

The implications of E Schillebeeckx's theology of liberation for anthropology and creation

ABSTRACT

The relevance of E Schillebeeckx's theology for the South African context is seen in the implications of his theology for anthropology and creation. He has construed an experiential and contextual theology which unravelled the intrinsic correlation between "Christian liberation" and "modern emancipation". In Christology, according to him, all aspects of theology are integrated. Even though some of the Schillebeeckx readers assume that his concern for liberation theology is a recent concern, Schillebeeckx himself has stated on the contrary that it is the golden thread throughout his theological endeavours. The dialogical relationship between church and world makes it impossible for the church to remain silent when they hear the cries of downtrodden and helpless people. This choice is so radical that it means more than even the confession of God. Hermeneutics is therefore not only the understanding of the Scriptures, but it is an instrument of renewal of man and world in the dialectical tension between history and eschatology.

1. THESIS

The thesis of this paper is that the theology of Prof Edward Schillebeeckx of Nijmegen has direct implications for anthropology and the integrity of creation which is highly relevant for our South African context.

The problems, with which this thesis confronts us, are:

- Why does Schillebeeckx call his theology a theology of liberation?
- What role does anthropology and creation play in his systematic biblical approach?
- What are the implications of this theology for our situation?
- How can we evaluate this theology and its implications in a satisfactory manner?

2. METHOD AND GOAL

As an appetizer we will firstly have a look at his developing a full-blown Western contextual theology. This includes his view of the relationship between "liberation" and "emancipation". In the following section we will scrutinise the core of his theology: Christology. This will make it clear that Christology binds together all the essential aspects of theology. In the third and final section the implications of Schillebeeckx's theology of liberation for our South African context with regard to anthropology and creation will be expounded. In this section we will also focus on the problem of evaluating the theological contribution of Edward Schillebeeckx.

We will not pay attention to the historical development of Schillebeeckx's thought, but his ideas will be synthesised and used as a tool to scrutinise our own situation. The proof of the

pudding lies in the eating thereof. It will also be done in a critical fashion to distinguish between the wheat and the chaff. The aim of this paper is not to supply easy made answers, but to provoke lively discussions and to stimulate thought and further action.

3. LIBERATION THEOLOGY IN THE NETHERLANDS?

It is common knowledge that there are different prevailing types of political theologies in Europe. Schillebeeckx's is nevertheless the first theologian of the First World with the audacity to call his own theology a "theology of liberation" without provoking protest from Latin-American and African theologians. G. Gutierrez (1983:224) for example has voiced his high regard for the dialogical relationship between church and world which Schillebeeckx advocates in sharp contrast to the earlier "monologue" of the church as if the world has no voice of its own.

It is important to note that the intention of building a theology of liberation is not a "recent interest" as one of his renowned pupils described his thought (Schreier 1989:151). According to Schillebeeckx this interest has for a long while been deeply imbedded in his theology as the leading theme (V: 188). It has been running like a golden thread throughout his theology since 1968.

This "interesse" was cultivated by a thorough study of on the one hand Neo-Marxism which led him to J. Habermas and his critical sociology as a way of dismantling ideologies (cf. I: 164-208); and on the other hand by a critical historical and literary study of the New Testament to examine the relationship between liberation as a biblical reality and the need of modern man for emancipation on all different levels of life (cf. his Christological trilogy J. G and V). He synthesised his thought into an ecumenical and pastoral fundamental theology which addresses the basic questions of men and women in Europe, but also cross-culturally in other parts of the world (cf. Malan 1990:169-210).

In concrete terms this meant doing theology in a new modus and with a different interest. In opposition to the classical "Roman" theologians, Schillebeeckx's theology is not aimed at preserving the Catholic Church institutionally and therefore apologetically. To him theology is to ascertain whether the praxis of the church is "secundam scripturas". Praxis is therefore always the precursor of theology. He regards theory as a function of the Christian praxis (1980b: 116). Orthopraxy moves more to the forefront as a criterion in his theology than orthodoxy. This is crystal clear when he writes that the choice in the struggle between right and wrong, between oppressors and oppressed, is more vital than the confession of God (V:27).

