

Concentrating on Creation: Following Christ in a Context of Climate Change

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In the first edited volume to consider the phenomenon of anthropogenic climate change from the point of view of systematic theology, published in 2014,¹ the chapter on creation was written by Celia Deane-Drummond, building on the theology of creation propounded by Thomas Aquinas. She argues that his philosophically rich account, ‘arguably the high water mark’² in the development of the classical metaphysical view of creation *ex nihilo*, is still relevant today, and is particularly helpful in responding theologically to climate change. After offering quite a detailed summary of Aquinas’ treatment of creation in his *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, she considers some of the contemporary objections to his approach, commenting that while his emphasis on the ontological distinction between the world and God ‘safeguards belief in God as the ground of all being, [it] does not develop the idea as to why God created the world in the first place’.³

The position that she then outlines, stressing the themes of love and wisdom as motives for creation, could well be described as one that she develops *sequela* Aquinas⁴ (and, interestingly,

¹ Michael S. Northcott and Peter M. Scott, ‘Introduction’, in Michael S. Northcott and Peter M. Scott (eds.), *Systematic Theology and Climate Change: Ecumenical Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 1-14 (p. 1).

² Celia Deane-Drummond, ‘Creation’, in Michael S. Northcott and Peter M. Scott (eds.), *Systematic Theology and Climate Change: Ecumenical Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 69-89 (p. 71).

³ Deane-Drummond, p. 77.

⁴ See Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 167, for a description of the origins of this typically Dominican expression. For an account of the way in which this theme operates in the work of Edward Schillebeeckx, see Martin G. Poulson, *The*

sequela Irenaeus too).⁵ All the same, it does seem fair to say that the possibility of interaction between the Creator and autonomous creatures in response to a critical challenge like climate change, remains somewhat implicit in her account, as she admits herself.⁶ The theme that she develops more explicitly is the need for a theological account of the interaction between human activity and Sabbath rest, as a way of sanctifying ‘not just space, but also time.’⁷ Such a double interaction – of activity and rest, on the one hand, and of human and divine action in the world, on the other – seems to be what Wendell Berry is reflecting on in his *Sabbath Poem*, 1979 VII, which also speaks powerfully of the negative impact of human activity on the ecosphere and invites the reader to think and act differently:

What if, in the high, restful sanctuary
That keeps the memory of Paradise,
We’re followed by the drone of history
And greed’s poisonous fumes still burn our eyes?

Disharmony recalls us to our work.
From Heavenly work of light and wind and leaf
We must turn back into the peopled dark
Of our unravelling century, the grief

Dialectics of Creation: Creation and the Creator in Edward Schillebeeckx and David Burrell
(London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), pp. 144-49.

⁵ See the way in which she denies the juxtaposition of Irenaean and Thomistic theologies, in opposition to Colin Gunton. (Deane-Drummond, p. 78).

⁶ Deane-Drummond, p. 82.

⁷ See pp. 80-81, where she develops her account in dialogue with Jürgen Moltmann (quote from p. 80).

Of waste, the agony of haste and noise.

It is a hard return from Sabbath rest

To lifework of the fields, yet we rejoice,

Returning, less condemned in being blessed

By vision of what human work can make:

A harmony between forest and field,

The world as it was given for love's sake,

The world by love and loving work revealed

As given to our children and our Maker.

In that healed harmony the world is used

But not destroyed, the Giver and the taker

Joined, the taker blessed, in the unabused

Gift that nurtures and protects. Then workday

And Sabbath live together in one place.

Though mortal, incomplete, that harmony

Is our one possibility of peace.

When field and woods agree, they make a rhyme

That stirs in distant memory the whole

First Sabbath's song that no largess of time

Or hope or sorrow wholly can recall.

But harmony of earth is Heaven-made,
Heaven-making, is promise and prayer,
A little song to keep us unafraid,
An earthly music magnified in air.⁸

I agree with Deane-Drummond that there is a need to develop a critical response to this critical situation in systematic theology.⁹ She is also right to aver that a more explicitly relational account is needed, if only to correct the dual misunderstanding that Aquinas's ontological distinction separates God off from the world, and that those who do their theology *sequela* Aquinas posit an apathetic God, who is far from being the God of love that Christians believe in.¹⁰ The thinking of Edward Schillebeeckx on creation-faith can make a significant contribution here,

⁸ Wendell Berry, 1979 VII, in Wendell Berry, *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems, 1979-1997* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1998), p. 15.

⁹ See Martin Poulson, 'The Place of Humanity in Creation', in Catherine Cowley (ed.), *Faiths in Creation* (The Institute Series, 8; London: Heythrop Institute for Religion, Ethics and Public Life, 2008), pp. 25-35.

¹⁰ See, for example, Moltmann's argument that metaphysical theism is unable to respond adequately to the challenge of protest atheism because 'Aristotle's God cannot love [...]. The "unmoved Mover" is a "loveless Beloved".' (Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* [trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1974], pp. 222-23 [quote from p. 222].) Also see David Burrell's summary of the position typically taken by Process Theologians on this matter, and his helpful thought experiment on love in response to it, in *Aquinas: God and Action* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 87-88.

because his writings on creation, especially in his critical period,¹¹ make an explicit connection between God and humanity, in many ways. Philosophically, this results in complementing the ontological distinction between the world and God with a corresponding ontological relation between them.¹² Practically, it asks us what kind of a future we want to make for our world, given the challenges that we face – at least some of which are of our own making.¹³

This article, however, is not intended primarily as an exposition of Schillebeeckx's critical creation-faith, but as an application of it *sequela* Schillebeeckx. This, he explains, is a way of following in the footsteps of another, 'not through imitating what he has done but, like Jesus, by responding to one's own new situations from out of an intense experience of God.'¹⁴ It represents a

¹¹ See William R. Portier, 'Interpretation and Method' in Mary Catherine Hilbert, and Robert J. Schreier (eds.), *Praxis of the Reign of God: An Introduction to the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx*, (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2nd edn, 2002), pp. 19-36 (esp. pp. 30-34).

