church theology in a minor key, necessary (...).”

fortifying their credibility as the critical consciousness of a sociopolitical system.²⁹ The eschatological convictions of the churches concerning an emancipative justice and liberating reconciliation have definite although indirect implications for political praxis. As indicated in the previous section with respect to establishing a political consensus concerning the legitimation and distribution of power in a civil society, Schillebeeckx also maintains the autonomy of sociopolitical discourse independent of biblical or doctrinal arguments. In the productive tension between the public repercussions of eschatological convictions, and the autonomy of sociopolitical discourse grounded in the independent rationality of political praxis with its own intrinsic intentions and goals, the question emerges: how can the sociopolitical agency of the churches both communicate their eschatological convictions and uphold the autonomous rationality of sociopolitical discourse? How do the churches navigate and negotiate the productive tension between religious conviction and public argumentation?

Schillebeeckx situates his response to this challenge in the context of the public mandate of the churches. The churches, as witnesses to the eschatological significance of preferential justice and universal reconciliation, have a public mandate to conscientize the societies in which they are embedded by furthering the active sense of solidarity and sociopolitical responsibility on a regional and global basis. This is an

²⁹ See Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 727 / *Christ*, 788-789, where he cites the assimilation and cooptation of the institutional churches in the sociopolitical system of late advanced capitalism as a significant compromise of their distinct witness. See also "Spreeken over God in een context van bevrijding," 10-17.

evident ecclesiological repercussion supported by Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology. The churches manifest institutional forms of public agency and for this very reason are sociopolitical institutions in civil society and politics, whether they engage their responsibilities for conscientizing or deny them in an illusory attempt to maintain neutrality. They cannot evade the public representation of their institutional existence. This does not for one instance suggest, according to Schillebeeckx, that the churches take over regional, national or global levels of civil governance, since on the one hand "[d]at zou de vernietiging van de politieke keuzevrijheid betekenen en deze is niets slechts een politieke, maar ook een morale waarde (...);"³⁰ while on the other hand "geloof verwarren, identificeren of herleiden tot een politiek engagement is verlies van eigen identiteit."³¹ While the churches thus have a sociopolitical agency which contributes to the legitimation and distribution of power in society, it is an indirect and complementary agency that does not substitute for the agency of civil sociopolitical movements and institutions. This indirect and complementary nature of the political agency of ecclesial institutions is determined in part by the concern to uphold the integrity of the civil sphere in its intrinsic autonomy. It is further determined in part by the sovereignty of ecclesial identity as an institutional communication of the full

³⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Als politiek*, 74; *On Christian Faith*, 77-78: "That would mean the annihilation of political freedom of choice and this is not only a political but an ethical value (...); to confuse, identify or reduce faith to a political engagement leads to the loss of its distinct identity."

³¹ *Ibid.*, 75 / *ibid.*, 79.

promises of salvation involving the entire range of eschatological liberations. This institutional representation of the promises of salvation eschatologically includes but is not limited to the emancipative range of preferential justice and universal reconciliation. Therefore the churches represent ranges of salvation that exceed the structural transformation of a society.

Schillebeeckx explores the sociopolitical agency of ecclesial institutions regarding the integrity of the civil sphere in terms of its particular responsibility to promote the autonomy of political discourse. The autonomy of political discourse is necessary for the formation of a political consensus that legitimates and distributes powers and goods in a society. Schillebeeckx identified the integrity of this autonomy as a particular sociopolitical responsibility of the churches and their institutional agency. This is of particular concern for Schillebeeckx, since, as a practical christian believer in solidarity with emancipative movements, he values the autonomy of political discourse, while as a critical christian believer he suspects that the autonomy of political discourse is systemically compromised by political-economic and military interests:

Druk van economische processen vanuit de in feite alom heersende prioriteit van de economie kan van een democratisch meerderheidsbesluit nog een puur ideologisch besluit maken, waartegen de kerken moeten protesteren (...) Dit is geen uithollen van de democratie, maar een dienst aan ware democratie. Kerken mogen en moeten daarom ook ambtelijk politiek actief worden, *zij het op de wijze van kerk*, – en niet als een derde of vierde politiek machtsblok in de samenleving –, als met name de door de rede erkenbare grenzen en doelstellingen van de politiek worden geschonden (...) Dan is het in het belang van de politieke rede zelf als ze door kerken wordt gewezen op grensoverschrijdingen naar boven of naar onder toe. Maar dan is het wel beslissend, dat de kerken niet slechts vermanend, parenetisch spreken, maar argumentatief ... Wat de kerken op politiek gebied te

zeggen hebben, moet op redelijke gronden bediscussieerd kunnen worden. Een beroep op bijbel of traditie heeft voor de politieke openbaarheid geen enkele zin ... Of kerkelijke kritiek op politieke beslissingen terecht is, moet alweer argumentatief duidelijk worden gemaakt. Van kritiek op haar eigen politiek engagement moeten de kerken zich pas dan iets aantrekken als haar argumenten zake-lijk niet voldoen; of, als haar activiteit de verwerkelijking van de sociale vrijheid en het functioneren van de democratie zou verhinderen of uithollen.³²

Schillebeeckx accepts a political economic perspective that exposes the systemic compromises to the integrity of political discourse. These compromises in turn undermine the detachment of political discourse from ideological distortions that reinforce the power disparities creating alienation and violence. In the context of this systemic compromise of political discourse, Schillebeeckx identifies a particular responsibility of the churches in their public sociopolitical agency. Noteworthy in this passage is the distinct public role assigned by Schillebeeckx to the churches as advocates of the integrity of democratic procedure. Since the churches carry the mandate to institutionally represent the full promises of salvation involving the entire

³² *Ibid.*, 77-78; *ibid.*, 81-82: "The pressure of economic forces arising in effect out of the universally dominant priority of the economy can turn a democratic majority decision into a purely ideological decision, against which the churches must protest (...) This is not to mitigate democracy, but a service to true democracy. Churches might and must therefore also become officially politically active, *if but in the manner of church*, – and not as a third or fourth political powerbloc in society, especially when the limits and purposes of politics recognizable by rational discourse are undermined (...) In that case it is in the interest of political discourse itself that the churches point out how it is transgressing or minimizing its limits. But then it is decisive that the churches speak argumentatively, not pedantically or catechetically ... What the churches have to say in the area of politics must be open to discussion on a rational basis. An appeal to bible or tradition makes no sense to the political public ... Whether ecclesial critique or political decisions are right must always be clarified argumentatively. The churches must only take note of the critique of their political commitment if their arguments are not in fact adequate, or if their activity is preventing or undermining the realization of social freedom and the functioning of democracy."

range of eschatological liberations, and since this representation therefore includes but is not limited to the emancipative range of preferential justice and universal reconciliation, the churches have an institutional responsibility to protect the freedom of political discourse as a basic minimal condition for the communication of a preferential justice and unrestricted reconciliation. If emancipative liberations are a condition of possibility for rendering eschatological salvation tangible, intelligible and credible, and if the integrity of political discourse is the condition of possibility of emancipative liberations, then the churches, as institutional representations of eschatological salvation, have an intrinsic responsibility to secure the integrity of political discourse. This intrinsic responsibility of the churches for the integrity of political discourse sustains the minimal conditions in which to pursue the development of those kinds of public consensus that contest and legitimate the emancipative distribution of power in a society. According to the identity and difference between eschatological salvation and emancipative liberation warranted by Schillebeeckx' soteriology with its practical and critical intent, this sociopolitical responsibility is intrinsic to the eschatological identity of the church. As intrinsic to this identity, it represents a constitutive dimension of the

sacramental,³³ ministerial³⁴ and magisterial practices³⁵ of the churches. Sociopolitical responsibility is not some back-burner issue reserved for those who are casually interested on a volunteer basis. It is constitutive for the identity of the churches, just as emancipative liberations are constitutive for eschatological salvation as their tangible intelligible and credible condition of possibility. This is not a reductionistic proposal, but an inclusive proposal within the distinct eschatological identity of the churches as the institutional communication of the promises of God's reign of justice and reconciliation for the living and the dead.

Noteworthy too in this passage is the proposed recourse of the churches to public modes of argumentation according to the norms of autonomous reason. This delegitimizes biblical appeals or religious doctrines as interventions that further stagnate political discourse. While such appeals and doctrines are wholly appropriate within the churches as a kind of discourse appropriate to their identity for the sake of legitimating their sociopolitical responsibilities, they become contentious and divisive outside the churches in the civil sphere of political consensus and rational discourse. In order to

³³ See Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 773 / *Christ*, 836: "De sacramentele praxis roept de christen daarom op tot bevrijdend handelen in onze wereld. Liturgische anticipatie van verzoend leven binnen de vrije communicatie van een 'gemeente van Christus' zou immers geen zin hebben als zij niet metterdaad bevrijdend handelen in de wereld helpt realiseren." See also *Als politiek*, 37 / *On Christian Faith*, 34.

³⁴ See Schillebeeckx, *Mensen*, 188 and 203 / *Church*, 169-170 and 184-185.

³⁵ See Schillebeeckx, "Theologische draagwijdte van de magisteriële spreken over sociaal-politieke kwesties," 144-161 / "The Magisterium and the World of Politics," 141-166; "Op zoek naar de heilswaarde van politieke vredespraxis," 232-244; and *Als politiek*, 76-77 / *On Christian Faith*, 80

carry out their minimal institutional responsibilities as prophetic advocates of the integrity of public discourse, the churches must become practiced and performative in diverse tactics of public dialogue and debate. In order to effectively communicate political positions integral to their eschatological convictions, the churches must develop a proficiency in the forms of rational discourse necessary for developing the legitimacy of a public consensus. If Schillebeeckx encourages a movement of emigration by the theologian into the social and human sciences, developing competent capacities in their types of discourse to fulfill the intrinsic demands of correlation, he also encourages an analogous movement of emigration by the institutional agency of the churches into autonomous lines of political discourse, in order to fulfill the intrinsic demands of an eschatological correlation between salvation and emancipation.

Schillebeeckx insists that to restrict salvation to the personal self or interpersonal relations deforms the public, structural dimensions of eschatological salvation in socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological contexts. Since his pastoral commitments inform his technical theological endeavour, this leads to a relatively strong polemic against a depoliticized personalism divorced from socio-cultural and political-economic contexts.³⁶ Schillebeeckx also inveighs, albeit less frequently, against abstract

³⁶ Schillebeeckx, "Kritische beschouwingen over het 'secularisatie'- begrip," 133-134; "Godsdienstige herleving in conflict met sociale inzet," 24-26; "Stilte gevuld met parabels," 75-77; *Jezus*, 512 / *Jesus*, 623-624; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 516, 684, 747 / *Christ*, 563, 744, 809; "God, Society and Human Salvation," 90; "Op weg naar een christologie," 148-149; *Tussentijds verhaal*, 68-69 / *Interim Report*, 58-59; and "Can Christology be an Experiment?" 13; *Als politiek*, 72 / *Christian Faith*, 75.

structuralisms that trivialize personal subjectivity and intersubjective relations.³⁷ He sees a much greater threat to the integrity of the life of the churches in abstract personalism than in abstract structuralism. For Schillebeeckx, it is ultimately a matter of equally and at the same time sustaining both revolutions of the heart and structural revolutions of existing sociopolitical systems.³⁸ Both kinds of revolution need each other in order to attain their own fulness; any deficiency in one entails a corresponding deficiency in the other. Schillebeeckx recognizes in the churches, through both the symbolic events of liturgy and the personal conversions arising from mystical communion which delineate its eschatological identity, reserves of the human spirit for sustaining those revolutions of the heart necessary for fully just and reconciling revolutions of sociopolitical relations.³⁹ This is expressed by Schillebeeckx in terms of the correlation he espouses between liturgical prayer and mysticism, on the one hand, and the structural communication of love through sociopolitical emancipation on the other: with this correlation it is indicated that “(...) *mystiek en politiek* elkaars hart moeten zijn. Mystiek zonder politiek verglijdt vlug in vrijblijvende innerlijkheid of zelfs sentimentaliteit; politiek zonder gebed of mystiek wordt vlug barbarij. Het joods-

³⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 672 / *Christ*, 731-732.

³⁸ Schillebeeckx, “Godsdienstige herleving in conflict met sociale inzet,” 13 and 27-29; *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 685 / *Christ*, 745.