Hermeneutics, to Schillebeeckx, does not only entail better understanding of the cosmos, but it is indeed an instrument of renewal of creation in the dialectical tension between history and eschatology. The problem of our modern history of liberation is the problem of emancipation within a new horizon of understanding and praxis (J: 545, G: 752; cf. also 1986:32 on the correct approach to theology). "The basic hermeneutic problem of theology, then, is not so much the question of the relationship between the past (scripture and tradition) and the present, but between theory and practice, and this relationship can no longer be solved idealistically, by a theory of Kantian pure reason from which consequences flow for the practical reason, but it will have to be shown how the theory appears in the praxis itself. How, for example, can religious freedom, as formulated by Vatican II, be deduced by purely theoretical exegesis from the church's past? The church's practice in the past at least contradicts this theory rather seriously. Only a new praxis in the church can make the new interpretation credible ..." (S: 116).

The problem, however, still remains: Can a modern, white priest, living in a monastic order in a privileged society, steeped in the Western academic tradition and professor of doctoral students only, have any credibility propounding a theology of liberation?

The answer lies in the first instance in the self-critical attitude of Schillebeeckx. He regards the question of the position of the theologian in the university, the churches, the congregations (basisgemeenskappe – cf. S:200-202) and in daily life as an urgent question. The theologian must take cognisance of the objective society in which he finds himself, as well as the academic-scientific tradition within which he operates. The power-structures in the church and the society must be critically apprehended. This is the way in which he tries to overcome the problem of creating new ideologies (1983:4, 5). The context, in which he practices his theology, is in the first instance the context of world-poverty. In this situation the universal gospel obtains a new social dimension (V:188).

The second reason why Schillebeeckx has integrity in the circles of the churches and theologians in the so-called Third World is the fact that he regards experience of the suffering mankind as the concrete starting point of his theology, not one or other theory or formula (cf. Galvin 1989:66). Furthermore, the theological method of Schillebeeckx, especially his focus on praxis, is acceptable to them. His experience-based theology is far removed from the Western scholastic theology (cf. Krasevac 1986).

Praxis is the main task of the critical theory, which became the basis for his writings on church and world, on ethics and ministry, and it was still markedly part of his theology in the 1980's (Schreiter). The meaning of "emancipative praxis" to Schillebeeckx is explained by Schreiter as follows: "More than the theoretical understanding of hermeneutical theology, this approach calls for a liberating understanding of hermeneutical theology, this approach calls for a liberating of consciousness from a false understanding (ideology) which in turn calls for contesting the dominant view of society" (S:107).

Schillebeeckx's history of intercession on behalf of the Latin-American Christians, especially his concern on the eve of the historical Puebla-conference, will not be lightly forgotten (cf. 1978b:3).

Western critique which does not acknowledge the evangelical inspiration of the Latin American theology is discarded by Schillebeeckx (G:699). Even so, he puts his own critical questions to the theology of liberation. It is especially the identification of the church with the class-struggle which, according to him, is a travesty of the gospel. No social class can, in the light of the universality of God's grace, be regarded as the universal subject and torch-bearer of the meaning of history (1978b:14). He criticises the political theology of J.B. Metz on these grounds by saying that Metz's theology implies that the suffering person is the "universal subject" of history (G:694-696).

Marxism is, according to Schillebeeckx, not the best instrument of practicing solidarity with the poor. Critical-sociological results made it clear that other ways of analysing society are more fruitful (G:726; 1986:73).

In the second and third part of this paper the appeal of Schillebeeckx to the Christian to show solidarity with the poor and down-trodden will be expounded. We now turn to the second part: Christ, liberation and creation.