¹² See Philip Kennedy's assertion that Schillebeeckx has a relational ontology at the heart of his theology, in Philip Kennedy, *Deus Humanissimus: The Knowability of God in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx* (Fribourg: University Press, 1993), pp. 19, 363-64.

¹³ Cf. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report on the Books Jesus and Christ* (trans. John Bowden; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), p. 105 [(London: SCM Press, 1980), p. 120]. According to the note on 'How to use this book' in the front matter of this authoritative edition of the text in English, 'it would be a service to [...] readers if the page numbers of the old edition (added in square brackets in the margins) are mentioned as well.' (Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report*, p. v. Henceforth *IR*.) This practice is adopted here, placing the page numbers in square brackets, as in the 2014 editions.

¹⁴ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World* (trans. John Bowden; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), p. 630 [(London, SCM Press, 1980), p. 641,

following after¹⁵ someone else that involves both continuity and change, in such a way that the two are dynamically interrelated, rather than being seen as an either-or choice, or as poles at opposite ends of a continuum. Such a following is able, at one and the same time, to be both faithful to the inspiration of the master and also to develop and even break with elements of the master's thinking so as to relate it to new times and places, finding ways to respond to challenges that are even more pressing now than they were in his day. Two themes are addressed in what follows, which, faithful to Schillebeeckx's style, are both relational in character. First, the interplay of critical negativity and critical positivity is considered, partly because it offers a theological way of expressing the dialectic of challenge and promise that Berry's poem captures so well. Secondly, the interplay of human and ecological solidarity is explored. This interplay, which has also surfaced, in distinctive ways, in the social teaching of recent Popes,¹⁶ can help systematic theologians to speak about the interaction of

where the translation is identical]. (Henceforth *II*, referring to this work as the second volume in his Christological trilogy.)

¹⁵ Though it is an somewhat unusual formulation in English, this seems a better way of translating Schillebeeckx than simply using the term 'following', since it more clearly indicates the notion of *sequela* that he uses it to express. See, for example, the 2014 translation of Schillebeeckx's point about salvation being linked with the here and now experiences 'of Jesus and of those who "follow after him" in this world', in Schillebeeckx, *IR*, p. 108, compared to the Dutch text, 'van Jezus en van hen, die hem in deze wereld "achterna gaan"', in Edward Schillebeeckx, *Tussentijds verhaal over twee Jesus boeken* (Bloemendaal: Nelissen, 1978), p. 140 (Henceforth *TV*). The 1980 translation, in which the more typical English expression, 'those who follow him in this world' [p. 123], is used, makes the notion of *sequela* which Schillebeeckx is employing here less obvious and, as such, the change to the translation that has been made is a useful one.

¹⁶ See, for example, Pope Francis who, in *Lumen Fidei*, speaks of the way that faith, 'by revealing the love of God the Creator, enables us to respect nature all the more [... and] also helps us to

divine and human activity in the world in a way that can make a significant contribution to the current debates about climate change and what – if anything – we can do about it.

[A] Critical Negativity and Critical Positivity

Schillebeeckx's creation-faith has a 'critical and productive force',¹⁷ which has both positive and negative aspects. On the one hand, as Philip Kennedy correctly points out, its force 'lies in its criticism of overly pessimistic and optimistic conceptions of human history and society',¹⁸ enabling people of faith to offer a critique of secular accounts that they deem to be unrealistic. On the other

devise models of development which are based not simply on utility and profit, but consider creation as a gift for which we are all indebted'. (*Lumen Fidei*, [London: Catholic Truth Society, 2013], § 55).

¹⁷ This is the translation found in Edward Schillebeeckx, *God Among Us: The Gospel Proclaimed* (trans. John Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1983), p. 102 (Henceforth *GAU*), but the Dutch text here is identical (though, with a small addition in the third and latest source) in all three of what can accurately be called Schillebeeckx's parallel texts on creation from his critical period. In the new editions of both *IR* and of Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God* (trans. John Bowden; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014) (Henceforth *III*), the key term is rendered as 'power' (*IR*, p. 106; *III*, p. 231), which, it is fair to say, is a reasonable translation of the Dutch term 'kracht', the term that is found in all three texts. (Schillebeeckx, *TV*, p. 138; Edward Schillebeeckx, *Evangelie verhalen* [Baarn: Nelissen, 1982], p. 102 [Henceforth *EV*]; and Edward Schillebeeckx, *Mensen als verhaal van God* [Nelissen: Baarn, 1989], p. 251). In the previous translations, the term was rendered differently each time: as 'consequence' in the 1980 translation of *IR* [p. 122] and as 'power' in the 1990 translation of *III* (London: SCM Press; New York: Crossroad, 1990), [p. 233]. 'Force' is preferred here in English because it has a slightly more motivating ring to it, and because it has helpful connotations, found in expressions like being 'a force for good in the world'.

