

# The Kingdom of God and Human Liberation in Edward Schillebeeckx

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## Abstract:

Penulis mempresentasikan pemikiran Edward Schillebeeckx tentang kerajaan Allah dan keselamatan atau pembebasan umat manusia. Kerajaan Allah adalah pemerintahan, kekuasaan Allah dalam dunia dan hidup manusia. Allah memimpin dan menyelenggarakan hidup manusia dan dunia dengan kasih, kebaikan, kebenaran, dan keadilan. Yesus Kristus diutus ke dunia untuk mewartakan kerajaan Allah. Hidup, karya, pengajaran, wafat, dan kebangkitan Yesus merupakan tanda nyata kehadiran kerajaan Allah. Manusia dan dunia diselamatkan oleh Yesus Kristus dari dosa, kejahatan, ketidakadilan, dan penderitaan. Keselamatan adalah karunia Allah dan tanggungjawab manusia. Keselamatan merangkul dimensi sekarang dan masa depan (*eschaton*), dimensi jasmani dan rohani. Lebih lagi, Allah menyelamatkan tidak hanya manusia tetapi juga seluruh kosmos, atau seluruh alam ciptaan. Gereja diutus Allah untuk menghadirkan kerajaan-Nya dalam dunia. Gereja harus aktif memajukan keadilan, membela hak-hak orang kecil, miskin dan menderita, memelihara bumi dan seluruh alam ciptaan. Gereja bisa berhasil dalam karya menyelamatkan manusia dan dunia, jika ia selalu meneladani dan bersatu dengan Yesus. Gereja harus menghayati tiga kebajikan teologal: cinta kasih, iman, dan harapan, serta menjadikan liturgi/doa (dimensi mistik) sebagai sumber kekuatan pelayanannya. Pemikiran Schillebeeckx menjadi inspirasi dan sekaligus kritik terhadap karya pelayanan dan misi Gereja lokal.

**Keywords:** kingdom of God, human suffering, salvation/liberation, mysticism, political love, church as the sign of the kingdom, eschatological fulfillment

## 1. Introduction

Salvation of humankind and the whole world is an important theological theme that has been discussed and even debated by many Catholic and Christian theologians. In this essay I am going to present theological reflection of Edward Schillebeeckx, especially about the notion of the kingdom of God and human salvation or liberation. His theological reflection is mainly based on biblical interpretation coupled with contributions from social science, philosophy of language and hermeneutics. Schillebeeckx was influenced by ideas of Albert Camus and Merleau-Ponty. He personally met them and attended

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their lectures in Paris. Schillebeeckx was interested in historical method in biblical interpretation, a new approach in the theology that was prevalent at his time.

Schillebeeckx is a well-known Dutch Dominican theologian. He studied in Louvain 1941 and latter in Paris. He was professor of dogma and the history of theology at the University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands. He retired from teaching in 1983. He participated in the Second Vatican Council as an advisor for the Dutch bishops. (Schreiter, 1996:152-163).

This essay goes through three main parts. In the first part, I will present Edward Schillebeeckx's understanding of the kingdom of God. For him, the kingdom of God is the rule of God, God's love, peace and justice in human history. The kingdom of God is already revealed in the person of Jesus and his ministry. Jesus is the parable of God, the "subversive Narrative" that challenged the unjust religious and social structure. Jesus is God's story, the story of God's liberating, redemptive presence in the world. His faithfulness to the kingdom reached its climax in his rejection, suffering and death.

In the second part, I will describe Schillebeeckx's understanding of human liberation or salvation. He contends that liberation will lose its meaning if it does not have a strong basis. For him, humanity in all its aspects is the basis or locus of liberation. In other words, liberation or salvation is ultimately about human existence, the meaning of humanity and the goal of the whole creation. Liberation or salvation comprises the whole aspects of human life; thus it is holistic. In this part, I also will present Schillebeeckx's understanding of church. The church is called and sent to mediate and realize God's plan for salvation of the whole world. And the third part is conclusion by a way of summary. I will summarize Schillebeeckx's ideas and then I will point out his contributions to the theological enterprise of today.

My goal in this paper is to present and critically examine Schillebeeckx's theological ideas of the kingdom of God and human liberation. Also, I will point out some of his theological contributions to the universal Church and especially to the local Church of Indonesia.

## **2. The Kingdom of God**

The term "kingdom of God" is a concept that has its roots in the Old Testament. The concept itself is very broad and complex which cannot be defined easily. Many theologians have tried to define or describe the term. However they cannot give a definitive definition, since it is a mystery. In the NT we discover that Jesus himself does not give a full blown definition of the kingdom of God. He tries to explain the mystery through parables.

## 2.1. Description of the Kingdom of God

The “kingdom of God” or the “rule of God” is used in the New Testament with a single concept: *baseleia tou Theou*. For Schillebeeckx (1979:41), *baselia tou Theou* can be defined as the kingdom of God, or the rule of God or the realm of God. The term does not denote any particular region, place or area on this world or beyond where God is supposed to reside and reign as king. It is more, for him, “a process, a course of events, whereby God begins to govern or acts as king or Lord, an action, therefore, by which God manifests his being God in the world of men...It is the divine power itself in its saving activity within our history, but at the same time the final, eschatological state of affairs that brings to an end the evil world...” (1979:41). Furthermore, he points out that there were at least three versions of the kingdom of God which were current in Jesus’ time (1985:19-20). First of all, there would be a period of reestablishment or restoration of the kingdom of David; it was a restoration of the national political theocracy. Secondly, the kingdom of God according to the interpretation and understanding of the Qumran community that believed that God would come to establish an everlasting kingdom after the evil world was judged or condemned. Those who recognized and understood the signs of the kingdom and prepared for its coming would be freed or liberated by Yahweh. Finally, there was the rabbi’s and the Pharisees’ understanding or interpretation of the kingdom of God. For them, the kingdom of God not only was hidden in the hearts of those who followed the Torah, but also it was realized in the transformation and renewal of social or communal life. Those who practiced God’s law would experience the saving rule of God. Jesus’ understanding of the kingdom of God was closely related to that of the Pharisees; however his concept was more holistic.