³⁹ Schillebeeckx, “Waarom Jezus de Christus,” 12-13; “Glaube und Weltverantwortung,” 9 and 11-12; *Als politiek*, 70-71 / *On Christian Faith*, 72-73.

christelijk geloof is daarom wezenlijk politiek-mystiek, in-één.”⁴⁰ Further alienations can occur if a conversion of the heart does not accompany the revolution of structural relationships; the strict application of the norms of justice can sometimes become unjust! Further alienations, however, can occur when conversions of the heart are dissociated from eschatological revolutions transforming unjust structural relations, for such conversions in the comfortable or contented leave the alienated and vanquished broken-hearted.

In sum, Schillebeeckx discerns various initiatives of the institutional agency of the churches that entail specific repercussions for a progressive political praxis. The churches are autonomous and distinct in their eschatological identity. This position of a sovereign eschatological surplus, however, far from dissociating them from sociopolitical systems, radicalizes their initiatives at the very core of the structural relationships of power defining these systems. Out of this eschatological abundance, whose minimum condition of possibility is emancipative liberation for the living and the dead, the churches revitalize the integrity of political discourse. By revitalizing the integrity of political discourse, they endorse the minimal procedural conditions for the development of emancipative praxes redressing disparities in power and socio-economic goods. Out of this eschatological abundance, the churches develop their capacities in the various

⁴⁰ Schillebeeckx, “Spreken over God in een context van bevrijding,” 10: “(...) mysticism and politics must be each other’s heart. Mysticism without politics quickly slips into an aloof interiority or even sentimentality; politics without mysticism quickly becomes barbarism. The jewish-christian faith is therefore essentially political-mystical, in one.” See also “Glaube und Weltverantwortung,” 12.

kinds of rationality appropriate to public discourse in order to advocate a consensus advancing the redistribution of power and socio-economic goods in pursuit of a preferential justice and unrestricted reconciliation. On the basis of upholding the procedural autonomy of political discourse and releasing the emancipative capabilities of political discourse, the institutional agency of the churches intrinsically constitutes a critique of the ideologies distorting relationships of power in a sociopolitical system. To uphold the procedural autonomy of political discourse and to release its emancipative capabilities in effect exposes covert disparities in power, deconstructs the legitimacy of alienating patterns of relationships in a political-economy and begins to reconstruct the alternative possibilities. By supporting the integrity of sociopolitical discourse, the churches perform a service of democratization; by enhancing the emancipative commitment of such discourse, the churches perform a service of socialization into sociopolitical responsibility, especially for the most disadvantaged and outcast. To democratize and socialize effectively, the institutional agency of the churches must be both indirectly inserted in and clearly distinct from the processes of the legitimation of power within a sociopolitical system. An integral source of the eschatological abundance maintaining the distinct and sovereign identities of ecclesial institutions is found in their liturgical events and mystical spiritualities. Liturgical events and mystical spiritualities radicalize and are radicalized by their correlation with emancipative political praxes. Due to their ability to rehabilitate the imagination, they inject renewed vitality into sociopolitical processes at the level of the imagination that

orients and coordinates human action. By making a liturgical remembrance and intimate communion with God's definitive solidarity possible in the name of Jesus and his life-renewing praxis of God's reign, ecclesial liturgy and mysticism can invigorate a critical process in Christians, who as citizens are energized in deconstructing existing constellations of power and perhaps in legitimating alternatives.

5.III. Chapter Summary

This chapter on sociopolitical agencies attempts to delineate two independent yet complementary lines of institutional agency capable of sustaining a progressive political praxis. The agency of political parties and churches is presented by Schillebeeckx in terms of contesting and legitimating the distribution of power and resources in a sociopolitical system. The public mandates of practical-critical soteriology insist on indirectly sustaining the development of a political consensus through partisan and ecclesial political agencies. Such a consensus de- and reconstructs the legitimization of power and distribution of social goods. Although they approach this formation of power in different ways, Schillebeeckx challenges Christians, as citizens and believers located in both kinds of agency, to approach politics in the following spirit: "[D]e wil tot heil van allen en van iedere mens mag (...) niet uitgaan van de 'politiek' als zgn. kunst van het mogelijke, het haalbare of bereikbare. Politiek is veeleer de moeilijker

kunst om wat voor menselijk heil *noodzakelijk* is, meeterdaad ook *mogelijk* te maken.”⁴¹

In this fascinating claim, Schillebeeckx is accentuating the real issue for a critical political praxis under the eschatological surplus and proviso, whether in partisan or ecclesial initiatives: the real issue in politics is not simply the *exertion* of power, but its *purpose*. In proposing that the real purpose of the legitimation and management of power is not efficacy but making possible what is necessary for salvation, Schillebeeckx is insisting on orienting political praxis towards the realization of emancipative justice and liberating reconciliation. Far from spiritualizing politics as a sectarian obsession, he is radicalizing politics as an emancipative vocation to restore life to the dead and a home to the exiled.

Schillebeeckx explores the institutional processes whereby the public mediation of practical-critical soteriology enters into the distribution of power and goods. An interesting shift takes place in his discussion of public institutions from the centrality of the connection between the sociopolitical imagination and human action to the centrality of the connection between the integrity of sociopolitical discourse and human action. Schillebeeckx promotes the diverse institutional responsibilities of political parties and the churches to cultivate the integrity of sociopolitical discourse and thereby sustain the conditions for legitimating and co-ordinating, however indirectly, truly emancipative

⁴¹ Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, 683 / *Christ*, 743: “The readiness supporting the salvation of all and of every human being (...) cannot proceed from ‘politics’ as the so-called art of the possible, of the attainable or of that which is within reach. Politics is much rather the more difficult art of in actual fact also making *possible* what is *necessary* for human salvation.”

forms of sociopolitical praxis. He associates the critique of utopias and ideologies with these institutional responsibilities, emphasizing their responsibility to deconstruct the dominant legitimization of power disparities with its corollary, the abusive restriction of access to eco-social goods, even of the most basic kind. While endorsing the constructive mediations of the eschatological utopia, social theories and a political ethos, their role in shaping and implementing the objectives of civil or ecclesial institutional agencies remains underdeveloped. The entire complex consisting of an eschatological utopia, critical social theories, and political ethos clearly endorse institutional objectives that deconstruct the existing legitimization of power that is oppressive and alienating. Beyond this deconstructive intervention, however, their further contribution to a reconstructive emancipative praxis remains somewhat tenuous. How do these mediations enter into and influence the way in which institutional agencies communicate and coordinate emancipative praxes that structurally transform socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological relationships? Even before that, how do these mediations condition each other? The links, not only *ad intra* within and among the diverse mediations themselves but *ad extra* between mediations and institutional agencies, remain considerably underdeveloped. In discussing the complementary but definitely distinct institutional agencies of civil political movements and ecclesial communities, Schillebeeckx seeks to radicalize the emancipative commitment of their initiatives. This presumes that Christians, as citizens, are willing to articulate their convictions, in this case primarily convictions concerning the

fragmented identity and productive difference between liberating emancipations and eschatological salvation, in public terms that are intelligible and communicable within sociopolitical discourse. Such rational and communicative discourse, it appears, represents the means to establish a political consensus centred on preferential justice and unrestricted reconciliation.

CONCLUSION

Towards a Soteriology of Liberating Emancipation: Is Practical-Critical Soteriology Sufficiently Practical and Critical?

“In de feitelijke situatie van onze moderne samenleving,” writes Schillebeeckx, “kan het christendom niet meer geloofwaardig zijn zonder solidariteit met wat genoemd is de emancipatieve vrijheidsgeschiedenis van het mensdom.”¹ I have been constructing my reading of Schillebeeckx’ practical-critical soteriology as an effort to sustain this solidarity with histories of emancipative freedoms. If Schillebeeckx’ practical-critical soteriology represents a reconstructive interpretation developing the distinct repercussions of this solidarity in terms of the eschatological mandates of preferential justice and reconciling communication, my dissertation strives to be an endnote to its salient features. Schillebeeckx’ practical-critical soteriology can justifiably be read, on account of its liberationist intent and procedural mediations, as a soteriological discourse of emancipation endorsing a pro-gressive political praxis. Christological resources feature prominently in this discourse. The biblical interdependence between the resurrection, death and lifepraxis of Jesus, which distinguish Jesus as an eschatological advocate of God’s preferential solidarity, also serves to interpret the soteriological significance of liberating emancipations. No matter how provisional or fragile, liberating emancipations are promised an unexpected future which even extends

¹ Schillebeeckx, “Kritische theorieën en politiek engagement van de christelijke gemeente,” 55 / “Critical Theories and Christian Political Commitment,” 77: “In the actual situation of our modern society, Christianity is no longer believable apart from solidarity with the history of the emancipative freedom of humankind.”

to embrace the dead. There is a fragmented identity and productive difference connecting salvation and emancipation to one another. The eschatological surplus and proviso intensify both the identity and the difference between salvation and emancipation. Within this fragmented identity and productive difference, practical-critical soteriology seeks to enlarge and orient the possibilities of emancipative praxis sustaining the liberation from oppression and alienation through a partisan justice and unrestricted reconciliation. Is Schillebeeckx' soteriology, however, sufficiently practical and critical?

6.I. Towards a Critique of Practical-Critical Soteriology

There are critiques that devastate a position. There are also critiques that encourage a critical retrieval and hence extend a position. While some styles of critique devastate by paralyzing a position in its limits, other styles of critique not only preserve the limits but extend the possibilities and therefore enhance a position. In this section, I would like to formulate some critiques that preserve the limits yet extend the possibilities of Schillebeeckx' soteriology. The critiques that I initiate reflect the intersection of my own sociopolitical and theological interests with the reading of Schillebeeckx' soteriology sustaining an emancipative political praxis. I limit myself to initiating the critiques from aporias emerging within the complex whole of those positions and commitments integral to advancing Schillebeeckx' practical-critical

soteriology. I formulate my critiques by drawing on interlocutors with whom Schillebeeckx has sustained significant conversations, the pivotal importance of whose work he acknowledges and whose works share a basic affinity with his own practical-critical soteriology of a progressive praxis. I organize my critiques around two different sets of concerns: the first related to the location of Schillebeeckx' discourse; the second related to the conceptions of utopia and ideology which proliferate his understanding of the mediations central to the liberationist mandates of practical-critical soteriology. In both instances, my attention is directed towards enhancing the emancipative outreach of the eschatological surplus of justice and reconciliation animating Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology.

6.II. The Many Locations of Schillebeeckx' Soteriological Discourse

Every discourse is marked by its contexts. Schillebeeckx recognizes that every discourse reflects its particular region. Contexts, however, are never simple or discrete, they are multiple and overlapping with intricate interactions between them. Clodovis Boff identifies two prominent types of contexts that enter into the texture of a discourse: epistemic locations and social locations.² An epistemic location refers to the theoretical quality of a discourse, to the places and procedures that maintain theoretical plausibility within a discipline of knowledge. A social location refers to the practical function of a

² Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 15-16 and 162-168.

discourse, to the means of production influencing its genre of a discourse, the political-economic class in which it is situated, the significant audiences or groups that distinguish a discourse alongside its formal contexts of theoretical plausibility. Epistemic and social locations condition the possibilities and the limits of a theological discourse. They represent boundaries defined through interests, practices and priorities as these enter into the production of a work. It is interesting to note that while Schillebeeckx insists on the regional boundary of theological discourse, he also grants discourse the capacity to intrinsically transcend its context and perform a universal signification.³ At stake here is the fissure between regionality and universality, and the possible mediations between them. Even a universal discourse is regulated by boundaries; otherwise it represents a totalization with a broken relationship to sociopolitical realities, an ideological distortion of consciousness according to Schillebeeckx. My first suspicion in reading Schillebeeckx is that his soteriological discourse too quickly universalizes to the extent that it loses the boundaries that permit it to meaningfully signify the sociopolitical realities it seeks to sustain. The regional limits of his discourse tend to be minimized if not disappear, leaving the impression that there are no boundaries inserting the universalizing discourse in concrete historical contexts. I grant that interactive universals can be acquired through a communicative exchange between different regional discourses, when the exchange is sustained over a long duration and subject to various criteria and warrants; but the direct or unilateral

³ Schillebeeckx, "Theologie als bevrijdingskunde," 397-398.

move of a regional discourse into the level of universal discourse risks blurring the boundaries of the universal discourse and rendering the reference of such discourse vague. There are several signals which suggest the necessity of critique related to the issue of location and boundaries in Schillebeeckx' soteriological discourse. The purpose of delineating these locations and boundaries is to better appreciate the limits of Schillebeeckx' soteriological discourse in order to critically retrieve its possibilities.

