

E. SCHILLEBEECKX, O.P.

CHRIST
THE
SACRAMENT
OF THE
ENCOUNTER
WITH GOD

A SHEED & WARD CLASSIC

Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAM	<i>Antonianum</i>
AAS	<i>Acta Apostolicae Sedis</i>
BJ	<i>Bijdragen</i>
DB	Denzinger-Bannwart, <i>Enchiridion Symbolorum</i>
DTC	<i>Dictionnaire de théologie catholique</i>
FS	<i>Franciscan Studies</i>
GL	<i>Geist und Leben</i>
GM	<i>Gregorianum</i>
MC	Mansi, <i>Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio</i>
MST	<i>Medieval Studies</i>
NRT	<i>Nouvelle revue théologique</i>
PG	Migne, <i>Patrologia Graeca</i>
PL	Migne, <i>Patrologia Latina</i>
PO	<i>Patrologia Orientalis</i>
RTAM	<i>Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale</i>
SC	<i>Studia Catholica</i>
SCG	St. Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summa Contra Gentiles</i>
SH	E. Schillebeeckx, O.P., <i>De Sacramentele Heilseconomie</i> , Antwerp and Bilthoven (1952)
SK	<i>Scholastik</i>
ST	St. Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologiae</i>

FOREWORD

The author of this book, Fr. E. Schillebeeckx, O.P., was born at Antwerp in 1914, and after many years of teaching at Louvain, both in the Dominican *studium* there and in the University, is now Professor of Dogmatic Theology at the University of Nijmegen. A bibliography of his books and articles would include over a hundred items; it is hoped that some of these will be published in English translation in the near future. His chief book so far is *De sacramentele Heilseconomie*,¹ published in 1952 as Part 1 of a projected book in two parts, though it now appears that the author intends to publish in a single volume a revised version of the matter of Part 1 together with the matter originally intended for separate publication. The work here presented in English translation (it has already appeared in German and French) may be regarded as a non-technical summary of the projected single volume of *De sacramentele Heilseconomie*.

Under the conditions prevailing in the world of publishers and readers today, especially in "religious publishing," and especially in England, it is not easy to acquire a very fine sense of discrimination, of standards of theological depth and excellence. Such large claims are so frequently made for minor figures that it becomes difficult to give due credit to the authors who really deserve our respect. I shall merely say here, then, that of the many writers who have contributed to the renewal of Catholic theology in our day, Fr. Schillebeeckx and Fr. Karl Rahner, in their different ways, stand in a class by themselves.

¹ A useful account of this work may be found in Dom J. Gaillard, "Chronique de liturgie," *Revue Thomiste*, 57 (1957), pp. 510-51.

Writing of the French translation of the present work, Fr. B. D. Dupuy speaks of the way in which Fr. Schillebeeckx "rediscovers, as it were from within, the notions forged by scholastic theology, and thus restores to us a theology of the sacraments rooted in the biblical and patristic soil from which it first sprang."² The reader of this work, who may catch only occasional glimpses of the enormous work of detailed and creative examination of biblical, patristic and liturgical sources embodied in *De sacramentale Heilseconomie*, needs perhaps to be assured that while Fr. Schillebeeckx's summary manifestly possesses the unity of a single vision, it is not merely as a personal vision that it commends itself to the reader, but as the obedience of a trained sensibility to revelation in the Church. It is this insight into the profound intentions of scholastic theology, of what it was trying to "fix" theologically, which allows him to disclose its genetic and original sense, and indeed to modify it and enlarge its scope. For it is difficult to conceive of someone truly original in theology, as anywhere else, who lacks sympathetic insight into the originality of his predecessors.

One important way in which Fr. Schillebeeckx displays this originality which is appreciative of earlier creative endeavours is to be found in his "anthropological" insight into the sacraments. "Anthropology" in its ordinary English usage refers to those investigations which, whether they are regarded as belonging to the natural or the moral sciences, at any rate depend on field studies, usually of primitive societies. On the Continent the term is frequently used to mean in general a "doctrine of man," especially a metaphysical or phenomenological one. It is in this latter sense that the word is used here, for Fr. Schillebeeckx has found theologically fruitful the work of such writers on phenomenological anthropology as Merleau-Ponty, Buytendijk and Binswanger.³ To say that he has found

² *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 47 (1963), p. 297.

³ The English reader now has at his disposal some of the classics of phenomenology: M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*; M. Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy* and *On the Eternal in Man*; M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (and indeed Husserl's *Ideas*). The *Eranos-Jahrbuch* paper by F. J. J. Buytendijk (referred to by Fr. Schillebeeckx in

them theologically fruitful is not to suggest that he used them merely as a source for ready-made categories of explanation; it is rather that through these studies it is possible to enlarge our understanding of the properly human already given in our experience, and, in a theological context, to allow this enlarged understanding to be taken up into our human experience as Christians.