Schillebeeckx realizes that even though term the “kingdom of God” can be alienating for most of us, since we live in a very different era or context with that of Jesus, and yet we can still retrieve its meaning for our lives today. To him, one can apply the biblical understanding of the kingdom of God to the modern sense of the kingdom. The kingdom of God, therefore, can be defined as “the whole of the worldly sphere, the ecumene or the inhabited human world, in which the rule of God, creator of this universe, means that peace, justice and love prevail there among men and women, who are also at peace with the whole natural ecological environment...” (Schillebeeckx, 1994:111). In the light of Christian faith and tradition, the kingdom of God must be understood in the context of Christian faith confession of Jesus as the Son of God and as the Messiah, the Anointed one. Because Jesus was and is believed by Christians as the supreme revealer of God’s liberating act and presence in the world and in human history.

## 2.2. Jesus' Life and Career: Signs of the Kingdom

To portray Jesus as the sign of the kingdom of God is to put Jesus against the background of social, cultural and political situations of his time. In portraying or understanding Jesus as the sign of God's kingdom, Schillebeeckx uses historical method of interpretation to see Jesus not as a mythical figure but a historical and cultural person and his significance for the early Christian community. The population of Jesus time was comprised by the majority of poor peasants, fishermen and minority elite. There were also unjust religious institution and oppressive social structure. The military system was quite strong, especially the presence and occupation of the Roman military. It was in this context that Jesus lived, preached and did his ministry.

The central or key message of Jesus' life and proclamation was the kingdom of God. He witnessed to and proclaimed the kingdom of God which was quite opposite to the popular, earthly understanding of the earthly kingdom of his contemporaries. In his ministry, Jesus healed the sick, related to and communicated with the poor, welcomed and reconciled the sinners and the outcasts. Through his presence, his preaching and healing ministries, Jesus revealed God's presence and his saving act in human lives. Jesus presented a new image of God, a loving, merciful, compassionate God; a God who relates and communicates with people and who cares for the whole creation. "God's lordship or dominion [sic.]," Schillebeeckx writes, "by which Jesus lives and which he proclaims tells us something about God in his relation to man and likewise about man in relation to God. It is a theological and yet also anthropological reality grounded in experience." (1979: 142). The kingdom of God is nothing else than a loving relation between God and humankind, established by God and experienced by human here and now. It is a reality that can be experienced by humankind; it is not just an utopia. The kingdom of God is a reality that touches human life (*anthropological dimension*) and at the same time it is a divine reality (*theological dimension*). Through and in Jesus people experienced the nearness of God and His liberating act. However, the kingdom of God is also about judgment on humankind, culture and society. It is a judgment on the way people live their lives according to the will or the Law of God.

There is a good connection between the kingdom of God and Jesus' invitation of *metanoia*, transformation or renewal of life. Jesus demands: "The time has elapsed and the kingdom of God as at hand, repent and believe in the Good News" (Mrk 1:15; Lk 11:20). The transformation or renewal of human life both individually or communally is a sign of actual praxis of the kingdom of God. On this, Schillebeeckx insists: "It is orthopraxis, right conduct, is the hu-

man manifestation or rendering of God, universal saving love, registered in practical human living”(1979: 153). This connection between the rule of God, or the liberating presence of God and the right, just way of living is based and manifested in the whole Jesus’ ministry and life. When people encountered Jesus and openly welcomed him and his teaching, they experienced transformation or conversion. It is not only an intellectual, moral, or individual conversion, but it is also a communal or social conversion.

Through and in Jesus, people began to experience reestablishment of a new, a right and a just relationship of men and women to God; and also a good and a more humane relationship among men and women in the community or society. Schillebeeckx (1994:20) contends that, for Jesus, “the kingdom of God is to be found where human life becomes ‘*whole*’, where ‘*salvation*’ is realized for men and women, where righteousness and love begin to prevail and enslaving conditions come to an end.” The kingdom of God is present when people begin to care for one another, to forgive one another and mutually respect the dignity of one another. It is present when the master-servant model of relationship is transformed into a friend-to-friend model of loving relationship. The kingdom of God is nothing else than the experience of love and salvation in the world. In the light of orthopraxis, human beings can become signs that mediate the liberating act of God in the world.

The whole ministry of Jesus in proclaiming and witnessing to the kingdom of God was centered in his intimate experience and loving relationship with God. Jesus’ deep consciousness of God’s presence and intimacy in his life is called “Abba experience” (Schillebeeckx, 1979:268). The Abba experience becomes the source of Jesus’ preaching and ministry, of his life and his commitment to the kingdom of God. It gives him inspiration and strength to reveal God’s love and mercy to his people. This Father-Son relationship, Schillebeeckx argues, is a very basic and important factor that determined Jesus’ identity, life and mission. Therefore, any attempt to deny or neglect the relationship between the two, for him, is to turn Jesus into a mythical being, a non-historical person, a non-Jesus and his teaching and way of life are taken away from his very person (1979:268).