Beginning with the coverage of political praxis in the last chapter, some of the limits of Schillebeeckx' approach to emancipation begin to emerge. In elaborating the institutional agencies supporting an emancipative praxis, two characteristics of Schillebeeckx' approach converge in a common observation. First, it is noteworthy that Schillebeeckx primarily attends to articulating the agency of church leadership and of church communications by prophetic ecclesial elements. Second, it is noteworthy that his approach to the soteriological interpretation of political parties, while distancing itself whenever possible from confessional parties, is addressed to christian citizens as believers. His soteriological approach to the selection of political parties presents itself in terms of evaluating their support of or participation in the limited number of institutional options historically available to them in their national context. In other words, Schillebeeckx' interpretation of sociopolitical agency is restricted to a consideration of ecclesial agency or of the individual agency of christian believers who as citizens are assessing their individual involvements. Given that his practical-critical soteriology is intended to contribute towards the development of a European liberation

theology,⁴ the marginal view of agency restricts its capacity to sustain the structural transformation of society.

This abbreviated understanding of the agencies initiating, organizing and orienting complex interactions marginalizes the meaning of sociopolitical praxis. By not offering an account of the diversity of agencies constitutive for sociopolitical praxis as such, Schillebeeckx in effect limits the sense and reference of his concept of political praxis. Despite the considerable effort to demonstrate the foundational role of liberation and emancipative praxis in the experience of salvation, and to rehabilitate liberation and emancipative praxis through the eschatological surplus and proviso, Schillebeeckx' discourse does not provide a comprehensive interpretation of sociopolitical praxis. Schillebeeckx' language restricts the reference of praxis by primarily assigning it to various kinds of ecclesially identified ministries.⁵ This tendency is reinforced by his frequent yet ambiguous use of the phrase "the praxis of the reign of God," where this praxis might be referring to any one or more of i) the praxis of the historical Jesus; ii) the praxis of early christian communities; iii) the praxis of current forms of ecclesial ministries, whether pastoral, caritative or sociopolitical; or iv) the praxis of preferential

⁴ Schillebeeckx. "Theologie als bevrijdingskunde," 391-402; "Befreiende Theologie," 56-71.

⁵ See Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 239 fn. 13, where he writes: "I do not, then, take 'praxis' in the acceptance of Germanic theological literature, where it usually means 'pastoral practice.' Thus e.g., the well-known dictionary *Sacramentum Mundi* is subtitled, in the German edition, *Theologisches Lexikon für die Praxis*, and a Dutch periodical is called *Praktische theologie: Nederlands tijdschrift voor pastorale wetenschappen*. To my thinking, it is not basically this 'praxis' that presents a problem for theology today (...)."

justice and communicative reconciliation by christian believers. References to the praxis of the reign of God or to the lifepraxis of Jesus overwhelm the comparatively limited range of references to a progressive political praxis in Schillebeeckx' soteriological discourse. This disproportion needs to be addressed by a soteriological discourse that seeks to support, for eschatological reasons, and be identified with the fragmented history of emancipative freedoms. The contraction of sociopolitical agency limits the extent of Schillebeeckx' theological solidarity with the praxis necessary for the public communication of justice and reconciliation.

The repercussions of the peripheral understanding of agency and praxis in practical-critical soteriology are extensive. The difficulties hence arise in understanding what the categories of emancipation, emancipative liberation or self-liberation refer to or signify. "De emancipatie," afterall, according to Schillebeeckx, "wordt echter niet voltrokken door de 'theoretici' van de geschiedenis, maar door degenen die effectief de huidige geleding van de sociale samenhangen veranderen."⁶ In the absence of a more complex consideration of social change concerning the structures of power and disparity, taking into account not only how these structures systemically function and evolve but of how praxis intervenes to rehabilitate them, the sense and reference of political praxis in Schillebeeckx' soteriology emerges somewhat abridged. Alongside

⁶ Schillebeeckx, "Naar een verruiming van de hermeneutiek: de 'nieuwe kritische theorie,'" 48 / "The New Critical Theory," 121: "Emancipation has not, however, been realized by the 'theoreticians' of history, but through those that effectively change today's articulation of social relationships."

the transcendental categories of oppression and alienation, or “the oppressed” and “the alienated,” the referential significance of the categories of emancipation becomes noticeably ambiguous. The relation between the signifier and the signified is obscured since decontextualized and removed from the concrete structural conditions and agencies that forge its transformative significations. In short, in the absence of a comprehensive account of the complex interactions between sociopolitical agency, structural relationships and system-processes, the soteriology of emancipation faces an enormous restriction of its practical and critical capabilities.

This loss of signification to the concept of emancipation therefore diminishes the capability of Schillebeeckx’ soteriology to signify the eschatological promises of salvation. It also threatens to render soteriological discourse about praxis and emancipation ideological in the sense of disguising the relations of production and legitimations of power not only in society but underlying the process of its very own articulation. Schillebeeckx rightly insists that there is more to sociopolitical praxis than merely the legitimization of power differentials or the structural transformation of social relations, since sociopolitical praxis concerns not only the leverage of power but justice and reconciliation and the love they communicate. Schillebeeckx also rightly insists that sociopolitical praxes have their own intrinsic rationality and intelligibility prior to their soteriological interpretation. Between the regulative ideal of the eschatological surplus and the intrinsic elements of intelligible autonomy, however, the contextual signification of emancipation and sociopolitical praxis remains unclear. This poses a

considerable concern, since Schillebeeckx' commitment to the mediation of theological hermeneutics and the viability of a practical and critical soteriological interpretation of human action rely on the contextual significance of emancipative events and movements. Amidst this loss of signification, the questions begin to emerge: whose emancipation, and whose salvation are being referred to in Schillebeeckx' discourse? Who defines the reference to "the oppressed" or "the alienated," and whose voice is constructing them? Who is legitimating this voice to speak, to define, to limit and to exclude? A similar problematic emerges from his discussions of utopia. By endorsing an eschatological utopia, Schillebeeckx seeks to reorient human action. But in reference to which society is the eschatological utopia of justice and reconciliation projected? Whose voice is projecting the utopia, and to whom does its anticipated future belong? With whom does the productive capacity of the sociopolitical imagination, with its utopian function, reside? To say that it resides with the prophetic consciousness of ecclesial communities does not account for the process of the productive imagination in a sociopolitical system at large. If the eschatological utopia of justice and reconciliation is to be capable of signifying real liberations, does it not presuppose being inserted within concrete historical contexts of actual alienations? Despite the language of solidarity with emancipative movements, these movements are never contextually identified let alone analyzed and interpreted. As it stands, the soteriology of Schillebeeckx is insufficiently practical and critical.

This first set of residual perplexities pervading the discourse of praxis, emancipation and utopia alert my attention towards three issues: i) the impact of epistemic and social locations on the discourse of practical-critical soteriology; ii) the kind of mediation of social scientific analyses and interpretations actually engaged by Schillebeeckx as a constitutive procedure for his practical-critical soteriology; and iii) the nature of the dialectic between salvation and emancipation. I base this critical entry on the methodological work of Clodovis Boff and his pivotal text *Theology and Praxis* (originally published in 1978). The justification for introducing this text is that, in addition to sharing the same commitment to a soteriological interpretation of sociopolitical praxis in historical contexts of oppression and alienation, Schillebeeckx' is directly influenced by Boff on several counts.⁷ I will subsequently introduce a second set of perplexities marking the juxtaposition of utopia and ideology in the functioning of the sociopolitical imagination (see 6.III. below). Paul Ricoeur's practical hermeneutics of the dialectic between ideology and utopia offers critical resources for examining the

⁷ The influences of Boff can be discerned in many recent positions of Schillebeeckx. For instance, Schillebeeckx' differentiation between the history of salvation, the history of revelation, and the distinctness of the church in *Mensen*, 24-34 / *Church*, 5-15 is worked out on principles articulated by Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 97-98; and the hermeneutics of recontextualization based on an identity of proportional relationships which Schillebeeckx presents in *Theologisch Geloofsverstaan*, and again in *Mensen*, 59-61 / *Church*, 41-43 likewise duplicates the schema proposed by Boff, *op.cit.*, 146-150. More immediate to my discussion, Schillebeeckx' articulation of the socio-analytic mediation in "Theologie als bevrijdingskunde," 398-400 is a summary of Boff, *op.cit.*, 57-60 to which he independently added semiotic theory; his articulation of the theological-hermeneutical mediation, while more independent, still expresses vestiges of the theological-hermeneutical mediation as discussed by Boff throughout his book, while the entire model of socio-analytic / theological-hermeneutical / and praxis mediations is directly lifted from Boff, *op. cit.*, xxv and throughout the entire structure of the book.

second set of perplexities. The purpose of these critiques is to enhance the capacity of soteriology to articulate the eschatological significance of emancipative political praxis.

6.II.1. The Plausibility Structure of University Theology: Erik Borgman

Before introducing Boff's insights into the epistemic and social locations of theological discourse, however, Erik Borgman's characterization of Schillebeeckx' theology offers a constructive point of entry into the question of discursive boundaries. Borgman distinguishes between emancipationist theology, or theologies of emancipation, and universitarian theology, or theologies of the university.⁸ With this distinction, he attempts to demarcate differences in the epistemic locations which define these contrasting types of theological discourse. Emancipationist theology, he explains, is contextually situated, practical-critical and arises from the sociopolitical praxis of the christian community. University theology, by contrast, is defined by the function of the university as the site of the production of academic discourse. This does not preclude the conditioning of university theology by other sites of influence such as society or the church. Borgman assumes, however, that each site has its own criteria of plausibility which are not commensurate with any other site.⁹ A university theology, therefore,

⁸ Borgman, "Theologie tussen universiteit en emancipatie," *op.cit.*, 240-245.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 243.

identifies the plausibility structure represented by the academy as its central epistemic location.

Determined by knowledge-specialists, the codes and canons of this plausibility structure condition the signifying capabilities of a discourse. This means that the discourse of a university theology is primarily relevant within the university; being produced through and for the university. University theology can still be relevant in society or church, but its relevance is precisely as a theology whose principal epistemic location is defined by the institutional codes regulating the production of knowledges. The relation of this type of theology to society and to the church therefore takes place in the form of a direct association with other organized knowledges.¹⁰ Borgman therefore claims that the primary context defining the epistemic location of Schillebeeckx' theological discourse is the university.¹¹ As a critical and methodologically reflexive initiative, Borgman claims that Schillebeeckx' theological discourse is defined by its plausibility and association with other knowledge-producers, even if the pastoral connection with church communities and their traditions remains a subsidiary identification.