¹⁸ Kennedy, *Schillebeeckx*, p. 89.

hand, ‘by allowing people fully to accept the worth of finitude’, creation-faith not only ‘frees them for their own tasks in the world’,¹⁹ it also indicates a *direction* for their action. The ‘critical force’ of authentic creation-faith ‘at the same time therefore represents salvation for man and the world and a judgment upon them’,²⁰ as Schillebeeckx puts it himself. Of course, any account of what the best direction for human activity in the world *is* needs to be subject to rigorous examination – and not just using the tools of theology. But, at the very least, Schillebeeckx’s critical creation-faith shows that theology has a role to play in the dialogue – faith in God has got something to do with politics and public life.

The expression ‘on the one hand ... on the other hand’ used in the preceding paragraph, one that is frequently employed by Schillebeeckx,²¹ is both a form of argument that is faithful to him and also a way of voicing an important methodological principle for theology *sequela* Schillebeeckx. It helps to distinguish the mode of dialectic used in it from that which is found in Barthian theologies and, perhaps even more importantly, from that found in transcendental forms of correlational theology in the Roman Catholic tradition. David Tracy, who is certainly one of the foremost proponents of the latter, says that, in its dialectical form, correlational theology has a polar character. It makes progress by moving back and forth between the poles that it identifies in order to balance them against each other.²² A similar pattern can be discerned in the account of creation

¹⁹ Kennedy, *Schillebeeckx*, p. 90.

²⁰ Schillebeeckx, *GAU*, p. 94; cf. *IR*, p. 101 [p. 115].

²¹ See, for example, his definition of creation (Schillebeeckx, *IR*, p. 110 [p. 126]; *GAU*, p. 104) and the reasons he gives – one negative and one positive – for the need to find an answer to what it is that true and good humanity consists in (Schillebeeckx, *GAU*, pp. 100-1; *III*, p. 230 [p. 232]).

²² David Tracy, ‘The Uneasy Alliance Reconceived: Catholic Theological Method, Modernity and Postmodernity’, *Theological Studies* 50 (1989), pp. 548-570 (pp. 550 n. 6 and 562, n. 56).

offered by David Burrell,²³ who Tracy identifies as a fellow hermeneutical theologian following in the footsteps of Bernard Lonergan.²⁴ What is theologically interesting about this pattern is that, in it, the *relata* are inversely proportional to each other. As the image of the balance makes clear, saying something ‘on the one hand’ immediately forces the correlational theologian to say something ‘on the other hand’ in order to maintain a balanced account. Schillebeeckx’s dialectic does not work like this.²⁵

²³ See, for example, the way in which he speaks about creation and salvation ‘as two poles’ in the Christian tradition (David Burrell, *Faith and Freedom: An Interfaith Perspective* [Oxford: Blackwell, 2004], p. 236, citing, with approval, John McDade, ‘Creation and Salvation: Green Faith and Christian Themes’, *The Month* 23 [1990], pp. 433-41 [p. 436]). It must be said that, elsewhere, he says he finds the image of balance somewhat static, preferring to speak of ‘a more dramatic, not to say dialectical, field of force’ (David Burrell, and Elena Malits, *Original Peace: Restoring God’s Creation* [Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1997], p. 91). However, he immediately returns to polar language on p. 92 of *Original Peace*, so it would seem that the polar element of the dialectic is still very much present, even in the alternative proposal.

²⁴ David Tracy, ‘Lindbeck’s New Program for Theology: A Reflection’, *The Thomist* 49 (1985), pp. 460-472 (pp. 462-63, 468).

²⁵ For more on the comparison between Tracy and Schillebeeckx, see Martin Poulson, ‘The Place of Praxis in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx’, in James Sweeney, Gemma Simmonds and David Lonsdale (eds), *Keeping Faith in Practice: Aspects of Catholic Pastoral Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010), pp. 131-42.

Rather than being inversely proportional, the *relata* of a Schillebeeckian dialectic are directly proportional.²⁶ The more one is stressed, the more the other is given importance, in a form of argument that can be called relational dialectic.²⁷ This the way that Schillebeeckx speaks of mysticism and politics: because these two *relata* ‘are each at the heart of the other’,²⁸ he denies the charge that the first two volumes of his Christological trilogy emphasize the political liberation of men and women at the expense of their mystical liberation. These two ways of talking about human wholeness, he contends, ‘cannot be contrasted with each other. Restructuring and inner conversion form a dialectical process.’²⁹

This relational dialectic is also present in the way that he interweaves the negative and positive aspects of his critical creation-faith. When he speaks of creation as ‘good news’,³⁰ saying that God’s honour and glory lie in human happiness,³¹ it might at first seem that he is stressing the positive over against the negative. What he is proposing, rather, is a form of critical optimism, which, at the same time as describing the relational dialectic of critical negativity and critical positivity, enacts that very interplay. On the one hand, he criticizes forms of optimism that think that change for the better is inevitable, that ‘life and history *per se* mean progress’, because these

²⁶ The term ‘Schillebeeckian’ is used here to indicate both a form of dialectic and, more generally, a way of doing theology *sequela* Schillebeeckx. See Poulsom, *Dialectics of Creation*, p. 11 for an explanation of this neologism.

²⁷ See Poulsom, *Dialectics of Creation*, pp. 96-98 for an account of this kind of dialectic.