4. CHRISTOLOGY AS CONCENTRATED CREATION

Schillebeeckx defines Christology as "concentrated creation". This is without doubt his most radical and fundamental statement on Christology. The first two articles of the Apostolicum are thereby linked and the second is placed in the circumference of the first. Christology as "concentrated creation" means that God loves us without any condition or merit from our side by revealing Himself as the Creator, the God of humans. The concentration of creation in Christ also points at the finality of the redemptive work of God in Jesus of Nazareth. Christ is love made flesh.

Christology is creation underlined, concentrated and condensed: faith in creation as God wishes it to be” (1980a:78).

The actual history of humanity frustrated the promise of creation. Nevertheless, God fulfils this promise by installing his reign of peace. “Israels oude droom van komende rijk als sjaloom voor mensen, in handen van de mens gelegd, is dan ook de verwachtings- en ervarings-horizon waarbinnen Jezus gezien en geïnterpreteerd moet worden, dè mens in wie de *scheppingsopdracht* is geslaagd, zij het nog binnen de condities van een lijdensgeschiedenis” (T:126, my emphasis). In a dialectical fashion Schillebeeckx can maintain on the one hand, that salvation is not in our hands, and on the other hand, in our history the future of God is being decided (1976:99).

Schillebeeckx described Jesus as concentrated creation because it illuminates the unique place of Jesus in God’s redemptive plan and acts. Irenaeus definition is almost programmatic for Schillebeeckx to describe the relationship between God and man: “Gloria Dei, vivens homo. Vita autem hominis, visio Dei” (G:728, 742). Faith in this man Jesus is concretisation of our faith in God as Creator (T:127).

In Jesus creation and eschatology are one. He is the alpha and the omega. The covenant is fulfilled in his person (T:125). In the Old Testament the wonders of creation are being exalted in the framework of the Exodus. Liberating yourself is in this light a command given by our Creator which encompasses our whole life. In this way the Western dualism between church and world, reason and faith is superseded. “In de christelijke beleving heeft men vaak de eenheid van schepping en verbond verbroken. De Schepper zelf is de Verlosser en zelfs in zijn verlossende activiteit treedt Hij goddelijk op, d.i. per definitie scheppend, derhalve *zonder* dat er rivaliteit bestaat tussen wat Hij doet en wat wij, geground in Hem, zelf doen” (G:704,705, his emphasis).

Jesus’ experience of God as “Abba” is the experience of God as the Power of the future by redeeming us through love. This is interconnected with creation. In the Jewish tradition creation means to “rebuild that which was broken” (J:220).

Creation, salvation and the completion of creation depend on Christ. There is no historical pattern of creation, fall and redemption. Creation is a free gift of God. Human frailty is not sin and God does not want to save us from transience. He does, however, want to be our God in all transitoriness (T:131).

The relationship between Christology and anthropology is of vital importance in Schillebeeckx’s creation theology. Theology is not anthropology, according to him, but every theological statement is also an anthropological statement (G:48,49). The acknowledgement of God as God is simultaneously the recognition of the humanity of man (J:513). For Jesus the reign of God is not a concept of doctrine, but an experience or reality (J:116). God’s plan with humanity was revealed in Jesus (J:493). Living man is the fundamental symbol of God: the image of God (T: 69). Not only man’s spirit is made in God’s image. Man is spirit-embodied in a substantial unity. Albeit unity is not monism. Man differs from even the most complex other living creatures. Liberty and thought constitute man and woman as humans (1970a:121).

According to M.C. Hilkert (1984:186,187), an excellent interpreter of Schillebeeckx’s theology, the central scope of his theological project is the negative contrast experiences of humanity. This experience calls for decisive praxis. Rather than choosing one or other anthropological model, Schillebeeckx opts for the one aspect which is present in all different anthropologies: the negative experience of suffering.