Borgman suggests that the hold of the university as the primary epistemic location defining Schillebeeckx' theological discourse shifted on account of his encounter with theologies of emancipation, primarily Latin American theologies of

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 244.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 249, 252.

liberation.¹² This, he argues, destabilizes the hold of canonical academic plausibility-structures on Schillebeeckx' theological discourse, since the plausibility structure defining emancipationist theology is the historical outcome of sociopolitical praxis. The epistemic location of the discourse characteristic of theologies of emancipation resides in networks of sociopolitical action aiming at the structural transformation of society. It is these networks of sociopolitical praxis that define the interests of emancipationist theology. Borgman claims that this confronts university theology with two challenges: (1) regarding the epistemic location of the theologian and consequently the contexts of plausibility defining her or his discourse; and (2) regarding the methodological responsibility of the theologian to accord a primacy to praxis in her or his theological method.¹³ Under the influence of Boff, Schillebeeckx himself drew Borgman's attention to these issues in his departing speech to the Faculty of Theology at the Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen in 1983. Given the socialization of theologians both into social structures that internalize relationships of power and into academic expectations that impose canons of prescribed methods and scientific attitudes, Schillebeeckx claims

Daarom moeten theologen die objectieve maatschappijvorm en het sociale bestaansontwerp waarin zij in feite leven, de academisch-wetenschappelijke traditie waarin ze staan, en het feit van de machtsstructuren van kerk en samen-

¹² *Ibid.*, 252-253.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 253-258.

leving waartoe ze behoren, in hun theologiseren analytisch-kritisch medebedenken, wil hun theologiseren zelf niet 'ideologisch' worden.¹⁴

Much like his introduction, during that same speech, of a positive function to the concept of ideology, however, Schillebeeckx' injunctions did not find expression in a thorough rehabilitation of his soteriological discourse and its practical-critical intent. Borgman appreciates this unrealized potential of Schillebeeckx' assessment of the social construction of theological discourse. He therefore seeks to renew the discussion of i) the epistemic position of the theologian and ii) the priority of praxis in theological method in continuing Schillebeeckx' work. With respect to addressing the issue of epistemic location, Borgman recommends a thorough analysis of the relationship between a theology and its context, specifically drawing on the assistance of the social

¹⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Theologisch Geloofsverstaan anno 1983*, 5: "Theologians must analytically-critically account for the objective structures of society and the systemic social relations in which they in fact live, for the academic-scientific traditions in which they stand, and for the social structures of church and society in which they are in fact inserted, if their theologizing itself is not to become 'ideological'." This passage expresses insights, in a post-structuralist perspective on the relationship between knowledge and power, which he had identified in his confrontation with Habermas' early critical theory: "Anderzijds moet men zeggen dat de kerken, maatschappelijk gezien, inderdaad een onderdeel zijn van het sociale bestel en daarbinnen juist als zodanig een eigen functie vervullen. Evenmin als de wetenschappen zelf zijn de kerken en de theologie die er bedreven wordt, geen in zichzelf besloten, zelfstandige grootheden. Ze vormen een element binnen een sociaal-economisch bestel, waarvan de verschillende deelprocessen innerlijk samenhangen. Op grond hiervan kan elke wetenschap, en dus ook de theologie, bewust of onbewust in dienst worden genomen door het 'bestel'. Wanneer de analyse van de kritische theorie dit kan constateren, heeft zij inderdaad een onkritisch theologiseren betraapt. Ook de theologie is immers een onderdeel van het sociale geheel en valt daarom onder het gebied dat de kritische theorie analyseert en waartegen dan ook een kritische praxis zich kan richten. De theologie is aldus het geanalyseerde en bekritiseerde (deel) object geworden van de kritische maatschappijtheorie," ("Kritische theorie en theologische hermeneutiek: confrontatie," 125-126 / "The New Critical Theory and Theological Hermeneutics," 139).

sciences and eventually developing a competency in their performance.¹⁵ With respect to addressing the issue of the primacy of praxis in theological method, a primacy which he finds consistent with the objectives of Schillebeeckx' christology and theological hermeneutics of negative contrast experiences, Borgman makes no explicit recommendation as to how to proceed.¹⁶ His overall claim, validating the intrinsic worth of a university theology such as the theology of Schillebeeckx, is that a university theology can take theologies of emancipation seriously and be changed by them.

I find Borgman's assessment of Schillebeeckx' theological discourse refreshing. I can only concur with him when he notes that "Niettemin zegt Schillebeeckx uiteindelijk weinig over zijn concrete situatie, niet in 'anecdotische verhalen' en 'zeer persoonlijke, auto-biografische belijdenissen' – dat wil hij zelf nadrukkelijk niet –, maar ook niet in een min of meer toegespitste analyse van de maatschappij waarin hij leeft of de positie waarin hij als theoloog verkeert."¹⁷ I find his move to read Schillebeeckx' in terms of a discourse analysis that exposes the epistemic location and hence boundaries of Schillebeeckx' theological language provocative and compelling. I find some aspects

¹⁵ Borgman, "Theologie tussen universiteit en emancipatie," 254-255.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 256-258.

¹⁷ Borgman, "Van cultuurtheologie naar theologie als onderdeel van de cultuur," 357: "Schillebeeckx nevertheless ultimately says very little about his concrete situation, neither in 'anecdotal stories' and 'very personal, autobiographical confessions' – he himself emphatically doesn't want this – nor in a more or less pointed analysis of the society in which he lives and the position which he as a theologian holds."

of his reading of Schillebeeckx problematic, however, in so far as they misconstrue the complexity of his theological production.

If one takes his description of emancipationist theology, all the characteristics apply to Schillebeeckx' own description and performance of his theology: a contextual theology, with practical-critical intent, arising as a reflection on the praxis of christian faith communities. What Borgman might like to say, but which he doesn't explicitly thematize, is that emancipation theologies have a different epistemic location and social function which are not primarily legitimated in the university but elsewhere. If Borgman had identified how these different epistemic locations and social functions materialize in emancipationist theology, he might have had a more constructive methodological recommendation to make regarding how it is that theological discourse can really grant a primacy to praxis. Borgman's concern that Schillebeeckx does not accord a primacy to praxis in this theology remains somewhat misdirected.

Schillebeeckx repeatedly defines theology in terms of a critical reflection on praxis.¹⁸

¹⁸ Schillebeeckx, "De functie van de theologie in de kerk," 64: "Daarom kan men zeggen, dat de theologie de grondslag legt voor een actualiserende interpretatie van het christelijk verleden die verantwoord en geloofwaardig is, door operationele modellen te ontwerpen voor het gelovig handelen. In die zin kan men de theologie noemen: *de specifiek theologische kritische theorie van de gelovige praxis*. Haar werkwijze gaat uit van de hedendaagse *praxis van de kerk (...)*" (*italics added*). See also "Kritische theorie en theologische hermeneutiek: confrontatie," 129-130 / "The New Critical Theory and Theological Hermeneutics," 143-144: "(...) een theologie, of zij nu conservatief of progressief is, uiteindelijk 'nergens' is wanneer zij het contact verloren heeft met de empirische basis, d.w.z. de concrete *praxis van de geloofsgemeente*. Als theologie het zelfbewustzijn van een christelijke praxis is, wat zij m.i. dient te zijn, op straffe van anders toch weer als ideologie te worden aangevoeld, niet toleren dat er een breuk bestaat tussen de louter theoretische actualisering en de feitelijke bestendinging van de oude praxis ... De praxis is een wezenlijk element van de actualiserende en bevrijdende interpretatie. *In die zin moet de theologie de kritische theorie*

He repeatedly insists that salvation is only possible amidst histories of suffering at the level of practical reason and liberating praxis, and repudiates any interpretation of christian identity which stops at the purely cognitive level as an idealistic ideology with a faulty understanding of the interaction between theory and praxis. The issue is not whether or not Schillebeeckx accords a primacy to praxis in theological discourse, but what kind of praxis the primacy is accorded to. I contend, on the basis of the epistemic location of Schillebeeckx' discourse, that he accords the primacy to the ecclesial praxis of the reign of God in Jesus and with their Spirit, to the praxis of the churches and critical faith communities, and to the praxis of individual believers in caritative and sociopolitical ministries. While Borgman recognizes the pastoral intention in Schillebeeckx' work, I think he underestimates the extent to which the church forms the primary epistemic plausibility context informing Schillebeeckx' theology. Due, furthermore, to the social location of Schillebeeckx' discourse, I further submit that there are explicit boundaries to the signification of praxis, such that his discourse fails to sustain a reflection or development of the ranges of emancipative praxis necessary for the public communication of love in the structural transformation of sociopolitical systems. And finally, I would like to establish that with variable epistemic and social locations, Schillebeeckx' soteriological discourse remains capable of shifting its boundaries so as to contextually situate the promises of salvation in relation to concrete

zijn – maar dan op de eigen theologische wijze – van de gelovige praxis. Zij gaat immers uit van de hedendaagse praxis van de kerk (...) (italics added); and again, *ibid.*, 138 / *ibid.*, 154: “De theologie is het kritische zelfbewustzijn van de gelovige praxis in wereld en kerk.”

liberation movements. In this I both identify the limits but invigorate the possibilities of Schillebeeckx' soteriology so that it can be even more practical and even more critical in the history of emancipative freedoms.

There are also other related aspects of Borgman's reading which I find problematic. For instance, with respect to his recommendation that an interdisciplinary immersion of theology in the social sciences would help clarify the contextuality of Schillebeeckx' theological discourse, I have to ask the question, in light of the coverage of interdisciplinarity in chapter 2 of this dissertation: why did Schillebeeckx' own interdisciplinary commitments not suffice to produce a critical reflection on the epistemic location of his discourse? The issue here is not a multidisciplinary heuristic encouraging interaction with and competency in the social sciences. Schillebeeckx has already advanced this heuristic. The utility of the heuristic is no guarantee for a thorough application of discourse analysis, since otherwise all interdisciplinary practitioners in the humanities and social science would explicitly thematize and account for the epistemic and social locations of their discourse, which evidently is not the case. The issue, despite this interdisciplinary heuristic, is whether a discourse-analysis focusing on the modes of theological production is realized. Discourse-analysis can assist in conducting an adequate reflection on the boundaries of theological discourse as a mode production according to various canons of legitimacy.

This is where Borgman's analysis leaves me dissatisfied. On the topic of plausibility structures, I find the location of Schillebeeckx' discourse to be more

complex than Borgman suggests. I think there are strong reasons to typify Schillebeeckx' affiliation with the renewal of christian religious traditions and christian ecclesial identity as the leading epistemic location defining the plausibility structures regulating his discourse. I think a viable argument can be made that the plausibility structures of the Roman Catholic church and the oecumene of churches is at least equally, if not more intensely, the leading epistemic location of Schillebeeckx' discourse. Repristinating contemporary christian identities with the original pneumatic experiences of Jesus the Christ, legitimating his christology through an explicitly thematized biblical hermeneutics, demonstrating the viability of a post-Ricoeurian, phenomenological-hermeneutical renewal of Aquinas' theology of creation, justifying his ecclesiology with historical reconstructions of the development of church traditions, reinvigorating sacramental and liturgical practices, and assisting with the theological legitimating of democratizing ecclesial reforms – these all coalesce in forming the priorities of Schillebeeckx' discourse. These commitments define its epistemic location to an equal if not greater extent than any concern to contribute to the theoretician's sophisticated development of novel methodological approaches which define advances in the procedures or substances of various disciplines in the social and human sciences. Schillebeeckx' interaction with theoretical developments can be placed at the level of a critical reception aiming at pursuing the repercussions of these theoretical developments for theology and ecclesial identity, more so than at the level of a strategic intervention reorienting major theoretical trends. Schillebeeckx evidently masters several of these

advances; but such mastery is placed at the service of intensifying the interaction with the plausibility structures defining his leading epistemic location, the church. I think the intense affiliation of Schillebeeckx with the church as his leading epistemic location also explains (1) why Schillebeeckx' massive theological oeuvre begins and ends in sacramental theology;¹⁹ (2) why Schillebeeckx was twice subject to official investigations by the magisterial offices of the Vatican; and (3) why, regarding a representative movement of emancipationist theologies, Schillebeeckx was more drawn to Latin American liberation theologies, with their localized sense of ecclesial affiliations and direct lineage with the pastoral reforms of Vatican II Council, than say to North American or European feminist liberation theologies, whose ecclesial affiliations are more complex and decentralized. By way of contrast, if the university were Schillebeeckx' leading epistemic location, he *might* instead have (1) focused on developing original theoretical advances in the field of ritual studies in his approach to the sacraments with methodologies from cultural anthropology, the sociology of religion

¹⁹ Schillebeeckx' first three landmark books were all in the area of sacramental theology [*1. De sacramentele heilseconomie. Theologische bezinning op S. Thomas' sacramentenleer in het licht van de traditie en van de hedendaagse sacramentsproblematik*, (Antwerpen / Bilthoven: 't Groeit / Nelissens, 1952); *2. Christus sacrament van de Godsontmoeting*, (Bilthoven: Nelissen, 1959) / *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, 1963); and *3. Het huwelijk: aardse werkelijkheid en heilsmysterie* (Bilthoven: Nelissen, 1963) / *Marriage: human reality and saving mystery*, (London : Sheed and Ward, 1965)]; while his forthcoming (and supposedly last) book in preparation [cf. *Nieuwsbrief* 19 (2000) 1 from the Stichting Edward Schillebeeckx at K.U.N. in The Netherlands] is a constructive reworking of his theology of the sacraments and liturgy in light of his christology and ecclesiology from the 1970s and 1980s. See Schillebeeckx, "Naar een herontdekking van de christelijke sacramenten: ritualisering van religieuze momenten in het alledaagse leven," *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 40 (2000) 164-187 for an indication of this work in progress.

or *Religionswissenschaft*; (2) represented a discourse holding insufficient interest for the Vatican to scrupulously investigate; and (3) shown ongoing interest in the continuous development of Ricoeur's practical hermeneutics or Habermas' theories of communicative action. I do not find that Borgman's claim, presenting the university as the central epistemic location of Schillebeeckx' theological legacy, can account for significant facets of his oeuvre. His claim is therefore less than entirely probative.