²⁸ Edward Schillebeeckx, ‘The Role of History in What is Called the New Paradigm’, in Hans Küng and David Tracy (eds), *Paradigm Change in Theology: A Symposium for the Future*, (trans. Margaret Kohl; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), pp. 307-319 (p. 318).

²⁹ Schillebeeckx, *IR*, p. 93 [p. 105].

³⁰ Schillebeeckx, *IR*, p. 103 [p. 116]; *GAU*, pp. 91 and 95; and *III*, p. 228 [p. 230].

³¹ Schillebeeckx, *IR*, p. 101 [pp. 115-16] and p. 113 [p. 130]; *GAU*, pp. 94 and 100.

approaches mistakenly think that creation provides an explanation of the world.³² On the other hand, he says that the assurance that good, rather than evil, ‘will triumph in us and in our world’ can only be given through the absolute presence of the Creator God,³³ a presence that he speaks of as ‘pure positivity’.³⁴ Critical optimism is a way of describing the relational dialectic of critical negativity and critical positivity in a similar way to that in which both praxis and ethics describe the relational dialectic of mysticism and politics.³⁵

There is, of course, an ethical dimension to humanity’s place in the world, something that Schillebeeckx recognizes in his critique of optimistic views of the future based on human innovation and technology. He admits that technology can be good, if it ‘serves the authentic values

³² Schillebeeckx, *GAU*, pp. 97-98 (quote from p. 97). Cf. *IR*, pp. 99 and 101-2 [pp. 113 and 116]; *GAU*, p. 91.

³³ Schillebeeckx, *GAU*, p. 98.

³⁴ Schillebeeckx, *GAU*, p. 99; ‘The Role of History’, p. 317. Cf. *IR*, p. 105 [p. 120], where the expression is translated as ‘pure positiveness’ in both editions, translating the Dutch expression ‘pure positiviteit’ (Schillebeeckx, *TV*, p. 136). This expression – and, indeed, the text surrounding it, is identical in the Dutch texts of *TV* and *EV* (Schillebeeckx, *EV*, p. 99), showing that a variation has been introduced in the translation that is not present in the Dutch. Partly because of the use of the term in commentary on Schillebeeckx, and partly because it seems a better translation, ‘pure positivity’ is preferable here.

³⁵ Schillebeeckx describes the dialectic of mysticism and politics as praxis in Edward Schillebeeckx, ‘You Cannot Arbitrarily make Something of the Gospel!’, trans. David Smith; *Concilium*, 170 (1983), pp. 15-19 (p. 18); and ‘The Role of History’, p. 317. He describes it as ethics in Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus in Our Western Culture: Mysticism, Ethics and Politics* (trans. John Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1987), pp. 65 and 70. For a more detailed account of praxis in Schillebeeckx, see Poulson, *Dialectics of Creation*, pp. 112-26.

of true, good and truly happy humanity.’ However, he also points out that the technology that ‘is now causing pollution [...] serves a consumer society.’³⁶ This use of technology does not lead to fullness of life for humanity, because consumerism does not particularly aim to do this. Any happiness produced by consumerism is achieved at the expense of others – the consumerist world is one of inequality and competition. Schillebeeckx’s response to these challenges draws on the idea of solidarity found in the Catholic Social Tradition.

[A] Human and Ecological Solidarity

Human solidarity is a theme that dominates Schillebeeckx’s critical writings, so much so that the charge that he paid too much attention to the social and political liberation of humanity is understandable, even if misplaced. In the third volume of his Christological trilogy, he tells the story of how, from the 1950s to the 1970s, committing oneself to ‘the service or the virtue of co-humanity’ became a practical way of stressing that the reign of God is not a purely spiritual reality, and the expression ‘became a fashionable replacement in our everyday language for the familiar term love of neighbour.’³⁷ Alongside this development, hand in hand with it, came the theoretical development of co-humanity as a theological theme, such that this ‘was the time of an emphasis on a “God of human beings”’.³⁸ During this period, Schillebeeckx became a passionate proponent of the praxis of the reign of God, prophetically challenging both religion and society to act on behalf

³⁶ Schillebeeckx, *III*, p. 237 [p. 239].

³⁷ Schillebeeckx, *III*, p. 233 [p. 235].

³⁸ Schillebeeckx, *III*, p. 234 [p. 236]. Interestingly, the words ‘an emphasis on’ are not found in the earlier translation and are not in the Dutch text either, which reads: ‘Het was de tijd van “een God van mensen”.’ (Schillebeeckx, *Mensen*, p. 253) The new translation, however, in adding the phrase, is faithful to Schillebeeckx’s developing argument that an emphasis on one aspect of faith does not necessarily imply that others are being denied. Cf. the opening paragraph of Chapter Six of *IR* for a similar argument, engaging with critics of Part Four of *II* (Schillebeeckx, *IR*, p. 93 [p. 105]).

of the *humanum*, his preferred term for co-humanity.³⁹ In his writings on creation, he unambiguously says, on the one hand, that ‘a religion which – in any way – really has the effect of dehumanizing people – in whatever way –, is either a false religion or a religion which understands itself incorrectly.’⁴⁰ On the other hand, he points out that, in society, ‘we have learned from [our] irresponsible behaviour’ about ‘the limits of existing resources and energy consumption’ and have realized that ‘we are egoistically robbing coming generations of their possible future.’⁴¹

In the midst of this process of development, as Schillebeeckx recognizes himself, ‘one dimension was forgotten.’ Though it is true to say that God *is* a God of human beings, the development of the praxis of co-humanity largely overlooked ‘the fact that with inorganic and organic creatures we share in the one creation.’⁴² Mary Catherine Hilker and Janet O’Meara suggest that there is a ‘growing emphasis’⁴³ on ecological matters in this last volume of Schillebeeckx’s trilogy, in which he ‘begins to address the cosmic dimensions of redemption and

³⁹ See Edward Schillebeeckx, ‘Questions on Christian Salvation of and for Man’, in *The Language of Faith* (London: SCM Press; Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), pp. 109-26; cf. *II*, pp. 725-37 [pp. 731-43].

