

# The negative contrastexperience as part of the identity of the Christian peace movement Pax Christi

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## *Introduction*

This paper wants to explore the negative contrastexperience as described by Edward Schillebeeckx as an exemplary model for the experience within the peace movement that started at the end of the second world war in western Europe and continues its activities within present conflict areas all around the world. First an experience from the peace movement will be given within the paradigmatic framework of Pax Christi, inspiration-reflect-act. Secondly Schillebeeckx motivation and description of the negative contrastexperience will be represented within a secularizing context. Finally, the step will be made from the negative contrastexperience to the universal message of the gospel. Both the universal claims of the negative contrastexperience and the gospel will be criticised according to Schillebeeckx' own comments.

The sources for this paper are from the lecture series by Prof. Mary Catherine Hilker and Prof. Stephan Erps held early summer 2010, the three Jesus Books (*Gerechtigheid en Liefde, Jezus het verhaal van een levende en God, het verhaal van mensen*) and shorter publications by Schillebeeckx. I will try to be precise in the footnotes when the text refers to important text parts.

## *Pax Christi: the longing for peace after war*

World War II was an all-devastating war that did not only ruin and destroy millions of lives, it also gave way to resentment and hatred all over Europe at least. Nationalistic feelings were considered normal and projects of the brotherhood of men within the World Council of Churches and the labour movements had failed utterly to keep Christians and socialist labourers during the war united. Within this context it was at least against the current to start an action of prayer by French lay people for the fathers, mothers and children in Germany who suffered tremendously from the war as well. This action for prayer was started by Marthe Dorthel-Claudot and gained momentum when supported by the Bishop of Montauban, Pierre-Marie Théas. The bishop was outspoken and wrote in a pastoral letter in 1942: "I give voice to the outraged protest of Christian conscience, and I proclaim... that all men, whatever their race or religion, have the right to be respected by individuals and by states..."<sup>1</sup>. When he was arrested and imprisoned for several weeks he focused on the change of heart of the people around him and he spoke not only about love for our enemies, but even offered the Mass for Germany. Although at the time difficult to swallow this spirit of reconciliation characterised Pax Christi ever since. Just after the war, the prayers were followed by walking marches and peace pilgrimages to Germany where especially young people, lay and clergy, could meet, sing and inspire each other. This spirit of reconciliation became stronger in Europe as if the people had learned from the interbellum period and its detrimental influence on the cohesion in Europe. It was clear that people in Europe were convinced of the necessity to have a united Europe that would promote peace. It was already in 1947 when Archbishop Feltin of Paris took over the presidency of Pax Christi he

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<sup>1</sup> Website of Pax Christi International. Look at:  
[http://www.paxchristi.net/international/eng/about\\_cont.php?wat=history](http://www.paxchristi.net/international/eng/about_cont.php?wat=history)

broadened the focus from prayer only to prayer-study-action<sup>2</sup>. In later years Pax Christi developed a strong social and political agenda. At present Pax Christi has over 100 organisations in its network and is present in over 60 countries with 60,000 members.

### *Gambella genocide: an example*

Unfortunately violent conflict and even genocide have not disappeared from the globe. Pax Christi Netherlands, the Dutch section of the international network, in close collaboration with IKV, is deeply engaged in a fight against violence and a promotion of peace in central Africa, former Yugoslavia, the Middle-East, Colombia and the Horn of Africa. Here I would like to recall an experience, which is part and parcel of the work of Pax Christi when working in conflict areas. The experience shows that there is lethal violence; that this violence can only be brought back to multiple causes and that only after thorough research. In first instance, there isn't much we can do, at least in a strategic sense. On December 13<sup>th</sup> 2003 I was informed by our partners that about 500 men of the Anuak tribe were killed during three nights in the town of Gambella in western Ethiopia. I decided travelling to Addis Abeba, but could not get a flight to Gambella, nor drive up by car. I had to wait for two weeks before I was allowed in. I visited our Anuak partners and witnessed the devastation of houses and churches. I stood with people at tombs made in their own back yards, forbidden by the authorities, but they had nothing more to loose and were bold enough to ignore these orders. I was shown the sites where men were shot, even in churches in front of the altar. But most men were called out of their huts by their names, as they appeared on well prepared long-lists carried by the murderers, shot in the back by automatic rifles and cut and slashed to death with machetes. The people who were shown to me as victims were unanimous that the Ethiopian army was involved, supported by the immigrants from the highlands of Ethiopia. After this visit I travelled to Eastern Sudan where I met with hundreds of refugees from Gambella, who quickly flocked around me when they heard that I came from their home area. They looked at me with traumatised eyes. I do not need to see the pictures again as the images seem imprinted in my brain how we were sitting with some women in a church after prayer: the blurred eyes filled with pain and no hope.