Now the university evidently has its own set of plausibility structures regulating academic discourse. My counterproposal neither suggests otherwise, nor suggests that Schillebeeckx remains indifferent to the plausibility of his theological endeavors within the epistemic canons regulating plausible intellectual discourse within the academy. My counterproposal does suggest, however, that Schillebeeckx' discourse is plausible within the epistemic canons regulating academic knowledges precisely in so far as it is primarily plausible as a discourse within the church. Schillebeeckx' theology defines itself as a critical reflection on the christian community's praxis of faith as a praxis of the reign of God in hope and in love. It therefore seeks to be plausible first and foremost within and for the ecclesial community. Since it is a *critical* reflection, however, it is subject to the norms of critical analysis and reflexivity formulated within the university. The boundaries between church and university are not exclusive, but to a great extent, in the case of this Dominican intellectual, overlapping.

6.II.2. Discourse-Analysis in Liberationist Theological Method: Clodovis Boff

If church affiliation defines the leading epistemic location and overriding plausibility structure conditioning Schillebeeckx' theological endeavor (whether in his theological hermeneutics, anthropology, christology or ecclesiology), then this proposal must account for the roles of the university and society in the construction of Schillebeeckx' discourse. This is where I think Borgman's reading of Schillebeeckx would benefit from a more complex discourse-analysis such as offered by Clodovis Boff in *Theology and Praxis*. Whereas Boff distinguishes between the epistemic location and social location of any given discourse, Borgman fuses the two aspects of location. That is why, for instance, he mistakenly recommends an intervention at the level of epistemic location, such as an interdisciplinary involvement and competence with the social sciences, to redress an issue of social location, such as the conditioning of discourse by its insertion within the institutional and internalized structures of power. Schillebeeckx, as we saw, draws attention to the formative influence of a social location on theological discourse. For a correlational soteriology, the choice of social theory will be governed in part by social location. It is not so much a social theory that predetermines one's social location, but the social location that predetermines one's choices in social theory. Boff rightly insists that every theological discourse, even those that make vehement claims to cultural and political neutrality, is inserted in and conditioned by a social location.

To my mind, the real political problem for a (theological) theory is not that of 'engagement' as such, but that of an analytically predicated engagement: *What type of engagement is to be undertaken? What social position must the theologian take?* And, inasmuch as a theological discourse is always situated in some particular locus in social space, *which* locus should a given theological discourse occupy? ... As a consequence, we must conceptualize the theologian's social position (...) as engaged in an interplay within the activity of social groups, at the heart of the unstable configurations of power relationships ... By way of conclusion: the postulate of 'engagement' is equivocal. It is equivocal in virtue of the fact that we are always – ultimately – engaged, whether it be passively or actively. The real question, then, is: What engagement is meant? Engagement for whom? Option for what cause? Taking sides with whom? Struggling for which class?²⁰

Social location precedes, pervades and conditions the choice of theological theory, even social theory, more often than the other way around. In contrast to Borgman, I claim that it is the social location of Schillebeeckx' discourse which in part explains why Schillebeeckx, even though theorizing theologically about emancipation, does not attain a sufficiently complex account of sociopolitical agency that would concretely represent the emancipative repercussions of eschatological in salvation in a way that is contextually relevant.

In contradistinction to Borgman, I think it is inaccurate to represent Schillebeeckx' theological discourse as a university theology over and against a theology of emancipation from which it can benefit. Ever since his discerning integration of Habermas' critical theory and corresponding interest in emancipation movements arose in the late 1960s, Schillebeeckx' theology consistently develops as both an emancipation theology and a university theology. In addition to this, as the

²⁰ Boff, *op.cit.*, 161-162.

active role of ecclesial plausibility structures evident throughout his work suggests, Schillebeeckx' discourse represents not only a university theology and an emancipation theology, but also a church theology; so much so, that this discourse continues to function even in the university and in emancipation movements as a theology that is primarily relevant for the praxis of the church. With a leading theoretical plausibility located in the traditions of the church, and a complementary social function within the practices of the university, Schillebeeckx' soteriology, despite its explicit practical-critical intent, is limited in its account of sociopolitical agency. This, I suggest, more adequately accounts for its inability to sustain a functional intervention in the progressive praxis of emancipation. It seems inaccurate to differentiate Schillebeeckx' theological discourse over and against emancipationist theology; it is more accurate to claim that it would benefit, as a theology of emancipation, indeed as a practical-critical soteriology of emancipative praxis, if it diversified its epistemic and social locations. This is what Schillebeeckx himself intimated in 1983 in his departure speech to the Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen, as the last quote from this speech indicates. I would now like to corroborate these claims with recourse to Boff's distinction between these locations.

Boff's methodological work in liberationist theology is an extended effort to expose and differentiate the complex interaction between theology and praxis. His pivotal claim is that, with respect to praxis, theology is both autonomous and dependent, without, however, being either historically detached from contexts of praxis or reduced

to propagandizing the public representation of praxis.²¹ As autonomous of praxis, theology is a discourse with a field of intelligibility defined by a cognitive-truth code as determined by the object within a discipline.²² As dependent on praxis, theology is a discourse that is positioned within socio-cultural and political-economic systems, conditioned by material conditions of production which define its practical function and reflect its interests.²³ Every theological discourse is governed by these two types of codes, one related to an epistemic function or location, the other related to a social function or location. Boff seeks to clarify how these two different codes simultaneously influence the signifying capability of a theological discourse. He excludes the possibility of both a divorce between the two codes, as if the relation between them were a pure fiction; and a causal relationship between them.²⁴ It is neither the theoretical quality of a discourse that determines its practical function as cultural product, nor its practical function as a cultural product that determines its theoretical quality.

Boff subsequently argues that the social location of a discourse is a necessary but insufficient condition for liberationist theological theory. The socio-cultural and political-economic function of the production of the discourse permits a certain

²¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

²² *Ibid.*, 162.

²³ *Ibid.*, 162.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 165.

orientation but does not entirely determine the accompanying theoretical event.²⁵ The social function and the epistemic function, while distinct from each other, are inseparable since (1) they are both qualities of the single embodied agency of the theologian and (2) they can both share a single focus on, for instance, communicating the eschatological promises within emancipative praxis.²⁶ While the locations are distinct, they remain united within the single agency of theologian and shared focus on salvation within sociopolitical liberation. The repercussions of this for theological discourse, in solidarity with emancipative movements in an effort to sustain the public communication of love through structural transformation, are considerable.

Political engagement in a given cause within a defined group or class, although failing to guarantee the intrinsic quality of a theological theory, nevertheless constitutes a necessary condition for the selection by this theological theory of a determinate and adequate theoretical object, or thematic, as well as that of a style proportioned to its task of communication. (...) [T]heological practice can be, at once and the same time, although not in the same respect, political practice and (political) practice of faith. It can be, at the same moment, knowledge and participation, cognition of the political and the exercise of 'political love.' For purposes of *theological investigation*, the *analytical* distinction between the twin loci we have been considering must be respected. We must distinguish between the *theoretical* (or, more generally, the epistemic) locus, upon which the social agent *as such* is incompetent to make any pertinent judgments, and the political (or, more generally, the social) locus, in respect of which the theologian *as such* possesses no competence whatsoever. At the same time, *in historical concretion*, it must be recognized that these two loci are always found bound together, in the unity of a single person and a single basic object.²⁷

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 165-166.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 167.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 167-168.

Without controlling the plausibility of theological discourse, the social location of the discourse nonetheless partially conditions its focus. An exchange of influences, which orients the other without forcing it in any particular detail, obtains between the epistemic and social locations of a given discourse.

Boff therefore proposes that there are three models for constructively understanding the coexistence of epistemic and social locations, between epistemic practice and political praxis, within the single agency of the theologian: (1) the “Specific Contribution” model; (2) the “Alternating Moments” model; and (3) the “Incarnation” model. Before returning to consolidate the implications of the interaction between the epistemic and social locations of a discourse for the enhancement of Schillebeeckx’ practical-critical soteriology and in rebuttal to Borgman, a brief sketch of these models is necessary.

In the first model, the social function of the theologian’s discourse as a mode of production is strictly identified with her or his intellectual praxis, governed by the plausibility structures of the epistemic location. The social location and productive function of the discourse is limited to the institutional setting of the university. “The theologian is the agent who performs, on behalf of a group or political movement, the specific task of reflecting upon its activity precisely in its theological meaning. Thus, in and by the intellectual or the scholarly *profession* itself, the theologian performs social work and exercises a political option.”²⁸ Boff adds, however, that this is a minimalist

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 169.

approach to the interaction between epistemic and social locations that curtails the potential for enrichment.²⁹ Not only does this reduction of the social function to the epistemic function curtail the capabilities of theological discourse to reorient sociopolitical agency, it undermines its very theoretical plausibility.

In the second model, there is a split between the epistemic function and the social function of the theologian. The theologian alternates between moments of the agitator's sociopolitical praxis aiming at the structural rehabilitation of society through preferential justice and communicative reconciliation, and moments of the scholar's intellectual praxis aiming at cognitive validity according to the theoretical norms of a university discipline.³⁰ There is a variation between kinds of praxis according to separate contexts within a unified commitment of solidarity with the eschatological promises of justice and reconciliation within emancipative movements. The struggle within this kind of oscillating shift between different kinds of praxis is to realize the conditions for fulfilling, rather than frustrating, the engagement in both.

The third basically intensifies the alternating rhythms of the previous model. The theologian is fully inserted within and subject to the living conditions of the marginalized and/or emancipative movement she or he is advocating for.

By committing themselves to a determinate political position, theologians find what they need for confident reflection on the real in correct and accurate terms. They have taken a (political) position from which they can adequately theo-

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 169.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 170.

logize a given situation. However, they must still simultaneously secure the material and socio-institutional conditions permitting them to reflect, with all rigor, on the material to be reflected on ... I must also deny that the intensity of political engagement undertaken by a theologian can tolerate the abandonment of theological rigor, or a certain economy of thought. On the contrary, the *political* intensity of the theologian must become sensible, must appear, *in the very element of theory*.³¹

The intensity of the social location of a discourse not only enriches its theoretical content with a more accurate perception and urgent appeal; this enrichment must still be plausible within the autonomous criteria of theoretical cognition. Boff remains unwilling to sacrifice the epistemic rigours of plausibility to the practical intensities of the theologian's social location. While there is a difference in degree between the second and third models, there is a difference in kind between the first and the second.

The consideration of these resources from Boff's liberationist methodological reflections suggests that Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology, as a discourse, reflects tendencies within the first model. As a discourse, practical-critical soteriology reflects a social location that is limited to the university and church communities. Practical-critical soteriology performs its practical function and exercises a political option that is limited to the institutional boundaries of these communities. This renders some of its theological theory, specifically the social scientific analysis and contextual identity of its account of sociopolitical agency, inadequate outside their borders. It also curtails the ability of practical-critical soteriology to orient sociopolitical agency beyond the university and the church.

³¹ *Ibid*, 173.

The boundaries of Schillebeeckx' discourse further implies that the identity and difference between eschatological salvation and emancipation at the heart of practical-critical soteriology is not sufficiently practical and critical. Boff censures a purely universalized dialectic between salvation and liberation that has dislocated itself from a particular historical context. While he appreciates the formal value of the principle of identity and difference, or unity in diversity, this principle

permits us to go no further than the simple observation that there is a reciprocal relationship linking salvation and liberation ... One must ask, then, to what purpose it is to theologize, if everything is already resolved in advance by the alchemy of a Chalcedonian dialectic totally contained 'in a single sentence' (Hegel): union without confusion, distinction without separation. To my view, a theology of liberation must, on the contrary, *begin* with its particular object, 'liberation' (...) in accordance with its historical materiality – that is, in accordance with the real texture that the sciences of the social seek to teach us to perceive in it. From this point of departure, it can be grasped that 'liberation' is said in respect of real oppression, of an economic, political, and ideological order, and in respect of real historical thrusts in the direction of an emancipation of the same order.³²

The formal dialectic between eschatological salvation and sociopolitical emancipation in Schillebeeckx' soteriological discourse neutralizes the practical and critical capabilities of its intent. The use of the language of liberation, when it stands alone and is not qualified by a clear surrounding association with either salvation or emancipation, remains fundamentally ambiguous in this both/and dialectic: one is never quite sure whether Schillebeeckx' use of the term "liberation" is signifying eschatological salvation alone, or emancipation alone, or the Chalcedonian dialectic between them.