### **2.3. Jesus Christ and Parables of the Kingdom of God**

Another way by which Jesus presents or reveals the mystery of the kingdom of God is by telling and explaining parables. Using parables in transmitting moral values was a cultural tradition that was prevalent at Jesus’ time. In many cultural traditions, parables are used as a means or instrumentum of

teaching or learning. Jesus used parables to reveal the mystery of human life, the goal of life, the mystery of God and his plans. Parables usually are taken from human life or from day-to-day experiences. Parables connect with people's ordinary experiences. People can tell, retell, interpret and reinterpret a parable and then they draw meaning or inspiration of it. A parable throws a new light into our mind so that we can see our lives with a new perspective. It offers us a new possibility or a new way of understanding our lives and it urges us to respond to that reality in a new way. Schillebeeckx (1979:157) insists: "Parables have a strong and critical effect that may prompt a renewal of life and society... There is an element of existential earnestness... Parables point not to another, a supernatural world but to a new potentiality within this world of ours: a real possibility of coming to see life and the world, and to experience them. In a way quite different from the one we are accustomed to." Parables contain meanings that inspire and urge us to renew our lives both individually and communally.

Jesus used parables which were embedded in people's culture to explain and reveal new understanding of God's kingdom and his image. To present a compassionate, loving and merciful God, Jesus used parable of a woman who is rejoicing after finding her lost coin. He used the parable of the lost son to depict God as a forgiving and merciful father who is longing for his son's return. These parables, and many more parables, that Jesus used during his ministry to reveal new understanding or image of God and new understanding of our humanity. Through his parables, Jesus offered and even challenged the images of God that have been constructed by religious authorities which hindered or even oppressed people.

For Schillebeeckx, Jesus did not only tell parables but he himself was and is "the Parable of God" (1979: 158-172). In the person of Jesus, his way of being and doing, his whole life and even his death, is a parable. As the living Parable, Jesus reveals his Father to the world. The whole narratives of God are embodied, plausible and tangible in the life and person of Jesus. Through his act of forgiving the sinners, Jesus showed people the forgiving and merciful God. Through his act of socializing, eating and drinking with the outcast, Jesus revealed God who has the power to break down all social barriers and to reunite or reconcile all people into one family of God. Through his life and ministry, people experienced God's loving presence and actions in their very lives. Jesus is the living parable or the living narrative of God; the living story of how God loves and cares for human beings, of how God liberates and gives them life in abundance. In a word, in and through Jesus, people see and experience God.

## **2.4. Jesus' Death and Resurrection**

For so a long time, many theologians especially in the period of pre-Vatican II, used to treat death and resurrection of Jesus as two different subjects that were not interrelated. Furthermore, resurrection was not regarded as the central theme of theology, but just an addendum or as merely a proof for Jesus' divinity. But it is not the case for modern theology. Schillebeeckx, for example, asserts that there is a close relationship between the career and life of Jesus with his death on the cross and his resurrection. His death cannot be interpreted and understood separately from the rest of Jesus' life and ministry; rather his life and death are two dimensions of the one and the same liberating mission. For Schillebeeckx, "Jesus' whole life is the hermeneusis of his death" (Schreiter, 1985: 154). In other words, Jesus' death is already anticipated in his life and ministry. It is not an independent and accidental event that happens in the end of his life and his ministry; or it is not a mistake, or a failure on his part, but it is an essential part of his whole mission project or his plan for the salvation of human kind. Jesus' death is the climax of his radical self-identification with the poor, the unholy, the outcast and the rejected one (Schillebeeckx, 1979:124).

Schillebeeckx interprets the death of Jesus as the death of a prophet martyr or the death of the just, the righteous one. A prophet-martyr is put to death because he proclaims the truth that liberates people; the truth that calls for a radical metanoia, the renewal of life (Schillebeeckx, 1979: 276; see also Hinze, 1985: 133-135). In Schillebeeckx's view, Jesus is the true prophet or the righteous who suffers for proclaiming God's plan for human salvation. As the just one, He suffered not for his own sake, but for the greatest cause: for the salvation of the whole world. In this sense, Jesus is counted as one among many prophet-martyrs of Israel. However, for Christians, Jesus is more than a prophet; he is the Son of God.

On the cross Jesus shares in the brokenness and fragility of humanity and of the world. He reveals to the world the image of the suffering messiah and the humanity of God. He reveals that God can save and heal our broken world even through an immense suffering and cruel death. It does not indicate the powerlessness of God in the midst of suffering. It seems that God was absent and became silent when Jesus was on the cross. But for Schillebeeckx it was not the way to interpret the event. He asserts that the silence of God when Jesus was on the cross does not signify God's absence and indifference, or his weakness in facing suffering and death, but on the contrary it signifies that God is omnipresent both in Jesus' life, career and his death. For him, "God was not powerless but vulnerable and defenseless as Jesus was. At the death of

Jesus, God's presence was near in power but without misuse of power." (Schillebeeckx, 1994: 128). On the cross, Jesus radically challenges people's triumphalist image of messiah and invites them to come to a new awareness and a new understanding that a true messiah is the one who suffers for and with his people; that he is the defenseless one.

The whole ministry and life of Jesus comprise not only of his death but also his resurrection. For Schillebeeckx, Jesus' resurrection is already manifested or embedded in the life and the ministry of Jesus, otherwise his death is simply a failure, faith is just human longing and Easter is an ideology. "Resurrection," for Schillebeeckx, "is a symbol of victory of life over death, suffering; that only life has a future, death has no future." (Galvin, 1985:61-62). It is a sign that God of Jesus Christ is the God of the living, not of the dead. God is the life-giver who sustains us here and now and he is also the ultimate goal of our life; He is our future (the Eschaton). Only in God, can we have true life and happiness.