His negative starting point helps to analyse and identify underlying ideologies which are detrimental to human well-being. “Heil en menselijkheid, heel-zijn, integriteit op waarlijk menselijk-vrije wijze is juist het *thema* van heel het verhaal van de mens” (G:673). It cautions him also to associate too easily or fully with one or other party or class, because the Name of God and Jesus Christ can be misused by oppressors as well as freedom fighters (V:30). In this light, it is of

the utmost importance that all different political policies in the South African society must be examined in the light of the reign of God. Every ideology which is harmful to human freedom and well-being must be unmasked.

The Christian norms which Schillebeeckx believes must be built anew, is not a mere restatement of the norms which were used in New Testament times. On the basis of his historical hermeneutics he uses the concept of historical mediation to define norms for our own situation which has the same function and goal as the norms functioning in the first Christian community, the furtherance of the reign of God. These norms must be cultivated through a critical consciousness in which the critical rationality must be self-critical (G:673).

He discerns seven anthropological constant elements (in contradistinction to a positivist, philosophical or Marxist definition of true humanity) which he sees as secure values. These values must be concretised anew by creating new norms in our dynamic historically changing process. In the light of these values different norms can be shaped which will ensure that humans, their culture and society are not disgraced and hurt. In this way human dignity and well-being are being enhanced (G:674).

The seven constant elements are the following:

1. The relationship to our human corporeality, nature and our ecological milieu.
2. Humanity as co-humanity.
3. Our relation to societal and institutional structures.
4. Time and space structure of person as well as culture.
5. The correct relationship between theory and praxis.
6. The religious and semi-religious consciousness of humanity.
7. Synthesis of all six dimensions as necessary prerequisite for human well-being (G:674 and further)

History and culture are both dynamic realities which function throughout in his anthropology. Culture is an integral part of humanity. The return to a natural, non-cultural brotherhood advocated by the *Aufklärung* is dismissed by Schillebeeckx as unreal and without any substance, because it still leaves the outcasts in the cold (J:484,485).

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR ANTHROPOLOGY AND CREATION IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

5.1 Christian anthropology

J. Kinghorn (1988:112,13) said the problem of our South African situation has an anthropological character. By evaluating liberal, racist and nationalist anthropologies in our recent past, he tries to stimulate further theological thought “oor die mens as mens, as medemens en as samelewingsmens, dit wil sê oor die strukturele orde van menswees”.

We are not talking about man in an abstract and idealistic fashion, but as man *coram Deo*. In this perspective the whole creaturely reality of man is acknowledged (Berkouwer 1957:213). It must not be forgotten that Schillebeeckx states emphatically that religion is an anthropological constant element and every liberation which does not include religious salvation, can only partially be liberation. If such liberation happens in the guise of total liberation, it diminishes a real dimension of our humanity and works destructively rather than furthering liberation (G:681).

5.2 Ideologies

For the past forty years we have lived in a society where ethnicity was regarded as the most important aspect of humanity. This was, anthropologically speaking, the most fundamental

ideological thought-pattern which was instilled in people's minds, consciously and subconsciously. Structurally this idea was embodied in laws as well as the attitudes of society.

Cardinal Owen McCann said in 1983 that Pope John Paul II urged the bishops to bring peace to their country by the eradication of discrimination, because he saw South Africa as a state where racialism ruled, and it filled people with abhorrence (in Malan DJ in Du Toit 1988:129).

For Schillebeeckx, the problem of South Africa lies in the existence of what he calls "the non-person, the poor and down-trodden" in a country which has been ruled by Christians for centuries. This is a source of vexation for every Christian and as a result of this discrimination our faith loses credibility to many modern people (V:73).

Our South African society was also ruled, to a higher or lesser degree, by economic laws. Materialism is a way of life for many of the rich and idealised by many of the poor.