This was how we started more peace work in the region of Gambella. It started with a murder, but so complex in its causes that my strong disgust and indignation was confused by its complexity. It was clear that we had a role to play here, I felt responsible even and I badly wanted to do something to improve the situation, but felt quickly overwhelmed by the scale and complexity of the genocide. Still, I recognise the structural elements within this negative contrast experience as described by Schillebeeckx.

### *The triad prayer-study-action*

Within the peace movement the triad prayer-study-action was long introduced and could be compared with the Benedict rule of ora et labora, the triad of the Movement of Misericordia (Beweging van Barmhartigheid) see-move-act<sup>3</sup> and that of the Catholic Youth Labour Movement (De katholieke arbeidersjeugd KAJ): see-judge-act<sup>4</sup>. The prayer

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<sup>2</sup> Ben Schennink, Op pad vanuit de wachtkamer.50 jaar Pax Christi in vogelvlucht, zie <http://www.ikvpaxchristi.nl/files/Documenten/Achterban%20informatie/50jaarPax-Ben-Schennink.pdf> (2010-07-03)

<sup>3</sup> Vrij vertaald van 'zien-bewogen worden-in beweging komen'. Zie <http://www.barmhartigheid.nl>

<sup>4</sup> Wim Verzelen, *Sociaal werk: in- en uitzichten*, Antwerpen, 2005, p. 20.

refers to the initial activities of Pax Christi put up by Marthe Dorthel and was maintained as to express the source of inspiration and orientation. In a secularised context this orientation through a meeting with God in prayer, song and reading is no longer obvious. To find the right language for prayer we have to understand what prayer meant in the historic context of Marthe Dorthel. What moved Dorthel to start an action for prayer? She was clearly aware of the suffering of the German people, or at least she could imagine this suffering. At the same time she was aware of a caring God, loving all Gods' children, which awareness overruled her French identity.<sup>5</sup> Schillebeeckx understood the need for hermeneutics of the gospel and turned to the utter human experience of suffering which posed all mankind for very difficult and often tormenting questions. In the following we look at Schillebeeckx view on suffering and the meaning of the negative contrastexperience.

### *Suffering*

When Edward Schillebeeckx was writing his Jesus books he was very much aware of his times. Actually it was exactly how he saw the only right way to formulate a significant and true theology, which is within its contemporary context<sup>6</sup>. He realised that however valuable the message of the gospel, in particular the coming of the Kingdom of God and the salvation of the world through Jesus, it would only address modern people in their own experience of suffering and marginalisation. Any attempt to reach people with messages from above only without reference to their own lives was doomed to fail. 'Believers are not just passive receivers of a heritage; they are also heritage makers...'<sup>7</sup>.

It is striking how Schillebeeckx underscores the importance of suffering in the history of man, which has always been a favourite theme for philosophers. In xxx<sup>8</sup> he quotes Kant who repeats St. John's words (1 John 5, 19) by saying 'Die Welt liegt im Argen' and adds that this has been a complaint since man's earliest days. Suffering bothers us and although Schillebeeckx does not see any foundation of religion *in* suffering, he sees how suffering has always been a major concern for believers, while being regularly down played by critical-rationalists<sup>9</sup>. In history different positions have been developed towards the possibility of suffering and suffering itself. Even here Schillebeeckx has an eye for man grappling with his own experiences and the system developed to accommodate and overcome the suffering in the sight of a caring and merciful God<sup>10</sup>. While observing the intricacy of suffering in the human experience, Schillebeeckx puts emphasis on the relationship with human responsibility without overstressing it. Suffering is often incomprehensible or hits the innocent. Important in the present context is that his interpretation of the resurrection does not give any argument for political complacency: it is not a happy end to the gospel, and thus not an escape route, it merely implies that community with God is even beyond death. Equally, the endurance

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<sup>5</sup> It is very much possible that there was also a moralistic attitude to this action as Schennink writes that it was Bishop Roncalli, later Pope John XXIII, who saved Pax Christi by changing one of the actions for prayer for the conversion of the German people into the conversion of all people. Zie: Schennink, *Op pad*.