Schillebeeckx distinguishes resurrection narratives from appearance narratives of the resurrected Christ. For him, faith in Jesus' resurrection cannot be based upon the empty tomb narratives, but it must be seen the light of a metanoia process, that is from the condition of denial to a free acceptance of Jesus as the Lord and the savior. In the context of his mission, i.e., the salvation of the whole world and humanity, Jesus can be regarded as "the eschatological prophet" whose message for salvation has a universal significance (Schreiter, 1985: 164-169). Jesus is the intermediary in the kingdom of God. He reveals the power and the rule of God in the world through his whole life, deeds, proclamation, death and resurrection.

### **3. Human Liberation**

The experience of suffering, death and all kind of tribulations lead us to imagine or hope for liberation or happiness. Human experience of suffering challenges our lives and urges us to discover its meaning. As a Christian we can find meaning of our suffering in the light of Jesus' life, suffering and death.

#### **3.1. Human Experience of Suffering**

Schillebeeckx argues that salvation that was realized and fulfilled in and by Jesus has universal meaning and significance. As the consequence, Jesus is the savior not only for his time, his people and his culture, but for all peoples, for all times and for all cultures. The question is how do people of today can

experience Jesus as the one who saves and liberates all people and the whole world? Schillebeeckx begins his reflection with human experience. The history of humanity is the history of suffering or what he calls 'ecumene of suffering.' What common to all humanity is a constant experience of suffering and fragmentary experience of salvation or liberation. There is suffering that has educational values, it is a kind of school of suffering, the suffering that makes us aware of ourselves, others and above all, of God. But there is suffering that causes alienation, deprivation and oppression. Such a suffering takes away values and meaning from our very lives.

For Schillebeeckx, the cause of human suffering cannot be sought or found in God but it must be sought in humanity, in the oppressive, violent and unjust social structures. The cause of human suffering is not God, but sinful humanity. Very often we cannot explain, understand and even solve the suffering we are facing by mere rational explanations. Even Christian message cannot give any adequate and satisfied explanation of human suffering. One thing the NT offers us to resist and deal with suffering is not by explanation, but by remembrance of the suffering because it has critical and liberating force (Schreier, 1985: 53-54). For Christian today, the memory of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection can become the paradigm and source for our liberation. The remembrance of suffering can motivate and inspire people for praxis or actions. It urges us to hope for a better and a happy future.

### **3.2. Humanity: Locus of Liberation**

Humanity or anthropology is central to Schillebeeckx's theological ideas. Theological basis for understanding humanity is Jesus who is fully human and fully divine. The primary goal of Jesus' mission is to humanize humanity. Salvation from God in Jesus is primarily directed to humanity. Salvation cannot be separated from humanity. One, therefore, cannot talk about salvation without humanity. However, it is difficult to define humanity because it is a very complex reality. There is no perfect definition that enables us to comprehend the complexity of humanity. Schillebeeckx (1993:734-743) proposes the so-called 'anthropological constants' or 'coordinates.' What he means by these terms is that "the creative establishment of specific norms for a better assessment of human worth and thus for human salvation." (1993: 734). For him, there are seven constants or coordinates that help us to assess or to give us a better concept or understanding of humanity. The first constant is the relationship of human person as corporeal beings to other human beings, nature and ecological environment. Humanity exists in relation with other people, nature and the world. All are distinct but inseparable, interconnected and interdependent.

Salvation or liberation should include all these aspects: humanity, nature and the world.

The second constant is the fact that human beings are social being. Their lives, identities and existence are formed in the context of social relationship. In social life, we need norms or regulations that direct and order our lives. However, one's dignity, freedom and uniqueness should be respected because without these aspects a livable and just community cannot exist. There must be a good balance or harmonious relationship between the whole community's needs and those of individuals. The third constant is the understanding of our existence and identity as persons are formed or determined by social and institutional structures. These social and institutional structures are human construct, thus they are temporal and changeable. They become problematic and disturbing when those structures are employed or abused to serve the needs of the privileged few.

The fourth constant is the cultural and historical dimension of humanity. Human persons are cultural and historical beings. They can learn from their culture and history and at the same time they can criticize their historical and cultural situations. The fifth anthropological constant is the relationship between theory and praxis. These two in their mutual relationship can give human culture meaning and permanence. Both theory and praxis are interdependent. Without these two aspects, there is genuine human development. The sixth dimension of humanity is religious and para-religious consciousness. What Schillebeeckx intends to emphasize here, i.e., faith, hope and love are essential elements or aspects needed for the healthy and meaningfulness of humanity. In other words, liberation or salvation which neglects or bypasses spiritual dimension is only a partial liberation. And the last anthropological constant is the synthesis of all the anthropological constants as mentioned above. All these constants are mutually interrelated. By neglecting or bypassing one of these constants one will come to the point of destroying humanity. They form one reality: humanity. In order to have a holistic understanding of human salvation or liberation, one should regard these constants as one organic whole. Moreover, these constants reveal two basic dimensions of human salvation, namely: the *already* and *not yet*. It means that human salvation is a process that is already taking place here and now, but not yet completed; it is still in the process of achieving its fulfillment or its completion in the future.

### **3.3. Salvation as both a Gift and Task**

Christian understanding of human salvation or liberation entails the whole

aspects of humanity. In the New Testament salvation is understood both as a gift (grace) and a task (Schillebeeckx, 1933:513). It is a gift because it is freely given by God. We are receivers of God's gift. In and through Jesus, God freely and unconditionally manifested his love, kindness and compassion to humanity and the world. Salvation is also a task because God continually invites us to participate in his plan for liberating all humanity and the whole creation. We are to be co-workers of God's liberating works. We are saved not only as individuals but as one family of humanity. It demands from us our social and ecological responsibility. Salvation of God urges us to take seriously all problems we are facing and that are threatening and devaluing our humanity. Salvation is a call or a mission to transform the unjust, evil realities that dehumanize humanity. It is a call to overcome all personal and social forms of alienation. To be saved means to be whole: being –in- wholeness as individuals and as one community of humanity. Salvation is a call and a zealous commitment to participate in present-day works or efforts for political, cultural, and social emancipation.