The point may be made by referring briefly to the word which occurs in the title of this book, "encounter." What seems to be true of all pre-phenomenological philosophy, including scholastic epistemology, is that it conceives of all knowledge on the model of our knowledge of things, physical realities. In their very different ways, philosophy in England since Wittgenstein, and phenomenology, have abandoned this model. It would be a mistake to suppose that phenomenological philosophy is always a *personalism*, simply substituting personal relationships for the knowledge of things or facts; perhaps the nearest approach to this oversimplification is to be found in the writings of Marcel. However, it is true to say that the personal existent and the structure of his existence engage philosophical interest centrally in phenomenology, so much so that "knowledge of things" is seen as derivative from a fundamental being-in-the-world. Now, "encounter" is a fundamental mode of existence of the human existent, a structural possibility inherent in it. We may treat each other as physical objects or mechanisms, but that is to choose to mistreat each other; the misuse, the deficiency, throws light on that preordained openness to our fellows which releases our being into the fellowship of a *we*. It may be noted further that our *bodily* presence to each other is essential to encounter;

his essay, "The Sacraments: an Encounter with God," in *Christianity Divided*, edited by Callahan, Obermann and O'Hanlon) is available in French, *Phénoménologie de la rencontre*, Paris (1952). The only writings of Binswanger I know of in English are to be found in the collective volume, *Existence: A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology*, edited by May, Angel and Ellenberger, New York (1958). The opening sections of the book by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty are particularly useful for what is meant by "phenomenology"; Buytendijk's study of "encounter" is obviously important for the present book.

we may smile at each other or make our faces into masks, give ourselves to each other or withhold ourselves. Again, just as there are conventions in any given culture which shape the styles of this bodily encounter, so there is a ritual idiom, continuous with the ceremonial of secular life, which shapes the styles of our liturgical encounter with God—e.g., kneeling.

However inadequate these brief remarks may be to give a fair idea of what phenomenological investigation has revealed of the structure of human encounter, it will, I hope, be plain firstly that "encounter" in Fr. Schillebeeckx's writings is not simply a "mode-word" but represents a concept which has been the subject of a good deal of careful analysis; and secondly, that its theological application would seem to be preordained in a religion where God's personal gift of himself to man has been consummated in the Incarnation, God addressing man as a man amongst men.⁴

The value of this concept in theology, then, is the generality of its scope, its power to unify. The account of the sacraments offered here is very far from those narrowly conceived treatises, whether technical or popular, where the sacraments are treated of in isolation from the rest of Christian and human experience, either as matter for specialists or as the object of a purely liturgical enthusiasm. Once the Christian religion is seen as an encounter of God and man in Christ the "primordial sacrament," the sacraments themselves can be seen as inseparable from a whole economy of revelation in word and reality, a revelation of God in Trinity, of Incarnation, grace, the Church and indeed of man and his destiny, for it is within this economy of sacramental encounter that we as men achieve the fullness of our personal being. In fact, what is

⁴ Fr. Schillebeeckx himself, acknowledging that "encounter" has become a *modewoord*, an "existential slogan," goes on to point out that it is simply a modern word for a reality always recognized in religious life: "the theological, personal relationship to God in virtue of grace"—"De zin van het mens-zijn van Jesus, de Christus," *Tijdschrift voor Theologie*, 2 (1962), p. 128. This is a good example of his re-creation of the original sense of a scholastic theological concept ("theological"; see chapter 1, note 14) by way of a grasp of the reality it was intended to "fix," the grasp itself trained by exercise in non-scholastic, phenomenological analysis.

offered here is not simply an account of the sacraments but of the Christian religion, the *religio Christianae vitae* in St. Thomas's fine phrase, and through it of non-Christian religion and life. Once again the reader must be warned not to be misled by the condensed expression of Fr. Schillebeeckx's views in this book. Many of the topics briefly raised here have been dealt with at length elsewhere, in *De sacramentele Heilseconomie* and in substantial articles.

There is one last point I should like to make about this book, and indeed about all Fr. Schillebeeckx's writings, though it is not easy to do so without embarrassing the author. Professional theologians, like all other professionals, tend to lose contact with the living realities with which they are concerned; the mystery tends to disappear behind the problem to which it gave birth. This is not a reproach which can be made against the author of this book. There is manifest throughout a pressure and an urgency which only come from living contact with the mystery of Christ, and explain in part some of the density of the author's language. Theologians ought to bear inscribed on their hearts the wonderful words of St. Augustine:

And what shall we say, O my God, my life, my holy, dear delight, or what can any man say when he speaketh of thee? And woe be to them that are silent in thy praise, when even they who speak most thereof may be accounted to be but dumb. (*Confessions*, 1, 4.)

The present translation has been made from the third, revised edition of *Christus, Sacrament van de Godsonthoeding* (earlier editions bore the title *De Christusonthoeding als Sacrament van de Godsonthoeding*), with some modifications and additions made by the author. While the basic work of translation was done by Fr. Paul Barrett, O.P., the English text was revised by Fr. Mark Schoof, O.P. (Fr. Schillebeeckx's assistant) and by Fr. Laurence Bright, O.P. The publishers, both Dutch and English, should be publicly thanked for the exemplary patience they have shown throughout the long process of successive revisions.

CORNELIUS ERNST, O.P.

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