⁴⁰ Schillebeeckx, *IR*, p. 93 [p. 105].

⁴¹ Schillebeeckx, *IR*, pp. 105-6 [pp. 120-211]; *GAU*, p. 99. (The new translation also brings the English texts of these two sources closer together than was the case in the 1980 translation of *IR*.)

⁴² Schillebeeckx, *III*, p. 234 [p. 236]. This candid confession on Schillebeeckx’s part helps us to see that, whilst the insertion about ‘an emphasis on’ a God concerned with humanity in the new translation of *III* (p. 234) helps to keep his argument flowing as he would wish it, sometimes it *is* the case that, in talking a great deal about some aspects of faith, others are forgotten about.

⁴³ Mary Catherine Hilker, ‘Introduction’, in Mary Catherine Hilker, and Robert J. Schreiter (eds.), *Praxis of the Reign of God: An Introduction to the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx*, (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2nd edn, 2002), pp. xix-xxx (p. xxi).

liberation'.⁴⁴ Schillebeeckx himself, however, protests that his inclusion of ecological themes 'is not a fashionable adaptation to later trends, which is what some individuals have accused me of. I was already writing substantially the same thing in 1974 and even in 1960.'⁴⁵ This raises the matter of continuity and change in Schillebeeckx's theology, one that has generated a good deal of debate amongst academics.⁴⁶ There is, unfortunately, not space to deal with it here, other than to say that the notion of *sequela* can furnish theologians who follow after Schillebeeckx with a way of crafting accounts of human and ecological solidarity that can help further the dialogue between Church and society that is one of the themes of this conference.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Janet M. O'Meara, 'Salvation: Living Communion with God', in Mary Catherine Hilker, and Robert J. Schreiter (eds.), *Praxis of the Reign of God: An Introduction to the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx*, (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2nd edn, 2002), pp. 97-116 (p. 100).

⁴⁵ Schillebeeckx, *III*, p. 237, n. 4 [p. 263, n.4].

⁴⁶ See, for example, Philip Kennedy, 'Continuity Underlying Discontinuity: Schillebeeckx's Philosophical Background', *New Blackfriars* 70 (1989), pp. 264-77; Lieven Boeve, 'Introduction: The Enduring Relevance and Significance of Edward Schillebeeckx? Introducing the State of the Question in Medias Res', in Lieven Boeve, Frederiek Depoortere and Stephan van Erp (eds.), *Edward Schillebeeckx and Contemporary Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), pp. 1-22, (esp. pp. 2-8, where he compares his own assessment with that of Erik Borgman, and pp. 9-14, which focus on creation faith in particular); and Erik Borgman, 'Retrieving God's Contemporary Presence: The Future of Edward Schillebeeckx's Theology of Culture', in Lieven Boeve, Frederiek Depoortere and Stephan van Erp (eds.), *Edward Schillebeeckx and Contemporary Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), pp. 235-51, (esp. pp. 246-50).

⁴⁷ For an analysis of continuity and change in Schillebeeckx, which draws on his own account, found in Schillebeeckx, 'The Role of History', pp. 309-10 and in Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An*

Taking up this challenge, it seems fair to observe, first of all, that Schillebeeckx's treatment of ecological concern does not have quite the rhetorical drive of his account of human solidarity. The 'critical and productive force'⁴⁸ of his creation-faith, which he also calls 'a prophetic impetus'⁴⁹ does, indeed speak about both themes: 'the believer's concern for God's honour is also a struggle for more justice in the world, a commitment to a new earth and an environment in which human beings can live fuller lives.'⁵⁰ When he challenges the church to interrelate the spiritual and social aspects of Christianity, he argues that 'Christian salvation is not simply the salvation of souls but the healing, making whole, wholeness of the whole person, the individual and society in a natural world which is not abused.'⁵¹ The last phrase of this expression does, all the same, seem somewhat tame when compared with the passion of what goes before it.

In seeking to move forward *sequela* Schillebeeckx, it is helpful to recall the complexity of Berry's poem, in which positive and negative aspects, the relation between contemplation and action, and an ability to recognize that we are not the only ones who play a part in responding to the challenge, are all intertwined. Taking a praxical approach also helps, in which theory and practice exist in a dynamic and productive critical interrelation,⁵² resulting in expressions of ecological

Experiment in Christology (trans. Hubert Hoskins; New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1979), pp. 539-44 [pp. 576-82], see Poulson, *Dialectics of Creation*, pp. 101-6.

⁴⁸ Schillebeeckx, *GAU*, p. 102.

⁴⁹ Schillebeeckx, *GAU*, p. 100

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Schillebeeckx, *GAU*, p. 100.