These two dimensions should be kept in mind and should be put into praxis. Disregarding one of these two dimensions leads one to see liberation only as either human effort without religious significance or only as God's work without human involvement. Furthermore, liberation or salvation needs both human free acceptance of God's grace and realization of God's grace in orthopraxis. Historical and anthropological dimensions are locus of salvation. It means that salvation of God takes place in the world, in the history of humanity and it is experienced and advanced by humanity.

### **3.4. Faith, Ethics and Politics**

Christian faith, ethics and politics, at first glance, are distinct and yet interrelated. Schillebeeckx insists: "True ethics has to be rooted not in the universal moral reason but in the belief in God who continues to liberate us here and now." (1987:1953). Faith or religion is the starting point of ethics. Christian ethics should be seen as an application or praxis of all theological virtues: love, faith and hope. Ethics needs a good theology. In other words, Christian ethics needs a just and right images of God; the images of God that should be taken from the Bible and its long spiritual tradition. However, we are cautioned that it is very important to pay attention and to be critical to the danger of absolutizing or of idolizing one image or one interpretation of God. The image, language and interpretation of God can be oppressive and dehumanizing for the majority of the poor and the marginalized. Unjust images and languages of God can be abused to perpetuate unjust practices and to strengthen unjust and evil social

structures that dehumanize humanity. On the importance of just image of God in ethical praxis, Schillebeeckx writes:

“Our God is a God who accepts people beyond the limits of their ethical capacity and action regardless of the broken status of their humanity. He [God, sic.] is therefore a God of liberation, forgiveness and reconciliation, without which any ethics, whether personal or socio-politic can be fatally graceless, often fanatical and degrading humanity. Ethics needs a God who is more than ethics.” (1987: 71 ff).

God is the source of moral principles. He is above all ethics and the one who corrects all man-made moral principles. Schillebeeckx (1987: 71 ff) goes on to say that ignoring or being silent about God who is above all moral principles and the source of ethics will lead human beings to belief in idols (self-made gods) which nothing else than death and destruction of humanity.

Faith, love and hope have both individual and social dimensions. Faith in God embraces the whole aspects of humanity. Faith and love should compel Christians to struggle for justice, liberation and reconciliation. Love is the supreme law or the supreme virtue of Christian praxis. As Christians we are called to love God and our neighbors. These two dimensions form one single virtue. The love of God should be expressed through concrete practice of the love of one's neighbors. Schillebeeckx coins two terms, i.e., *mysticism* and *political love*. (1987: 71 ff). He employs mysticism to denote an intensive, intimate form of experience of God's love. One should live in a right and loving relationship with God. *Mysticism* is nothing else than a deep experience of God as a loving and merciful Father. What he means by *political love* is that the intense experience of God's love should be practiced or realized in our everyday life. It is about intensive form of social involvement and communal commitment to the salvation of all people. Political love is about loving all people regardless their backgrounds as God has loved us unconditionally. *Political love* is the core of our Christian ethics. It is necessary and imperative for Christian today, especially when we are dealing with human suffering, oppression and dehumanization. For us Christians the prototype or model of our mysticism and political love is Jesus Christ. He has an intimate and loving relationship with his Father and he has a zealous commitment to all people. He came into the world to show us God's love, to liberate, elevate and to heal our broken humanity. Jesus shows us the meaning of our true humanity and our mission that is to love God and all people.

For us Christians, the sources of our mysticism and political love are the Gospel and liturgy. The Gospel does not give us a clear cut program for our political and social, caritative programs, but it offers us what Schillebeeckx

calls *prophetic utopia* (1995:34). What he means by the phrase “*prophetic utopia*” is that the Gospel contains messages that can be used to criticize society and unjust conditions and to offer new possibilities to build up a more meaningful and just human life. The prophetic utopia of the Gospel compels us to live a new way of life.

Political love, faith in God are nurtured and nourished in liturgy or prayer. Prayer, especially Eucharist and *doxology* (praise) - is an expression of faith, love and hope in God; that God in Jesus has liberated us. Our remembrance of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection and his ever-presence in the liturgy of Eucharist has political or social meaning. In other words, liturgy has something to do with social or public life. There is no separation between worship, liturgy and our social responsibility in the world. On this Schillebeeckx asserts:” Without prayer or mysticism politics soon becomes cruel and barbaric; and without political love, prayer or mysticism soon becomes sentimental or uncommitted interiority. In an inseparable two-in-ones Christian faith has both mystical and political dimensions; the bond between the two is laid by the ethical dimension of Christian faith.”(1993:820-821). There is an intimate relationship between liturgy and our social responsibilities in building up a new world. Liturgy or worship is the source and inspiration for our mission in social, economic and political spheres.