³² *Ibid.*, 87.

To restore the practical-critical capabilities of Schillebeeckx' soteriology, the socio-analytic mediation is necessary. This mediation is entirely endorsed by Schillebeeckx' methodology. In the absence of any substantive integration of specific dialectical or semiotic social theories, however, Schillebeeckx' methodology remains heuristic and therefore underachieved. One can note the absence of sustained political-economic analysis, gender theorization and ecological diagnosis in his discourse despite his explicit concerns for global poverty, patriarchy and ecocide as forms of systemic oppression and alienation. In the absence of an emigration into the social sciences by acquiring some even limited specialization in sociology or political economy, the referential significations of emancipative praxis or sociopolitical liberation are attenuated at a regional contextual level, and therefore at a universal level as well. Despite recognizing the interdependence of two plausibility structures for his work in the university, the one socio-analytical and the other theological-hermeneutical, Schillebeeckx' soteriological discourse prescind from engaging social theory adequately and therefore places both kinds of plausibility at risk. This despite his methodological injunction that theology must, out of its own intrinsic necessities, be interdisciplinary and conversant with critical social theories. The Chalcedonian model, according to Boff, provides an initial approximation of the dialectic between eschatological salvation and sociopolitical liberation, but "stays on too general and abstract a level to be able to take account of concrete situations."³³ The eschatological future promised to the

³³ *Ibid.*, 86.

regnocentric praxis of justice and reconciliation suffers a subsequent loss of meaning except as a purely formal design. Practical-critical soteriology offers a heuristic but falls short of an actual development of its constitutive possibilities.

Schillebeeckx' soteriology seeks to develop a western liberation christology in the context of the dominant 1/5ths world that structurally exploits the 4/5ths world. This soteriological discourse also wants to support a progressive political praxis of emancipation that structurally transforms a sociopolitical system in its distribution of power and resources through processes of preferential justice and communicative reconciliation. These initiatives are hampered by the absence of a more rigorous and contextually grounded account of both oppression and human agency in their individual, institutional and structural complexities. I therefore submit that the epistemic location of Schillebeeckx' soteriology, as a discourse whose leading plausibility structures are situated in the church, at least partially explains the absence of such an account of oppression and human agency in society. The mutually conditioning functions of epistemic and social locations suggests that the discourse of practical-critical soteriology, in order to overcome this deficit, requires both a specialized capability in sociological and political economic knowledges as well as an explicit attachment to an emancipative movement or identification with a marginalized population.

In sum, the social location of this theology in the christian faith community qualifies his discourse as a pastoral practice nourishing the faith of believers in the churches. Schillebeeckx' soteriology has a pastoral function regulated by codes that

legitimate intellectual, homiletic and liturgical practices within the system of ecclesial traditions. The parallel social location of his theology at the university qualifies his discourse as a semiotic practice nourishing inquiry and reflection in the production of knowledge. It has an institutional function regulated by codes that legitimate communication within the university system. These kinds of practices, however, do not of themselves represent a direct political praxis. Regarding its epistemic location, Schillebeeckx' soteriology, even before its plausibility in the university, is an ecclesial soteriology of emancipation attempting to reinvigorate christian identities, innovate new religious traditions and reorient christian praxis through its theoretical plausibility in the church. Schillebeeckx intends his discourse to be theoretically plausible for christian believers, critical christian communities and discerning church leaderships in order to theologically legitimate changes in ecclesial praxis. Schillebeeckx also intends his discourse to be plausible for scholars with specialized knowledges in theology, especially as they align themselves with various phenomenological, practical hermeneutical and critically reflexive intellectual movements. Yet he first intends his soteriological discourse to be plausible for thinking believers in order to justify solidarity among the churches with movements for preferential justice and communicative reconciliation. There is an overlap of locations – ecclesial, academic and social – that renders the mutually implicating plausibility contexts more complex than in Borgman's reading. There are mutually reinforcing and mutually contesting forces at work in the overlap of plausibility contexts that renders a simple line of

analysis difficult to maintain. Even within the university itself, there are a diversity of plausibility structures regulating the theoretical quality of discourse. Schillebeeckx' favours phenomenological and hermeneutical philosophical contexts of plausibility over the empirical analyses and dialectical interpretations of social science, his transient correlation with Habermas' early critical theory notwithstanding. If, without losing its theological distinctness, the epistemic location of his discourse was also defined by plausibility structures that reside in a diversity of critical social sciences; and if his social locations were also affiliated with an institutional sociopolitical praxis located within public efforts towards the structural emancipation outside the university and the church, then Schillebeeckx' soteriological discourse might have developed differently and with a more concrete practical-critical orientation.

If these limits mark Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology, they also mark its real possibilities. I understand this diversification of epistemic and social locations to be not only consistent with the explicit purposes of Schillebeeckx' soteriology but urgently imperative for the practical-critical interpretation of emancipative praxis in relation to the eschatological surplus of the reign of God. In order to be internally consistent, the mediation that Schillebeeckx seeks between christian faith and emancipative movements, both regional and global, requires not just a methodological heuristic, but an equally theoretical as well as practical immersion in different locations of plausibility and practice. The theologian who endorses practical-critical soteriology will need to enlarge his or her epistemic and social locations beyond the church and the

university. I think the boundaries circumscribing Schillebeeckx' ecclesial epistemic and academic social locations also in part explain his inability to effect a genuinely interdisciplinary enrichment of soteriology with the knowledges of critical sociologies and political-economics. In order to fulfil the conditions for a genuine interdisciplinary enrichment of soteriological discourse, and in order to realize the socio-analytic mediation of eschatological faith for sociopolitical transformation, theologians endorsing a soteriological interpretation of sociopolitical praxis will need to differentiate their epistemic locations by developing competencies in sociological, political-economic and critical cultural knowledges. The difference between university and emancipation theologies as Borgman presents them, is not between a theology that does not reflect on praxis and a theology that does, but between the kinds of praxes each theology theoretically and institutionally identifies with, especially as these identifications are defined by epistemic and social locations. In so far as the question of epistemic and social locations raises issues concerning how discourse legitimates and contests relationships of power, the question is embedded in the dialectic between ideology and utopia.

6.III. Utopia and Ideology in Practical-Critical Soteriology

The connections Schillebeeckx posits between utopia, ideology and a political ethos are tenuous. The unthematized juxtaposition of these various functions of the

sociopolitical imagination represents a second set of aporias in the practical-critical soteriology of Schillebeeckx regarding its capabilities to sustain an emancipative political praxis. The categories of utopia and ideology are not organized together or placed into relationship with each other. They function independently of and without reference to each other in practical-critical soteriology. Utopias can distort the relationship between political praxis and the future, yet the eschatological utopia constructively projects an alternative future for society. Ideologies, by contrast, can only ever distort the relationship between praxis and current sociopolitical structures. His position, in the words of Michael Freeden, shows evidence of

ideolophobia, common not only among the general public but, regrettably, among scholars as well. Its symptoms include a pathological obsession with shrinking ideologies to a priori, doctrinaire, abstract and imposed systems of thought; and a blindness to, or serious mis-recognition of, the nature of one's own political ideas ... [W]e lack a signifier for that most central of thought-practices in a society, namely, how human beings create the interpretative conceptual maps through which they relate to their political environments.³⁴

The absence of this kind of interpretative schema in practical-critical soteriology risks further disorienting a progressive political praxis. Despite his reference to a political ethos, Schillebeeckx never endorses anything even remotely resembling an eschatological ideology, or an ideology of the eschatological community of justice and reconciliation. Schillebeeckx further advocates a democratic socialism or socialist democracy, but never establishes their relationship to eschatological salvation. He fails

³⁴ Michael Freeden, "Ideologies as Communal Resources," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 4:3 (1999) 411.

to thematize how these ideological commitments express a constructive function of the sociopolitical imagination in orienting human agency. Schillebeeckx randomly compensates for this difference by placing the role of the political ethos alongside the eschatological utopia, anticipating that there is a constructive parallel to the eschatological utopia functioning in the sociopolitical imagination. While the mediating function of a utopia is clearly rehabilitated and given an explicit emancipative content, the mediating function of a political ethos is not reconfigured to the same degree. It remains somewhat more procedural than substantive. The words of Paul Ricoeur accurately describe this asymmetrical contrast by observing that, in a secular age, eschatological faith “*est prise dans les rets du discours polémique ou apologétique. Elle se sent accusée et même se veut accusée. Et elle répond à l’accusation d’idéologie par une revendication d’utopie.* Mais en acceptant de se comprendre dans les termes de cette alternative, la foi ratifie les pseudo-concepts qui règlent ce combat ambigu (...).”³⁵ The language of ideology and utopia in Schillebeeckx’ practical-critical soteriology represents this ambiguous strategy of repudiating ideology in the name of a reconfigured utopia.

These perplexities attest to the aporetic treatment of the various functions of the sociopolitical imagination in the discourse of practical-critical soteriology. Since the

³⁵ Paul Ricoeur, “L’herméneutique de la sécularisation: foi, idéologie, utopie,” in *Archivio di filosofia* (1976) 61: “*is caught in the snares of polemical or apologetic discourse. It feels accused and even wants to be accused. And it responds to the accusation of ideology with the protest of utopia.* But in accepting to understand itself in the terms of this dichotomy, faith ratifies the pseudo-concepts that settle this ambiguous clash (...).”

sociopolitical imagination is constitutive for the orientation and capabilities of human agency, these perplexities further mystify the constructive basis for an emancipative praxis. Schillebeeckx' concepts of utopia and ideology play a decidedly limited role in disrupting current legitimations of power, but offer no real basis whereby human action can articulate social relationships free of domination and subjection. By emphasizing critiques of utopia and ideology and the projection of an eschatological utopia, the sociopolitical imagination as construed by practical-critical soteriology is limited to a deconstructive stance towards contemporary legitimations of power disparities. The sketchy role of a political ethos and the germinal recognition of a positive function in ideology insufficiently alter this predicament. The gravity of this deficit is starkly underlined by Ricoeur: "Mais la mort des idéologies ferait la plus stérile des lucidités: car un groupe social sans idéologie et sans utopie serait sans projet, sans distance à lui-même, sans représentation de soi. Ce serait une société sans projet global, livrée à une histoire fragmentée en événements tous égaux et donc insignifiants."³⁶ The sociopolitical imagination deconstructs but offers no resources to reconstruct the institutional configurations of human action within the legitimation of power which condition the integrity of life in a society. The basis for the sociopolitical imagining that represents a reconstruction of social relationships is compromised. In this way,

³⁶ Paul Ricoeur, "Science et idéologie," in *Du texte à l'action*, (Paris: Seuil, 1986), 325: "But the death of ideologies makes the most sterile of lucidities: for a social group without its ideologies and without its utopias would be without a project, with distance from itself, without representation of itself. It would be a society without a comprehensive project, delivered to a history fragmented into events all equalized and therefore meaningless."