According to Schillebeeckx, the problem with the political reason of mankind is not in the first instance the wickedness of man or his struggle for power, but the structural influences of a system of values in which neither political reason nor the "humanum" has the priority, but the economy. "De vraag is, of niet de door collega Kuitert erkende evidente noodsituaties bv. in Zuid-Afrika en Latijns-Amerika wezenlijk en structureel ook te maken hebben met wat in onze westerse democratieën en welvaartsstaten gaande is, zodat de spanningen o.m. tussen de noord en zuid-as en de oost en west-as, alsook de fundamenteel triestige, mondiale verschillen in verdelende rechtvaardigheid van de materiële en geestelijke goederen en van arbeid, de hedendaagse politieke wereld in breedte en lengte, in hoogte en diepte tot één grootste noodsituatie maken. Hoewel ik als gelovige vertrouwen schenk aan het gebruik van de politieke rede in een democratisch bestel, toch moet ik als kritisch gelovige de wetten doorzien waardoor in een wereldbestel van prioriteit van economische en vaak ook militaire belangen, de politieke rede gemanipuleerd wordt en ideologisch gaat functioneren" (1986:77). (The work of H M Kuitert to which he refers, is *Alles is politiek, maar politiek is niet alles*, Baarn 1985). This viewpoint of Schillebeeckx is important because of the clear criterion and value which he underlines: the human person. In our society and our churches this value must also be underlined from a Christological perspective (cf. Du Toit 1988:69,73). The well-being of humans may not be sacrificed to economic or military "priorities".

5.3 The poor and oppressed

In our situation in the changing South Africa, the light of the Christian values will have to be carried to all levels of society through the praxis of the Christian churches. Schillebeeckx exhorts us to live according to the praxis of the reign of God in solidarity with all people, and because of this, in a partisan choice for the poor and oppressed. This implies taking a stand against the oppression of the powerful and structures which are dehumanising (V:50). We should sound a warning signal at this point because of certain tendencies in the ecumenical theology of Schillebeeckx in which the truth of our confession is made a secondary reality to taking sides with the outcasts and the downtrodden. Against his Roman Catholic background it is understandable that praxis (good works!) is being elevated to the function of creating salvation. Soteriology is regarded as analytical, not synthetic (cf. Jonker 1981:61).

In our society the problems of the poor is the responsibility of the whole nation. Schillebeeckx warns against fleeing our social responsibility through a false trust in our eschatological hope (V:73). The churches may not be divided on which anthropological model to use (cf. König 1988:79-87 for different models). In the light of the teaching of Scriptures we must act upon the needs of our society. Poverty and everything it entails must be seen as a calling of God. The "negative contrast experience" Schillebeeckx speaks about can be used as starting point for ecumenical discussion and action.

How does Schillebeeckx see “praxis”? He defines it as doing what Jesus did; likewise we have to reach out to people. “Handelen zoals Jezus doet, is *praxis van het rijk Gods* en laat dan ook zien wàt rijk Gods is: heil voor mensen” (V:137).

5.4 Anthropology and creation

This last constant element in the anthropological coordination-system of Schillebeeckx is the most important of the seven elements and an important contribution of Schillebeeckx in the theological debate on anthropology. The implications for our theme is made explicit in the following quotation: “Christelijk heil ... heeft dus te maken met h  l het coördinatensysteem waarin de mens waarlijk mens kan zijn. Men kan dit heil - h  l-zijn van mensen – niet zoeken in slechts de ene of de andere van deze constanten, bv. In uitsluitend ecologische creten, in uitsluitend lief zijn voor elkaar, in uitsluitende omverwerping van een economisch bestel (marxistisch of kapitalistisch) of in uitsluitend mystieke ervaringen: “halleluia! Hij is verzezen!”. Anderzijds is de *synthese* van dit alles een duidelijk al-reeds en nog-niet “ (G:683, his emphasis).