⁵² For an account of how praxis can be understood as a relational dialectic, in which theory and practice interrelate, in Schillebeeckx's theology, see Poulson, *Dialectics of Creation*, pp. 112-20. For the suggestion that this interaction leads to a form of theology that can be described as praxical, see Poulson, 'The Place of Praxis', pp. 138-40.

solidarity that can both express what is important in Christianity and make a contribution to debates in society. A good example of an engagement with ecological solidarity that seeks to do this in a predominantly theoretical manner is the publication, in 2012, of the Ash Wednesday Declaration by Operation Noah. Entitled ‘Climate change and the purposes of God: a call to the Church’,⁵³ it deliberately echoes the style of other significant Declarations of the past, including the 1934 Barmen Declaration.⁵⁴ Explaining the rationale of the Ash Wednesday Declaration, Tim Gorringer argues that ‘climate change is a confessional issue’⁵⁵ for the church, making a distinction between issues like these, which go to the heart of Christian faith, and *adiaphora*, about which ‘we can politely agree to disagree’.⁵⁶

Although this confessional statement is explicitly addressed to the church, which might seem to make it less clearly an act of Public Theology, it is worth noting that ‘*confessing* itself is a

⁵³ ‘Climate change and the purposes of God: a call to the Church’, The Ash Wednesday Declaration, <http://operationnoah.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Final-ON_Declaration_web.pdf> (accessed 3 May 2015), 4 pp.

⁵⁴ Tim Gorringer, ‘Climate Change: A Confessional Issue for the Churches?’, Operation Noah Annual Lecture 2011, <http://operationnoah.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Tim_Gorringer_lecture_0.pdf> (accessed 3 May 2015), 14 pp. (pp. 1-2).

⁵⁵ Gorringer, p. 10.

⁵⁶ Gorringer, p. 1. A similar approach is taken in the Good Friday Declaration, ‘The World is our Host: A Call to Urgent Action for Climate Justice (Good Friday 2015)’, produced by a world-wide group of Anglican bishops, facilitated by the Anglican Communion Environmental Network (ACEN), <<http://acen.anglicancommunion.org/media/148818/The-World-is-our-Host-FINAL-TEXT.pdf>> (accessed 3 May 2015), 8pp.

basic way of defining the daily task in the life of all Christians.⁵⁷ This distinction between a textual confession and the act of confessing, made by Ernst Wolf, is explained by Eberhard Busch using the distinction between ‘guideposts on the pathway of the pilgrimage of the people of God’,⁵⁸ on the one hand, and the path itself, on the other, which is made by walking in the direction indicated. Thus, confessional statements made by the church, can point the community in a particular direction, acting as ‘anticipatory signs’ of the desired destination,⁵⁹ prompting its members to find answers to questions like those asked by Schillebeeckx: “‘Where are we going?’ [... and ...] which way of being human do we choose’ to help us get there?⁶⁰

One of the ways in which the Churches have been encouraged to ‘walk the talk’ since the publication of the Ash Wednesday Declaration is through the Bright Now Campaign, also run by Operation Noah.⁶¹ Taken together with the Declaration, this more active, practical response can

⁵⁷ Eberhard Busch, *The Barmen Theses Then and Now: The 2004 Warfield Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary* (trans. Darrell and Judith Guder; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), p. 8.

⁵⁸ Busch, p. 8.

⁵⁹ Busch, p. 9.

⁶⁰ Schillebeeckx, IR, p. 105 [p. 120]. This interaction between confession and confessing seems somewhat akin to that between confessing and witnessing in Edmund Arens’ *Christopraxis*. Although they are distinctive modes of the expression of faith for Arens, he notes that they have much in common, and that, in both cases, ‘their public character is constitutive.’ (Edmund Arens, *Christopraxis: A Theology of Action* (trans. John E. Hoffmeyer; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 89). His description of confessing as ‘the binding, public, communal act of putting faith in words’ (Arens, p. 98) is also useful in understanding confessional statements, and the community’s response to them, as a form of Public Theology.

⁶¹ See the material about the campaign on the Bright Now website, <<http://brightnow.org.uk/about-the-campaign/>> (accessed 3 May 2015).

form a praxical engagement with the challenge of climate change. Though not without theoretical content, the Campaign is chiefly aimed at encouraging action, in the form of fossil fuel disinvestment by the Churches, so that they – to use Schillebeeckx’s language – can show by the way they act what kind of humanity they choose in a context of climate change. Although, again, the Campaign is aimed at the church, the Foreword to the Bright Now Report points out that choosing the path of disinvestment ‘would show its faith in a low carbon future’, which would ‘help reframe the debate’⁶² not only in the church, but also in society, because of the role that the Churches have in Britain. The Report points out that a global disinvestment movement is growing, and there is evidence that Churches, not only in Britain but throughout the world, are taking part in this movement, alongside other organisations, in what can be termed an act of practical Public Theology.⁶³ It is also important to note, at the same time, that this critically negative action needs to go hand in hand with a critically positive ‘imagination of alternatives. [...] Investment decisions need to be taken as part of a positive re-imagining of the world, and with regard to all those who

⁶² Miles Litvinoff, ‘Bright Now: towards fossil free churches’ (Updated ed., 2015), <<http://brightnow.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Bright-Now-Report.pdf>> (accessed 3 May 2015), 16pp. (p. 2).