Schillebeeckx' critique of critical negativity in Habermas' early critical theory serves as the basis for the critique of his own handling of the sociopolitical imagination. Schillebeeckx' doesn't find the strategy of critical negativity sufficiently constructive to orient emancipative praxes in the structural transformation of society. The concept of critical negativity is

ofwel een negatief 'absolutisme' ofwel het impliceert een positieve zin-horizon, maar dat zou het radicalisme van de kritische negativiteit sterk relativiseren. Op grond van mijn elders beschreven inzichten (...) kan ik geen 'philosophie du non' aanvaarden als die niet gedragen en aldus gerelativeerd wordt door een optie, en deze is in feite dan reeds een ethische en 'weltanschauliche' keuze om in de geschiedenis *zin* te realiseren. Anders gezegd: ook het 'neen' veronderstelt een hermeneia die stoelt op zin en niet op onzin.³⁷

In this decidedly Ricoeurian move, Schillebeeckx asserts the primacy of meaningfulness as the condition of possibility for the loss of meaning and its critique. Critical negativity can only be constructively negative on the basis of the possibility of an affirming positive. Radical deconstruction presupposes an implicit hermeneutics of reconstruction. The sociopolitical imagination is no exception to this. The false consciousness of utopias and ideologies imply a positive horizon of meaning in the sociopolitical imagination. The critiques of utopias and ideologies can only be supported and thus are relativized by the option to pursue the reconstruction of political

³⁷ Schillebeeckx, "Kritische theorie en theologische hermeneutiek: confrontatie," 116 / "The New Critical Theory and Theological Hermeneutics," 127-128: "either a negative 'absolutism' or it implies a positive horizon of meaning, but this would strongly relativize the radicalism of critical negativity. On the basis of my previously described insights (...) I can valorize no 'philosophie du non' which is not supported and thus relativized by an initiative, in fact by an ethics and worldview which support the decision to realize *meaning* in history. In other words, even the 'no' presupposes a hermeneutics based on meaning and not meaninglessness."

praxis with a different kind of sociopolitical imagination, tentatively proposed by a political ethos and eschatological utopia. The critique of dissimulative utopias and ideologies presupposes a hermeneutics of the positive function not only of utopias but also of ideologies in the sociopolitical imagination. By a curious twist of connections, this is precisely the capital thesis of Ricoeur's practical hermeneutics of ideology and utopia. Ricoeur's hermeneutics of ideology and utopia (1) places them in a dialectic of complementarity to each other, (2) recognizes the constitutive and positive role of each function in relation to each other, (3) explains their pathology in light of their originary elements and finally (4) articulates their pivotal significance, as functions of the imagination, for the orientation of human agency. As a point of critical entry, this hermeneutics serves to delineate the limits in order to retrieve and extend the possibilities of Schillebeeckx' soteriology.

Before entering into the details of the dialectic Ricoeur initiates between ideology and utopia, it is significant to note that Ricoeur himself signals a connection between faith and the dialectic between ideology and utopia. While faith in eschatological salvation has roots more profound than the functioning of ideology and utopia in the sociopolitical imagination, it nevertheless invigorates them:

Son ultime constitution est le déni même de la dichotomie. En tant que Remémoration de certains événements qui font époque – l'Exode, la Résurrection – elle a quelque chose en commun avec le concept positif d'idéologie. En tant qu'Attente du Royaume à venir, elle est parente du concept constituant d'utopie ... [L]a foi engendre le phénomène idéologique dans sa fonction la plus fondamentale, à savoir l'instauration d'une *identité* pour l'individu et pour la communauté ... [L]a foi engendre le phénomène utopique dans sa fonction la plus émi-

nemment constituante. Pour elle le « nulle part » n'est pas un point virtuel, ce n'est pas la case vide qui permet au jeu de commencer. C'est le Royaume qui vient, c'est l'espérance contenue dans le récitatif de l'Exode et de la Résurrection.³⁸

There is a powerful affinity between Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the dialectic between ideology and utopia in the sociopolitical imagination and eschatological faith. In contrast to Schillebeeckx, for whom the sociopolitical imagination is capable of articulating an eschatological utopia, Ricoeur also endorses an eschatological ideology, subject to reconstructive warrants, that can invigorate the identity of a community. To fully appreciate the Ricoeurian enlargement of this connection between the sociopolitical imagination and eschatological faith, the complementary dialectic between ideology and utopia invites examination. Ricoeur posits a hermeneutic of an originary meaningfulness within the functions of ideology and utopia that precedes their disintegration into distortion.

For Ricoeur, ideology and utopia function within the productive, sociopolitical imagination to orient human action through articulating and organizing a network of symbols, images and concepts. They both possess positive and negative, constructive

³⁸ Ricoeur, "L'herméneutique de la sécularisation: foi, idéologie, utopie," 66: "The ultimate constitution [of faith] is the denial of the dichotomy [between ideology and utopia]. As the remembrance of certain epoch-making events – the Exodus, the Resurrection – it has something in common with the positive concept of ideology. As the expectation of the Reign to come, it is parent to the constituting concept of utopia ... faith engenders the ideological phenomenon in its most fundamental function, namely establishing an *identity* for an individual or a community ... faith engenders the utopian phenomenon in its most eminently constituting function. For it the 'no where' is not a virtual point, it is not the zero-point that lets the game begin. It is the Reign that comes, the hope contained in the narratives of the Exodus and the Resurrection."

and destructive and finally constitutive as well as pathological functions.³⁹ Their positive functions complement each other, while their negative functions reinforce another. In order to delineate their positive complementarity and negative reinforcement, Ricoeur describes ideology and utopia separately as symbolic networks representing the identity of a society and orienting sociopolitical action.

The positive function of an ideology is to generate the identity of a community through processes of representation. The most primary function of an ideology is the function of integration. Out of the memory of foundational developments in a society, an ideology represents a network of images and ideas that constitutes its identity.⁴⁰ Ideology functions, moreover, as a cultural code to invent social cohesion through public articulation: even the convictions and insights of religious traditions, ethical positions and philosophical rationalizations, according to Ricoeur, receive their social efficacy through the rhetorical mediation of ideology.⁴¹ An ideology consolidates the identity of a society by orienting recurrent sets of actions, stabilizing processes of interaction, and organizing the structures of a sociopolitical system in the legitimation and distribution of power.⁴² An ideology mobilizes the activities of a society by

³⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, ed. G.H. Taylor, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) 1.

⁴⁰ Paul Ricoeur, "Science et idéologie," 307; "L'idéologie et l'utopie," in *Du texte à l'action*, (Paris: Seuil, 1986), 385-386.

⁴¹ Ricoeur, "Science et idéologie," 308.

⁴² Ricoeur, "Science et idéologie," 310-311; "L'herméneutique de la sécularisation: foi, idéologie, utopie," 56; "L'idéologie et l'utopie," 383-384; *Lectures on Ideology and*

justifying determinate priorities throughout broad networks of institutional agencies and structures.⁴³ Ideologies forge political decisions and public policies from the conflict of interpretations and legitimate those decisions both substantively and procedurally.⁴⁴ They compete over the goals and self-understandings at work in a society.⁴⁵ Without these generative and integrative capabilities of ideology in the imagination, there would be no cohesion delimiting an identifiable society. “Ideologies are ubiquitous, yet crucial, political phenomena,” writes Michael Freeden, “that operate at the intersection of language, power and allegiances to public goals. They are attempts to manage the uses of political language, and, through them, the political practices shaped, recalled and given voice by such language, in order to determine the policies of groups, most notably societies.”⁴⁶ Without this integrative function of an ideology, the sociopolitical imagination would never produce specific kinds of human action. In its capacity to represent identities, justify priorities, and rhetorically articulate social cohesion, an ideology is therefore a very intricate and powerful function of the imagination determining the complex interactions of human action at work in a society.

Utopia, 12-13.

⁴³ Ricoeur, “Science et idéologie,” 307.

⁴⁴ Freeden, “Ideologies as Communal Resources,” 413.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 413.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 413

Within this generative and integrating representation of a society, however, ideology is woven into the fabric of authority and the legitimation of power.⁴⁷ Within its generative and integrative function, an ideology always represents precise patterns of power and legitimates their objectives. “Ideology moves beyond mere integration to distortion and pathology as it tries to bridge the tension between authority and domination.”⁴⁸ An ideology therefore always contains the capacity for legitimating domination and dissimulating how it systemically operates. Dominant powers in turn manipulate ideology in order to maintain the disparity of power and to exploit their privilege. Ideologies function to distort the disparities in power and publicly justify them in order to preserve their benefits to dominant interests.⁴⁹ Ideology cloaks the historical contingencies and vulnerabilities of the structural disparity of power in the guise of necessity.

Yet ideologies always also retain the capacity to legitimate power differently with a measure of relatively more transparency and therefore relatively less alienation. While there is never any ideology that prescind from the representation and legitimation of structural relationships of power as determined by systemic interests, there are always ideologies that represent and legitimate power differently. Only some

⁴⁷ Ricoeur, “L’idéologie et l’utopie,” 383-384; *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 12.

⁴⁸ Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 14.

⁴⁹ Ricoeur, “Science et idéologie,” 309-310; “L’herméneutique de la sécularisation: foi, idéologie, utopie,” 56; “L’idéologie et l’utopie,” 380-383.

interests are conservative and hegemonic; others are rehabilitative and emancipative. Since their generative and integrative capabilities for representation remain distinct from their capabilities to legitimate and dissimulate, ideologies cannot be reduced to their pathological deviations.⁵⁰ Ideologies can function to disguise systems of abusive power and dissimulate the oppression they cause; but ideologies can also function in relation to different kinds of interests to articulate alternate kinds of redistributive power. They thereby can introduce relatively less opaque measures of accountability within the legitimation process itself. There is always a plurality of ideologies operative in a sociopolitical system. Each ideology remains contingent and variable in its effect.

Utopias also exercise their positive and pathological functions in the sociopolitical imagination. The positive function of utopia is to introduce a reflexive movement within the sociopolitical imagination that distantiates a society from the grip of ideologies in the formation of its identity. Utopias insist that society, in its injustices and exclusions, can be otherwise⁵¹ The current constellations of power, exploitative and alienating, are contingent and vulnerable to change. By projecting a field of the possible which is nowhere completely realized, utopia introduces imaginative variations on the dominant legitimations of power in a society.⁵² A utopia expresses all the possibilities

⁵⁰ Ricoeur, "Science et idéologie," 311.

⁵¹ Ricoeur, "L'idéologie et l'utopie," 388-389.

⁵² Ricoeur, "L'herméneutique de la sécularisation: foi, idéologie, utopie," 58; "L'idéologie et l'utopie," 389; *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 16.

of a society that are repressed or minimized.⁵³ Through utopias, a society takes distance from its ideological constructions, questions its networks of institutional agencies and structures and disrupts existing legitimations of power, especially in the disparities of power and resources these maintain.

The potential for a deviant functioning of utopia resides within its constitutive role in constructing an alternative development of society. Utopia, as the possibly otherwise that really isn't yet anywhere, can derail human action in the escapism and inefficacy of an all-or-nothing attitude. "The nowhere of utopia may become a pretext for escape, a way of fleeing the contradictions and ambiguity both of the use of power and of the assumption of authority in a given situation."⁵⁴ Fascinated with the perfect outcome and unattainable dreams, utopias can remain incapable of constructing the adequate means to attain compromising advances in the interactions that could lead to a different kind of society. In the absence of any reflection on the practical or institutional bases for enacting alternative constellations of power in real societies, "[l]'utopie," asserts Ricoeur, "marque alors l'éclipse de la praxis. Ce qu'elle *fuit* c'est la logique de l'action, qui contraint à choisir entre des biens également désirables mais incompatibles (...)." ⁵⁵ Without an intrinsic connection to human action and institutional networks of

⁵³ Ricoeur, "L'idéologie et l'utopie," 388.

⁵⁴ Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 17.

⁵⁵ Ricoeur, "L'herméneutique de la sécularisation: foi, idéologie, utopie," 57: "Utopia thus marks the eclipse of praxis. It *avoids* the logic of action, which confines to choosing between equally desirable but incompatible goods (...)."

sociopolitical agency, utopias can paralyze human action and undermine the very emancipations they advocate. “This disjunction allows the utopia to avoid any obligation to come to grips with the real difficulties of a given society.”⁵⁶ They risk igniting violent apocalyptic irruptions or ghettoizing potential movements of liberation in a sectarian bondage.

Ideologies and utopias thus both manifest a wide range of constitutive and deviant applications in the mediation between the imagination and human action at the institutional and levels of power in a society. One of the distinct features of Ricoeur’s dialectic is to argue that ideology and utopia operate as complements in their constitutive and reinforce each other in their deviant ranges.⁵⁷ As constitutive of the positive function of the sociopolitical imagination, they function as counterparts. The activities of integration and subversion co-exist in the unity of a single productive imagination.⁵⁸ There is an element of projection in ideologies and thus a utopian dimension enters into the construction of a sociopolitical identity. There is an ideological element of representation in every utopia, and there is a utopian element of projection in every ideology. Several other parallelisms within the productive imagination emerge.⁵⁹ Where an ideology functions to construct and limit the

⁵⁶ Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 17.