### **3.5. The Church in the World: Sign of the Kingdom**

The Church as a community of believers is rooted in the faith in God who in and through Jesus has liberated and redeemed the whole world. The Church, however, is not the kingdom, but is the sign of the kingdom. The kingdom of God is more complex than the existence of the Church. The Church itself is in the rule or the governance of God; it is not above the kingdom. The Church is a sacrament, sign of salvation. Through it God’s grace of salvation is mediated to the world. The Church is not only a social reality but also a theological reality through which God reveals and conceals his plan for human salvation. For Schillebeeckx (1987:32) religion or the church is the “place where salvation from God is made a theme or put into words, confessed explicitly, proclaimed prophetically and celebrated liturgically.” He goes on to say that the church or Christian religion is the living anamnesis, the living memory of God’s liberating acts and presence in human history. But it is not just a memory of the past experiences of God’s liberation, but in the sense that God’s liberation is made present and experienced by people here and now, especially when they celebrate liturgy. The Church exists in the world and not above or out of it, but it lives in and relates to the world; and it continues facing and experiencing all

events that happen within it. Through its existence, its sacraments, liturgy and actions, the Church can mediate God's presence and his saving act in the world.

The Church as the sign of the kingdom should be manifested in its praxis or in political love. Since the Church is historical and cultural, it can transform the world, history and culture not from outside, but from within with the Gospel values. The Church can become a critical force and a prophetic voice that denounces all forms of injustices. It should struggle for building up a world worthy of living. The Church is called and commissioned to exercise its political love where the meaning of humanity is being devalued and when the poor and the marginalized are kept oppressed and isolated from the community. To effectively exercise its political love, the Church should be rooted in spirituality or mysticism. Schillebeeckx emphasizes the importance and meaning of liturgy as the source and center of Christian politics. For Schillebeeckx (1987:34f) the Church is "the celebrating sacrament of the salvation that God realizes in the world." The celebration of God's liberating works has its political or social dimension. It has outward dimension. Salvation should be understood not only as grace/ gift but also as a mission to be realized in this world. As the living memoria of Christ, the Church is called to proclaim a critical challenge and to take concrete actions to transform and renew the world. Moreover, the prophetic function of the Church is not as an outsider, but rather as an insider that seriously or actively involves in the development and realization of full humanity. (Schillebeeckx, 1993:820-821).

The danger that the Church should avoid is the old adage that says 'outside the church there is no salvation.' Schillebeeckx confronts this adage by saying: 'outside the world there is no salvation'. It means that salvation is taken place in the world. It is a historical and anthropological event. It has a theological basis in incarnation event-the divine Word became flesh. Incarnation took place in the world and in human history and not out of it. Salvation, moreover, is bigger and greater than the church; it is meant not only for the Church, but for all people and the whole world as well. The Church itself needs salvation from God. Salvation is the act of God in the world and in human history and not solely in the Church. This view challenges the traditional attitude of *ecclesiocentrism* and the tendency to separate the Church from the world. The world is no longer seen as profane or evil *in se*, but as mediation of God's presence. It is the locus of God's work of salvation.

### **3.6. Creation and Cosmic Salvation**

As it already mentioned above, humanity exists in relation to the nature and the world. Salvation entails not only the spiritual but also material or corpo-

real reality. It includes liberation of humanity and the whole creation or the whole cosmos. It is a cosmic salvation in which humanity is included. Schillebeeckx (1980:116) contends that nature and history are authorities in which and through which God reveals himself as creator. In and through our existential experience of finitude, suffering, and brokenness God reveals himself as savior and redeemer. Experience of creation, for him, is the basis for any experiences of God's presence and salvation. This cosmic experience can become basis for our spirituality and liturgy. Without the experience of God through creation and the world, liturgy and spirituality have no meaning and basis. What we celebrate in liturgy is what God has done in our lives and in the world. It is a celebration of life and grace given by God.

Schillebeeckx (1980: 112; 1983:91-92) asserts that creation faith of Christians should exclude false understanding of creation namely dualism, emanationism, pantheism, chronological explanation of creation (see also Kennedy, 1980: 83-85). Creation presupposes the creator, thus they are not identical. The creator whom we believe in is not a God who keeps distance and neglects humanity and the world. On the contrary, it is a God who creates and continues caring for, guiding, protecting humanity and the whole cosmos and leading them to the final end. The final end of humanity and the whole cosmos is God himself.

There is value and goodness in creation; it is not a mere compilation of material substances that has no spiritual meaning. In the story of creation in Genesis, all that God created were and are good and beautiful. God as creator has entrusted humankind the role of stewardship over the whole creation. It means that human persons, created in the image and likeness of God, have the responsibility to take care and preserve the whole creation. Through their works human persons contribute to the fulfillment and humanization of creation. They also can realize their full humanity as co-creators with God, the creator through their works. However, it should be noted that the role of humankind in the world is not of domination but "caring creativity: raising up everything, aiming at justice, peace and integrity of all creation." (Schillebeeckx, 1994:237).

The history of industrialization and economic development has shown us that our role and responsibility as stewards of the world and the cosmos have been turned into the role of destructive control or domination. We have destroyed the world and abused all natural resources for economic profits. The elite few has controlled, abused and manipulated all natural resources. As the consequence, the majority of people live in poverty. Created in the image of God, we are called to be agents of God's loving care for all creation. We are called to care not only for humankind but also for the whole creation. We can

realize our full humanity only in a livable world and in a good environment. Only in such a world can we human beings live our humanity and experience the kingdom of God: the glory of God and the salvation of humanity. In other words, it is in the world or the cosmos that God's saving and liberating act is revealed; otherwise salvation is simply an utopia without a firm basis in reality.

The God we believe in is the creator not only of humanity but also of the whole cosmos. We cannot talk about creation or the world without talking about God. God created the world through divine Word; and the divine Word became flesh in the person of Jesus. Through Jesus God saves and liberates the world. In and through Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, God reveals himself to the world as creator and savior. Jesus, for Schillebeeckx, (1980: 126-128) is 'concentrated creation'; it means that through Jesus' life, career and presence he reveals God who cares, loves and liberates humanity and the world. Every created reality will be completed in and by him, because through him and in him they exist and live.