⁶³ See Litvinoff, pp. 3, 6, 8 and 11 for information about the Churches involved in this global movement. Also see ‘The World is our Host’, p. 8, for details of a worldwide group of Anglican Bishops who have called for the Anglican Church to support ‘environmental sustainability and justice by divesting from industries involved primarily in the extraction or distribution of fossil fuels.’ (p. 6) More information about the disinvestment of UK Churches can be found on the Blog of the Bright Now website, <<http://brightnow.org.uk/blog/>> (accessed 3 May 2015).

might be affected, recognising that economic power can be used as a weapon, or it can be used for justice and peace.⁶⁴

Like the Ash Wednesday Declaration, the Bright Now Campaign faces church and society at the same time, seeking to engage and persuade both, by pointing to a more desirable future and indicating possible ways of getting there. As many of the contributors to this Conference have noted, the clear divisions between church and society, private and public, and so on, are breaking down in the twenty-first century. It could also be argued that thinking of the boundaries between these spheres as watertight is no longer helpful because we now appreciate that understanding them that way was itself a construction of modernity.⁶⁵ As a result, as Kathryn Tanner notes, the boundary-conditions of distinctiveness change:

the distinctiveness of a Christian way of life is not so much formed *by* the boundary as *at* it; Christian distinctiveness is something that emerges in the very cultural processes occurring at the boundary, processes that construct a distinctive identity for Christian social practices through the distinctive use of cultural materials shared with others.⁶⁶

This makes possible a Public Theology that takes a dialectical approach to the interaction between church and society, in which critical affirmation of the views of others, critically negative assessment of current ideas and practices, and critically positive imagination of alternatives all play

⁶⁴ Susan Durber, in 'Is it ethical for the Church to invest in fossil fuels? Reflections from Christian Theologians, scientists and environmentalists' (February 2015), <http://brightnow.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Is-it-ethical-for-the-Church-to-invest-in-fossil-fuels-reflections-from-Christian-theologans-scientists-and-environmentalists.pdf> (accessed 3 May 2015), 16 pp. (p. 2).

⁶⁵ Cf. Sue Patterson's 'weak thesis' of postmodernity, in *Realist Christian Theology in a Postmodern Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 7. Also see Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), p. 53.

⁶⁶ Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, p. 115.

their part in finding a way forward.⁶⁷ Speaking about the Bright Now campaign, Nicky Bull says that the ‘Church can demonstrate that it both listens to today’s prophets and that it is itself prepared to act prophetically if it aligns its investments with the mission of seeking the flourishing of all creation.’⁶⁸

Reflecting and acting alongside others who have distinctive values and commitments, compared with our own, helps both human and ecological solidarity to mature. It recognizes that the church does not have all the answers, and that the grace of God sometimes comes to its help through those who are outside of it. This recognition is a way of developing another theme *sequela* Schillebeeckx, namely his insistence: ‘*extra mundum nulla salus*’.⁶⁹ The reflections on climate change that have begun to appear in the secular press,⁷⁰ alongside worldwide actions focussed on persuading governments and multinational companies to respond positively to the challenge, harnessing the political, economic and ethical will of a vast movement of men, women and

⁶⁷ For an account of how this dialectical interplay functions in Schillebeeckx’s encounter with atheistic secular humanism, see Poulson, *Dialectics of Creation*, pp. 131-43.

⁶⁸ Nicky Bull, in ‘Is it ethical for the Church to invest in fossil fuels?’, p. 1.

⁶⁹ Edward Schillebeeckx, ‘Letter from Edward Schillebeeckx to the Participants in the Symposium “Theology for the 21st Century: The Enduring Relevance of Edward Schillebeeckx for Contemporary Theology” (Leuven – 3-6 December 2008)’, in Lieven Boeve, Frederiek Depoortere and Stephan van Erp (eds.), *Edward Schillebeeckx and Contemporary Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), pp. xiv-xv.

⁷⁰ See, for example, the series of articles in *The Guardian* newspaper, which began with Alan Rusbridger, ‘Climate change: why the Guardian is putting threat to Earth front and centre’, *The Guardian*, 6 March 2015, <<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/mar/06/climate-change-guardian-threat-to-earth-alan-rusbridger>> (accessed 3 May 2015).

children,⁷¹ can help church and society to find a way forward together. Climate change *is* a scientific, ethical, humanitarian, ecological and political challenge. For Christians, it is all of these – and it is more than that, too.⁷² Responding to the challenge in its entirety is a way of following after Jesus in our time and place.

[A] *Sequela Jesu*

How to live *sequela Jesu* is a matter about which Schillebeeckx has a good deal to say in his critical creation material. In *Interim Report*, he says that the situation in which Christians find themselves ‘summons us to the urgency of a collective asceticism on the basis of our status as creatures; we may simply be men [and women] in a milieu which is simply the world.’⁷³ This call to live a simpler lifestyle, one that is also made by the Ash Wednesday Declaration,⁷⁴ lies at the heart of the *livesimply* project that has been running in the Catholic Church in England and Wales for a

⁷¹ A good example of this was the People’s Climate March on 21 September 2014, in which an estimated 2646 events took place in 162 countries as world leaders gathered for the UN Climate Summit in New York. See <http://peoplesclimate.org/wrap-up/> for details and coverage of the event (accessed 3 May 2015).

⁷² Cf. Schillebeeckx’s statement that ‘Christian salvation also comprises ecological, social and political aspects, though it is not exhausted by these. Christian salvation is more than that, but it is that, too.’ (Schillebeeckx, *GAU*, p. 100). Also see Gorringer, pp. 12-13.