⁵⁷ Ricoeur, “L’herméneutique de la sécularisation: foi, idéologie, utopie,” 59; “L’idéologie et l’utopie,” 380 and 391; *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 16-17 and 311.

⁵⁸ Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 16-17.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 310-311.

possibilities of a sociopolitical identity, a utopia de- and reconstructs them. Whereas ideology stabilizes, utopia destabilizes the legitimation of power. Whereas ideology distorts in order to maintain existing disparities, utopia fantasizes in order to redescribe and thus rehabilitate the responsibilities of power. While ideology presents a conservative picture preserving dominant interests, utopia composes a contesting fiction of emancipated outcomes. Ricoeur thus concludes that

Il semble, en effet, que nous ayons toujours besoin de l'utopie, dans sa fonction fondamentale de contestation et de projection dans un ailleurs radical, pour mener à bien une critique également radicale des idéologies. Mais la réciproque est vraie. Tout se passe comme si, pour guérir l'utopie de la folie où elle risque sans cesse de sombrer, il fallait en appeler à la fonction saine de l'idéologie.⁶⁰

We must try to cure the illnesses of utopia by what is wholesome in ideology – by its element of identity, which is once more a fundamental function of life – and try to cure the rigidity, the petrification, of ideologies by the utopian element.⁶¹

These two fundamental modes of the sociopolitical imagination are complementary not only as parallel functions but in a profoundly and inescapably mutual interaction among their constitutive and deviant roles.

Ricoeur attempts to align the repercussions of his hermeneutics of the dialectic between ideology and utopia with the correlation between faith and sociopolitical action

⁶⁰ Ricoeur, "L'idéologie et l'utopie," 391: "It appears, in effect, that we always have need of utopia, in its fundamental function of contestation and the projection of a radical other place, to complete an equally radical critique of ideologies. But the inverse is true. It is as if, in order to heal utopia of the folly to which it incessantly risks ceding, it is necessary to call upon the sane function of ideology."

⁶¹ Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 312.

in secular politics. This leads Ricoeur, in proposing to carry forward the repercussions of faith in terms of this complementary dialectic, to conclude that eschatological faith (1) both is and is not ideological; as well as (2) both is and is not utopian.⁶² Faith is and is not ideological: it *is*, in so far as, in order to become publicly influential among the networks of sociopolitical action determining the distribution of power, faith has no choice but to enter into the risk and promise of ideologies in their constitutive as well deviant functions. Faith *is not* ideological, at the very least in the sense that eschatological faith always exercises a utopian critique of ideologies and therefore destabilizes the entrenched grip of their excesses. In addition, faith is and is not utopian: faith *is*, in the sense that, even without a well-defined or definitive secular content, it projects perspectives which provoke and inspire imperative sociopolitical tasks; while faith *is not* utopian, at the very least in the sense that it is not a vision which paralyzes human agency with inaction or extremism since it is inevitably ideological (within qualifying warrants). Ricoeur thus attempts to open up the possibility that eschatological faith in the reign of God, as the community of justice and reconciliation promised in the exodus of Israel and ratified in the resurrection of Jesus, can enter into the procedural and substantive initiatives conditioning the legitimation of power. Faith in eschatological

⁶² Ricoeur, "L'herméneutique de la sécularisation: foi, idéologie, utopie," 64-66.

salvation enters these initiatives through the constitutive, equally ideological as utopian orientations of the sociopolitical imagination.⁶³

What are the repercussions of the complementary dialectic between ideology and utopia by way of a critical entry into rehabilitating the liabilities of Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology? The entry of Ricoeur's dialectic offers a comprehensive, rather than tenuous, articulation of the sociopolitical imagination. This offers to reprimatinate the capacity of Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology to orient human agencies towards an emancipative praxis. The description of ideology as a constitutive function entwined in the legitimization of power also strengthens the ability of soteriological discourse to realistically mobilize and negotiate the complexities of institutional agency and structural systems integral to the reconstruction of power differentials. Schillebeeckx' soteriology is set back by a truncated understanding of the sociopolitical imagination. There are elements of the sociopolitical imagination which intimate the larger dialectic, such as when Schillebeeckx acknowledges the positive function of ideology, identifies the escapism and violent potential of deviant utopias, and articulates the disruptive function of utopias. But the minimalist outcomes of his

⁶³ Ricoeur has hinted at the possibility that his practical hermeneutics of human action and the capable human agent, the *homo capax*, is really an attempt to lay the phenomenological foundation for a political theology that deconstructs relationships of domination through the conviction of living together in just institutions. While he never resumes his reflection on faith and the dialectic between ideology and utopia, one suspects that it would find its development in the Ricoeurian political theology, for what are ideologies and utopias in their positive and generative functions if they aren't convictions orienting a just society? See Paul Ricoeur, "Expérience et langage dans le discours religieux," in *Paul Ricoeur: l'herméneutique à l'école de la phénoménologie*, (Paris: Beauchesne, 1995), 179 fn. 3.

sketchy accounts of the imagination and institutional stand to be rehabilitated through the introduction of the differentiated resources named in the dialectic between ideology and utopia. The positive role of ideology, in its generative and consolidating functions, supplies a more appropriate basis from which to represent the convictions of eschatological faith regarding justice and reconciliation in the identity-formation of a society. With its connection to negotiating the constraints of power, the ideological representation of insights from the eschatological surplus and proviso can enter into the networks of institutional agencies as they legitimate systems of power and establish public priorities. By making the liberating initiatives of preferential justice and unrestricted reconciliation available to the representation of a society through the constitutive function of ideology, Ricoeur's dialectic renews the social efficacy of the public mandates of practical-critical soteriology. This in turn enlarges the capability of soteriology's practical and critical intent to enter into and influence the complexities of sociopolitical praxis beyond the marginal realm of ecclesial ministries and the civic duties of individual Christians.

The Ricoeurian dialectic also assists practical-critical soteriology in specifying its engagement of social theory. The engagement of specific instances of dialectical or semiotic theories remains underdeveloped in practical-critical soteriology. This soteriology sets itself a task which it does not carry through. While epistemic and social locations partially account for this, Schillebeeckx acknowledges that ideological interests also play their role. Schillebeeckx does not explain which ideological interests

guide *his* selection of social theories. Ricoeur reminds us that there is no discourse that can prescind from an ideological or utopian location; there is only the discourse that, aware of its location, accounts for how this intervenes in the construction and communication of knowledge. This still includes negotiating the repercussions of being determined by location in such a way as to enhance the accountability of a discourse to codes of epistemic plausibility and emancipative interest. But to minimize the ideological determination of discourse as if epistemic plausibility and emancipative interest were sufficient to galvanize sociopolitical agency into liberating movements disregards the constitutive roles of ideology and utopia at its own risk. The choice of social theory is already in itself an ideological decision with respect to constructing legitimations of power. One can enter into the selection aware of its repercussions for the disparities of power and those burdened by its cruelties, either resisting them with critical-practical commitments or enabling them with indecision, generalities and deliberate theoretical support. All of these stances are, in their own way, ideological. Unless practical-critical soteriology clarifies its ideological stance in addition to its utopian inspiration, it undermines its very own practical and critical intent. An explicit, even if revisable, ideological stance is necessary to influence the appropriate selection of dialectic and semiotic social theories in assisting practical-critical soteriology.

In retrospect, Schillebeeckx argues to establish the impossibility of a radical deconstructive critique that does not rest on a preceding affirmation that renders the critique possible to begin with. This Ricoeurian hermeneutic is also at work in the

dialectic of ideology and utopia, for, as Ricoeur insists, ideological and utopian deviations are only possible because of the metaphorical and epistemological priority of ideologies and utopias in their constitutive function. For Ricoeur, every knowledge is at least in part conditioned by ideology, both in its constitutive and its deviant possibilities, since it is unable to arrive at a total reflection whereby it extricates itself from an ideological investment in society.⁶⁴ There is an ideological boundary to every discourse, even the most universal. The effort to completely extricate discourse out of its embeddedness in a class, culture or traditions remains out of reach, since discourse fundamentally belongs to these locations in a way that can never totally be thematized and hence cognitively managed.

Avant toute distance critique, nous appartenons à une histoire, à une classe, à une nation, à une culture, à une ou des traditions. En assumant cette appartenance qui nous précède et nous porte, nous assumons le tout premier rôle de l'idéologie, celui qui nous avons décrit comme fonction médiatrice de l'image, de la représentation de soi; par la fonction intégrative des idéologies, nous participons aussi aux autres fonctions de l'idéologie, fonctions de justification et de distorsion. Mais nous savons maintenant que la condition ontologique de précompréhension exclut la réflexion totale qui nous mettrait dans la condition avantageuse du savoir non idéologique.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Ricoeur, "Science et idéologie," 323.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 328: "Before all critical distance, we belong to a history, to a class, to a nation, to a culture, to one or more traditions. In entering into this belonging which precedes and carries us, we enter into the very first role of ideology, that which we have described as the mediating function of the image, the representation of self; through the integrative function of ideologies, we also participate in the other functions of ideology, the functions of justification and distortion. But we now know that the ontological condition of pre-understanding excludes the total reflection that would place us in the advantageous condition of non-ideological knowing."

There is no discourse, then, not even practical-critical soteriology, that can extricate itself from belonging to an ideological mediation constructing the legitimation of power; there is only the discourse that takes responsibility for its ideological texture, and thereby diversifies its capabilities to challenge the legitimation it is implicated in. Since discourse is ideologically enmeshed in the full range of generative and deviant functions, only the effort to render the ideological workings of discourse ever more transparent will hold it accountable for its practical and critical claims. This, then, is the boundary of every discourse, whether regionally contextual or interactively universal. Consistent with its own hermeneutical conviction, the Schillebeeckxian discourse of a practical-critical soteriology must acknowledge the boundaries of its ideological texture in order to enter into the communication of its possibilities.

6.IV. The Future of Love: Justice and Reconciliation

Schillebeeckx provides a heuristic for advancing the correlation between eschatological faith and political praxis. Situated in the church for its leading epistemic and social locations, Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology represents a discourse in and for the churches. This ecclesial soteriology articulates the eschatological imperatives which theologically legitimate the theologies of emancipation. Perhaps within this articulation there is the hope that, once legitimated, the churches might support theologies of emancipation to establish the sociocritical and practical

plausibility of their eschatological initiatives in society. The ecclesial soteriology of liberating emancipation remains significant for the university and society, but only precisely in so far as the churches can critically and practically validate this discourse in reconstructive sociopolitical praxes. This requires a corresponding diversity of epistemic and social locations within soteriological discourse itself. Amidst diversified epistemic and social locations, this further entails entering the risk and promise of ideological and utopian ranges of the sociopolitical imagination. Finally, through engaging the ideological and utopian textures of discourse and diversifying its locations, practical-critical soteriology can identify the particular dialectical or semiotic social theories that will contribute to grounding it in specific contexts of liberating praxis.

The danger of a purely formal heuristic, however, is that it disintegrates in an essentializing discourse that remains fundamentally ambiguous for emancipative praxis in the political communication of the promises of salvation. Schillebeeckx' heuristic remains susceptible to utopian deviation by incapacitating human action. This deviant utopian direction, however, would not manifest itself, according to the Ricoeurian dialectic, unless the constitutive utopian were also at play. Therefore, like any heuristic, Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology decisively represents a framework for advancing an alternative praxis and accompanying dialogue. It does not represent all the necessary elements of the correlation between eschatological faith and political praxis, some of which are necessarily ideological. But it allows these elements to come forth and enter into movement, allowing them to explore their relationships and

purposes with each other. This being its intrinsic promise, it is also the intrinsic limit of Schillebeeckx' practical-critical soteriology. For many issues remain that are not sufficiently grappled with. Some elements still need to emerge if this practical-critical soteriology of liberating emancipations is effectively going to carry forth the public mandates of preferential justice and unrestricted reconciliation in the communication of an always more, since eschatologically abundant, love. Within the fragmented identity and productive difference between emancipation and salvation, the solidarity of love becomes available, perhaps even meaningful and believable. The eschatological surplus of love abides in the future promised to the provisional and even failed praxes of preferential justice and universal reconciliation, embracing the struggling downtrodden, the humiliated dead and the mutilated earth. The promise of this surplus leaves us with an urgent call to risk fragile liberations yielding fragments of salvation. This promise stirs our dreams and breathes life into our hopes amidst the overwhelming ambiguities of tragic, yet never always only tragic, histories of suffering.

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