One implication of his theology for creation is his appreciation of technology and science as instruments of enhancing human well-being. However, he also warns against a total trust in science and technology and the ideal of technocratic control over nature. “Niet de wetenschap of techniek met hun mensbevorderende mogelijkheden staan aldus onder kritiek, wel vaak hun impliciete vooronderstellingen” (G:676).

On the modern cultural horizon modernity is the dominant impulse. It produced two negative results: the technological and bureaucratic West caused a deficit of experience, and the unlimited freedom and human rights have become oppressive and repressive in itself. The new values of modernity must in a “post-modern” sense be made fruitful so that freedom will be closely related to solidarity with all people, especially those who are not free (V:71,72).

5.5 Violence

In our situation of uncontrollable violence the churches are called to witness that God is the mystery of all-encompassing love (V:151). Jesus brought God back in the experience of mankind (G:469). This is especially true in God’s way of liberation. Jesus’ liberation is a way of suffering, not a way with weapons of injustice. “Jezus kiest voor de verlossende en bevrijdende liefde, die wel nie *onmiddellijk* ontwapenend is en de ander tot inkeer brengt- integendeel vaak-, maar “desondanks” zal de liefde het uiteindelijk halen op geweld” (G:637, 638).

The ecclesiology of Schillebeeckx is the bond between his anthropology and his view of creation. The churches are not in itself the kingdom of God. The church is the sacrament (a sign which is being effectuated) of the oneness or *communion* of the whole of humanity through her oneness with the living God (1966a:100,101; 1966b:54, 55).

Schillebeeckx states that Jesus left us a living community of believers. “Niet een heilige rest, maar eerstelingen van de verzameling van heel Israel, en ten slotte van heel het memdom. Met ander woorden: *een eschatologische bevrijdendebeweging, met als doel alle mensen te verzamelen en tot eenheid te brengen*, tot vrede: onderling, met elkaar en alle volkeren, en met de natuur. En dit alles op grond van de eenheid met de levende God” (V:176, my emphasis).

The role of the church as agent of peace and reconciliation is therefore of the utmost importance.

To Schillebeeckx the centre of all salvation is justification through grace. All other aspects of liberation are illuminated and seen in perspective from this viewpoint (G:770). Liberation and reconciliation is closely related.

This is exemplified in the history of reconciliation of Jacob and Esau (Gen 32:25-32). This is of great significance especially to black and white estranged “brothers in Christ” in South Africa.

Jacob is changed radically in his nightly encounter with God, and as a new man he confronts his brother. “In het elkaar wederzijds aamvaarden en bevestigen in een persoonlikje, verzoenende ontmoeting van Jakob en Esau, licht het aangezicht van God zelf op ... Op het gelaat van verzoenende mensen straalt als de zon het eigen gelaat van God. Daarom noemde Jakob de plaats Pniël, d.i. aanschijn van God, want ik heb God gezien van aanschijn tot aanschijn en *ik mocht leven* ... Verzoenden hebben bestaansrecht, het recht om te leven. Verzoening is leven, mogen leven. Zij maakt ons leven, binnen onze geschiedenis van lijden en onrecht, de moeite om te leven waard” (G:701-703).

6. CONCLUSION

This paper illustrates the central scope of Edward Schillebeeckx’s contextual theology. He believes that the relevance of theology depends on the churches’ ability to draw the line from liberation to salvation and vice versa. Schillebeeckx’s liberation theology is a bridge between the theologies of the First and the Third World and is critical of Marxist thought as well as Western economic values. It is primarily his Christology which provides him with a clear view of anthropology and creation and highlights the church’s role in the process of reconciliation and renewal. It is especially his anthropological coordinates which can serve as a basis of ecumenical discourse in our South African context.