### **3.7. Eschatological Fulfillment**

Salvation has been misunderstood by some Christians as something that has to do only with the future. But salvation in its full sense of the word, according to Schillebeeckx, should comprise two decisive dimensions: 'already' and 'not yet'. Salvation has already manifested or realized in the world by Jesus, and yet it is still in the process of fulfillment in the future. The Christian faith underscores the continuation and balance between two poles: *present* and *future eschatology*. Salvation is a dynamic process which is started from the present and it is led to its full completion in the future. It is a continuous process that involves both present and future dimensions. On this theme Schillebeeckx writes: "The future is an intrinsic dimension of the present, is related to what must still happen in time without allowing us to see its future shape at present." (1995:48). He goes on to say that salvation in the future is already anticipated in the present. The already eschaton that is manifested here in the world can become basis for our hope for a better future. The happiness of the future promised to us by God should compel us to live a good life here and now and it should motivate us to actively participate in the praxis of political love for human liberation.

The kingdom of God should be experienced and realized by humankind here and now, but it always opens to the eschaton. To hope for the future one has to base one's faith in God. In other words, the firm basis of our present and future is God. In the history of humanity, God revealed himself through Jesus

as the living God. Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus God manifested himself as creator and liberator. He is both the beginning and the end; the origin and the eschaton. Schillebeeckx infers that eschatology is the “expression of the belief that history in God’s hands, that the history of the world can reach its fulfillment in communion with God and it will be brought to this fulfillment in Christ who embodied God’s promise.” (1995:51). Communion of human beings with God through Jesus and with the Holy Spirit is the ultimate goal of human life.

This communion with the living God raises questions regarding the existence of hell and heaven. For Schillebeeckx, heaven and hell are *anthropological possibilities*. What he means by this phrase is that human beings are free to choose how they live their lives here and now. Heaven and hell are possibilities one can choose freely. One can choose to live a good life; practice virtues and that will lead him or her to eternal happiness. One can choose God and to be united with God here and in the future. Or one has freedom to deny, reject God in his or her life and it will lead him or her to eternal punishment or suffering. Heaven is about life and happiness and hell can be understood as the non-existence, because it does not entail eternal life. Only goodness has future; evil has no future, because God is good (*bonum*); there is no evil in God. God, the supreme good, has the last word. He has the power to destroy evil and to give life. Evil, suffering and death have no power to give life. God is our eschaton, because He is the God of the living not of the dead. Life in eternity is the final end; it has the last word because our God is the author of life.

Salvation (union with God) serves as critical force for our lives and praxis here and now. The eschatological hope should not make us indifferent toward injustices and oppression in the world. It should urge us to love God and others through praxis of political love. But salvation is not only human effort but above all God’s action in the world. Therefore, we should make room for God in our efforts to bring about human liberation. The way we live our lives here and now brings about its own judgment. Every action of ours has its consequence or judgment. Judgment is not only a future event, but naturally it is already embedded in our behaviors and attitudes towards others, nature and God. The final judgment is based on our lives here: how we live in a good relationship to God and to other people.

#### **4. Conclusion: Summary and Its Relevance**

##### **4.1. Summary**

Schillebeeckx contends that the kingdom of God or the rule of God is not

about domination, lording-over, but it is about love, caring, justice, peace, and unity. It is about unity of humanity and God. God's kingdom is human salvation and liberation; but it is also cosmic liberation. Liberation and salvation are not abstract but real, visible, tangible reality in human history. In human history the kingdom of God has been realized, became tangible and fulfilled in the person and the life of Jesus. Jesus reveals to the world the meaning of humanity and above all who God is for us. He is the parable of God. As the parable of God, Jesus transforms and challenges unjust and oppressive social structures. He restores and transforms human life. His life and ministry of healing and preaching of the Good News, his suffering and death on the cross, are signs of the rule of God.

Jesus is the primordial sacrament because he reveals God's plan and grace to humanity and the world. The God of Jesus is the God who creates and cares for humanity and the whole world. He is the God of goodness and love. He is the God of all peoples and the whole cosmos, especially the God of the poor and the oppressed. Jesus revealed God who radically became flesh and dwelt among us. He identified himself with our humanity and liberated the world through his suffering, death and resurrection. Jesus' death and resurrection affirm that death, evil, suffering and injustices do not have the last word. Only God is the author and the giver of life and true happiness. He is the origin and the end (eschaton). He created and will recreate and renew his own creation; and there will be a new earth and a new heaven.

Salvation manifested in the historical Jesus implies that salvation is historical, contextual, and real; it relates to humanity and the whole world. Humanity is the locus of salvation and liberation. For Schillebeeckx, humanity should be understood not in a fragmentary way but in a holistic way. Salvation includes body-soul, economic, social, political, ecological dimensions, etc. Neglecting one of these constants, salvation will soon become impaired, incomplete or partial. Salvation is historical; it entails the past, the present and the future. God is working in our history and brings it to its completion. God is the supreme origin and the supreme end of all creation.

Salvation from God is both a gift and a task; is grace and responsibility. Salvation or liberation should impel Christians to be faithful to their call and mission: to build a livable and meaningful human community. The Church in the world is an effective sacrament of the kingdom of God only when she struggles against any kind of evil practices that dehumanize, alienate and oppress humanity; when she boldly proclaims and promotes unity, peace and reconciliation among all people; when the Church faithfully practices reconciliation and forgiveness; when the Church keeps reminding people of their true identity as

God's children and of their responsibilities in loving their neighbors and caring for the whole creation; and when her liturgy and political love truly go hand in hand.