⁷³ Schillebeeckx, *IR*, [p. 121]; *GAU*, p. 99. Here, the 1980 translation of *IR* has been kept in preference to the 2014 translation found in *IR*, p. 106, because the older translation uses the expression ‘simply’, where the new one prefers ‘just’. As a result, the argument moves more easily to a consideration of what simply living means, which suits the purposes of this article.

⁷⁴ ‘Climate change and the purposes of God’, p. 3.

few years now.⁷⁵ It is, admittedly, not easy to articulate just what this simple lifestyle consists in, especially in a world where standards of living are so vastly different. Part of the difficulty lies in how to speak of the world, of creation, of the environment, of nature. In the *Epilogue* to the third volume of his Christological trilogy, Schillebeeckx recognizes the danger of offering a purely anthropocentric account of these realities when he calls for ‘self-restraint and a more sober life-style in order to protect creation.’⁷⁶ He explicitly recognizes the danger of objectifying nature, but, at the same time, struggles somewhat to avoid doing so himself.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, in this material, he offers two proposals that could act as anticipatory signs of the direction to move forward.

The first, critically negative, aspect, draws on what many writers consider to be one of Schillebeeckx’s greatest contributions to theology – his idea of negative contrast experience.⁷⁸ He notes, seemingly almost in passing, that it is ‘modern ecological experiences of contrast’ that have helped men and women to understand that ethics is not only applicable in the area of human

⁷⁵ See the material on the Catholic Social Tradition found on the *livesimply* website, ‘Catholic Social Teaching: Faith in a Better World’, <<http://www.catholicsocialteaching.org.uk/>> (accessed 3 May 2015).

⁷⁶ Schillebeeckx, *III*, p. 236 [p. 238]. Also see Deane-Drummond and Donal Dorr on whether the Catholic Church’s position on environmental issues is too anthropocentric in Celia Deane-Drummond, ‘Joining in the Dance: Catholic Social Teaching and Ecology’, *New Blackfriars* 93 (2012), pp. 193-212; and Donal Dorr, ‘Themes and Theologies in Catholic Social Teaching over Fifty Years’, *New Blackfriars* 93 (2012), pp. 137-54.

⁷⁷ Schillebeeckx, *III*, pp. 236-37 [pp. 238-39].

⁷⁸ See, for example, Kennedy, *Schillebeeckx*, pp. 127-29; and Kathleen Anne McManus, *Unbroken Communion: The Place and Meaning of Suffering in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), pp. 26-27.

solidarity, but needs to play a role in ecological solidarity, too.⁷⁹ Given the importance of the theme of contrast experience in his account of the ethics of human relationships and of the praxis of the reign of God, developing an ecological account *sequela* Schillebeeckx could make a significant contribution to current debates.

Intertwined with this critically negative theme, in relational dialectic with it, is another, in which Schillebeeckx points out that the simple and sober lifestyle he is calling for ‘is not as pessimistic as it seems’. He describes it as having ‘a liberating dimension’, being ‘attractive’ and ‘well-proportioned’, having ‘something of a festal element’ about it. He speaks of the movement for ‘a more contemplative and ludic relationship to the world of animals and nature’⁸⁰ in a way that suggests that this movement already exists, even if only in seedling form. Ludic – a word that is now all but obsolete in the English language – means, ‘Showing spontaneous and undirected playfulness’.⁸¹ Perhaps the undirected element of this definition is less helpful than the others, but certainly in the game of Ludo that I played as a child, the playfulness had a clear goal, even if the play itself, trying to reach it, was made up of a challenging blend of skill and chance.

In this spirit, it is possible to see, in Schillebeeckx’s critical optimism, the beginnings of an account of how human beings who are fully alive can be the glory of God,⁸² by striving to live simply, sustainably and in solidarity.⁸³ Developing this account *sequela* Schillebeeckx could make

⁷⁹ Schillebeeckx, *III*, p. 237 [p. 239].

⁸⁰ Schillebeeckx, *III*, p. 238 [p. 240].

⁸¹ *Oxford Dictionaries* website <<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/ludic>> (accessed 3 May 2015).

⁸² Cf. Schillebeeckx’s allusions to this famous theme from Irenaeus in Schillebeeckx, *IR*, p. 101 [pp. 115-16]; *GAU*, p. 94.

⁸³ Cf. the motto of *livesimply*, <<http://www.catholicsocialteaching.org.uk/resources/about/#about>> (accessed 3 May 2015).

an important contribution to current debates about climate change, in which political and ecclesial aims could enter into mutually beneficial dialogue for the good of all creation. This would be a ‘following after’ Christ that would be both old and new,⁸⁴ developing the likeness of God in men and women who commit themselves to be simply men and women, in a world that is simply the world. Schillebeeckx presents that likeness as ‘a constructive – almost divine –, caring creativity [...] raising up everything, aiming at justice, peace and the integrity of creation.’⁸⁵ This ‘conciliar process’⁸⁶ is surely one way of responding to the critical situation of climate change, so as to echo the first Sabbath’s song that can no longer quite be captured in its entire glory, but can still be, in Berry’s words, both promise and prayer: ‘A little song to keep us unafraid, An earthly music magnified in air.’⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Cf. Matthew 13:52.

⁸⁵ Schillebeeckx, *III*, p. 235 [p. 237].

⁸⁶ Schillebeeckx, *III*, p. 236 [p. 238].

⁸⁷ Berry, 1979 VII, in *A Timbered Choir*, p. 15.