The implications of his theology for the South African situation are:

- It demands a critical attitude towards the current value-systems.
- By implementing historical hermeneutics he challenges us to respond to the problems of our own age – especially the presuppositions of a scientific and technocratic worldview.
- In thought and action the Christians must be on the forefront, proclaiming God’s rule as liberating to men and women everywhere, especially to the sick, the poor and the needy.
- In our post-apartheid era we will have to learn to communicate anew and to experience the love of Christ which transcends cultural and political differences. The true opposite to an ideology of separation is not a new ideology of unity (where everyone still fends for himself), but the gospel of peace, communion and grace (cf. König 1988:87). The implication of such an attitude is concern for the needy and taking responsibility to act on one another’s behalf. This implies also the restoration of the value of the human person in totality (cf. the six dimensions of being human).
- In a society in which race is still the dominant factor even ten years since apartheid has been demolished, the most basic problem in South Africa is the division of races by the race classification act. This act has been a cornerstone of the apartheid era and many churches e.g. the Catholic Bishops of South Africa, regarded it as evil (Malan DJ, in Du Toit DA *Die Mens en sy regte*, Zebra, Cape Town, 1988, pp 127). It is unbelievable that it is still being kept intact by the new government in SA. It is the basis for new forms of discrimination in which skin colour determines work, the opportunity to study and the freedom of which Martin Luther King dreamt, seems to be just that: a dream ... Is it possible that some day in South Africa our children will be judged not by the colour of their skin, but by their character, virtue and talents?
- The love between Christians of different Churches and their actions to change the face and the heart of South Africa is of the utmost importance. The protestant Eucharist is a prayer “ut omnes unum sint” according to Schillebeeckx (1966c:177) and the Belhar confession is a cry for unity, righteousness and love through our faith and hope (Jonker WD 1994; Botha J and Naudé, P 1998).

- The violence which is demolishing our country like a tsunami, and in which women and children are mostly the victims with 900 children being murdered annually, is calling to heaven. The result is a loss of many talented South Africans and a feeling of hopelessness and fear. Curbing this violence is the calling of church and state, of every individual and all communities. In a community with so much poverty and hatred, the gospel is a powerful force of God. It is our only hope. God alone can change people's hearts and attitudes and their conduct. World-wide prayer is needed to change people, to reduce poverty and to instil new values.
- Poverty must be the main concern of church and state. Creating work opportunities, creating an atmosphere of trust and inspiring people to become entrepreneurs is vital. In Johannesburg, Cape Town and many other cities the Dutch Reformed Church amongst others are on the forefront investing millions and helping the poor to become self-employed. Du Toit pleaded in 1988 that the problem of poverty in all its different facets must be tackled, and it rings even more true today (p 95).

It is necessary to be critical of several aspects of Schillebeeckx's theology, especially the over-emphasis of praxis which dominates Schillebeeckx's theology, because it sometimes endangers the good news of God's free grace (which he tries to maintain in his soteriological theology) and the assurance of faith which corresponds with this amazing grace (*sola gratia* and *sola fide*) (cf. Malan 1990:275-349, especially 331).

The value of our Christian praxis as instrument in the hand of God to bring about reconciliation, peace and lasting brotherhood may however not be forgotten. The Reformed view of politics has always been to realise the importance of good and upright rulers as well as citizens who value human life and who have a high regard for the integrity of creation. The suffering of the poor as well as animals in Zimbabwe at the moment as a result of a government with no regard for the seven constants of which Schillebeeckx spoke, is a poignant, albeit sad, illustration of this fact.

Schillebeeckx has reminded us of our calling to link secular and spiritual freedom through the praxis consistent with God's coming Kingdom: a praxis of love, suffering and service. It may well be his most important contribution to theology and to the churches in South Africa.

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G: *Gerechtigheid en liefde, genade en bevrijding* (1977)

V: *Mensen als verhaal van God* (1989)

T: *Tussentijds verhaal over twee Jezus boeken* (1978)

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KEY WORDS

Christian
Liberation
Praxis
Anthropology
Creation

TREFWOORDE

Christelik
Bevryding
Praksis
Antropologie
Skepping

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