#### **4.2. Relevance**

Edward Schillebeeckx is a great modern thinker and theologian whose theological reflections do speak to contemporary audience. His Christology and theology emerged as responses to particular context of the western world. He brings together two sources of theology, i.e., human experiences and the Scriptures into a mutual dialogue or mutual critique. He is well based in the NT hermeneutics which assists him to have a good understanding of Jesus and his social, cultural context. The faith of early Christian community in Jesus is reinterpreted in the context of the lives of people. The basic questions of his theological and Christological enterprises are the following: Does Jesus Christ still have meaning or significance for Christians today? How do we responsibly and ethically interpret the Gospel messages that can become the driving force and inspiration for praxis, i.e., building up the kingdom of God?

In interpreting human experiences, especially experiences of suffering and pain, Schillebeeckx uses not only the Bible but also ideas from other disciplines such as sociology, hermeneutics, philosophy, just to name a few. He sets out a good example for modern theologians in doing theology by actively engaging in an interdisciplinary dialogue. A good theology or Christology, for him, should emerge from human experiences reflected in the light of the Gospel and Christian tradition. Such a theology can respond to people's problems and needs. The goal of theology is not for itself, but for the people of God; for strengthening people's hope, love and faith in God.

Schillebeeckx points out some urgent and pressing problems that almost all nations, including Indonesia, are dealing with, such as problems of suffering, poverty, unjust and oppressive social structures, ecological problems, etc. These problems raise some challenging questions about our humanity and about God. What is meant to be human? What's the nature of human suffering? Does suffering have meaning? Why do people suffer? Who are responsible for suffering? What do we do to solve or at least to ease human suffering? Does God care for people who are suffering? Does God take some actions to liberate people who are oppressed by poverty and power holders? Or Does God seem powerless in the face of human suffering? Do we feel called to take some practical actions, as Christians, to transform our unjust world in which we live?

Schillebeeckx offers us, the Indonesian Church, method of hermeneutics: using our present experiences, the Gospel and Christian tradition as sources of theologizing. We can use the Gospel, Christian tradition and our experiences in our theological reflection and praxis. The role of people or faith community in reflection and action is highly demanded. The faith community should play important role in reading, understanding, interpreting and living out the Gospel values according to its social, political, economic and cultural contexts. Schillebeeckx (1993:18) insists that a local church or a faith community should write its own Gospel; it is the “fifth gospel”. It means that any meaningful theology or Christology should come from the community of faith. All members of the community should journey together, to ponder and practice their faith together as one community. Faith is lived and nurtured by the whole community.

One community of faith has its own particular context, thus the type of theology or Christology that it produces has its own characteristics. This implies that there will be plurality of local or contextual theologies/ Christologies. Pluralism in theology or Christology is richness and therefore, it is necessary for the universal Church. However, there must be some criteria for a good and meaningful local / contextual theology. Imposing one theology or Christology to all people and all cultures is an aberration of faith. Because faith is human response to God’s self-revelation and self-communication in history. It is historical and contextual experience.

Schillebeeckx also contributes to the Indonesian Church the importance of parables or narratives in evangelization and faith development. I think that using narratives, parables, and local proverbs as a means of evangelization is very appropriate method for Indonesians. They are familiar with forms of oral communications. By using parables, narratives or proverbs, local people can easily understand and practice Gospel values. Moreover, these local wisdoms can be employed and developed in constructing contextual theology or Christology.

Schillebeeckx’s theological reflection challenges the local Church to further reflect on the meaning of her existence as the sacrament of the kingdom of God. The local Church of Indonesia should ask herself what is meant to be the sign of God’s kingdom in the context of religious, social and cultural pluralism. What do the Indonesian Christians contribute to the political, economic and cultural dimensions for the realization of full humanity? The local Church has to become the sign of unity in the midst of social, religious and cultural pluralism. She is called to transform and renew unjust national social, economic and political structures that have dehumanized the majority of Indonesians.

In the area of Church's ministries and liturgy, how does the local church live out her ministries and celebrate her liturgy? The local Church should celebrate her faith in liturgy in such a way that she should go beyond mere performing liturgical celebrations without social actions or social responsibility. The fruits of liturgy should be realized in human lives; it has power to transform politics, culture, economic and social life. There must be a healthy relationship between her faith and praxis; between her liturgy or her mysticism and her social involvement in the public sphere.

There are some important and challenging theological questions the Indonesian Church should reflect on: What does it mean for the local Indonesian Christians to confess Jesus as the only savior and the only Son of God in the context of religious and cultural pluralism? What is the meaning and significance of Jesus for the majority of Indonesian people who are poor and marginalized? Who is Jesus for Indonesians who are struggling for justice, peace, unity and liberation from the unjust, oppressive, and corruptive elite? What are the images of God and the images of Jesus which are biblically based that evoke meaning, hope for their daily experiences?

Lastly, the anthropological constants that Schillebeeckx offers for a better and more comprehensive understanding of humanity and salvation are similar to Indonesian people's understanding of humanity, cosmic harmony and wholeness. For Indonesians, to be truly human is to be in a good, harmonious relationship with God, other people and with the whole creation. Healing practices in traditional religion, for example, reveals a holistic concept of humanity and salvation. For the local people, to be whole, to be saved and to be healthy means to be in a good, healthy and harmonious relationship with other people, creation and with God. Salvation is about a right and harmonious relationship of humanity with God and with the whole cosmos. A broken, unjust and unhealthy relationship between humanity with the Creator and the created world will bring about chaos and suffering. In this context, the local Church is urged to liberate not only human beings but also the earth and the whole creation. The local Church is called to work for salvation and integrity of the world and the whole creation. By so doing, the Church partakes in preparing the arrival of a "new heaven" and a "new world"; an eschatological fulfillment promised and realized only by God.

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