<sup>6</sup> He makes this clear in a letter he sent to the symposium 'Theology for the 21st Century: the enduring relevance of Edward Schillebeeckx for contemporary theology, held in Leuven from 3-6 December 2008. He refers to his theology only as a starting point for doing theology in the 21st century.

<sup>7</sup> Newsletter by Edward Schillebeeckx, Resistance, Engagement and Celebration, October 1992. p1.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde. Genade en bevrijding*, Bloemendaal, 1977, p 614.

<sup>9</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, p. 615.

<sup>10</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, p. 618.

of suffering (this type of suffering that is man-made and innocent) is painful and has critical and productive power<sup>11</sup>.

### *The negative contrastexperience*

Schillebeeckx describes the negative contrastexperience as “a basic human and pre-religious experience and thus a basic experience accessible to all human beings, namely that of a ‘no’ to the world as it is....this experience is also more certain, more evident than any verifiable or falsifiable knowledge that philosophy and the sciences can offer us. Indignation (...) seems to be a basic experience of our life in this world...”. And then here ethics are at work (or even more, Schillebeeckx adds) and “It discloses an openness to another situation which has the right to our affirmative ‘yes’. One can call it a consensus with the unknown...a better, other world, which in fact does not yet exist anywhere...an openness to the unknown and the better”. In secular terms this may be a better world with a better face, for Christians it becomes “the face of Jesus...a well-founded hope. Something of a sigh of mercy, of compassion, is hidden in the deepest depths of reality...For Christians, the experience of contrast, with its inherent opposition to injustice and its perspectives on something better, becomes that in which the history comes about as God’s gift”.<sup>12</sup> Here we distinguish the No, the silence, the unknown and the Yes. We will come back to those. The negative contrastexperiences do not need to be personal encounters, but could also be the encounters with suffering we have in the media, almost everyday.

### *Encountering God and the perspective of peace*

Our reaction of indignation towards injustice and suffering reveals that we have an internal image of a just and peaceful world in which we believe and that deserves our full affirmation. There is “... a humane faith in the humaneness of humanity”<sup>13</sup>. How does this world look like? If peaceful, what is peace? Schillebeeckx is convinced with Augustine that man has a profound lust for life and is meant to be good and happy<sup>14</sup>. Creating a world without suffering, without tears is however not in human hands. “He who would like to try to build a kingdom of peace without tears Jesus calls ‘a satan’ (Marc 8, 27-33; Mat. 4,1-12; Luke 4,1-13; Marc 1,13)”.<sup>15</sup> In other words it is tempting to create a vision for a peaceful world as a situation without pain, violence and suffering and to go after that vision by all means. This is close to the arrogance of Leibniz who made critical Reason his God, and played down all evil and suffering in sight of a yet unknown Greater Harmony. Reality is that it does not make any sense to justify the suffering in the world against this Greater Harmony behind it. It is the heartfelt complaint by the elder brother Iwan of Aljosha that all the good in this world does not outweigh one tear of an innocent suffering child<sup>16</sup>. Jesus therefore, does not seem to have a final image of a better world in his mind, but focuses on the will of his father and this entails a much more dynamic view on a peaceful world, i.e. to live in freedom to do good<sup>17</sup>. We are freed (redeemed) and invited to do good. This peace starts right now, in contradiction with the compromised peace we may build with our own hands.

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<sup>11</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, p. 623 and 638. Schillebeeckx verzet zich tegen een verzoeningsleer die lijden als lijden altijd een positieve theologische zin geeft, p.642.

<sup>12</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church. The Human Story of God*, New York, 1977, p 5-6.

<sup>13</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Theologisch testament. Notarieel nog niet verleden*, Baarn, 1994, p. 130.

<sup>14</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, p. 640.

<sup>15</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, p. 637.

<sup>16</sup> In Dostojewsky, *De Gebroeders Karamazow*, 1980.

<sup>17</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Gerechtigheid en liefde*, p. 640.

Often leaning on Thomas of Aquino Schillebeeckx shows great faith in the presence of God in the world and especially in man. It is the duty of the theologian to discover and rediscover reality so Gods' presence may become visible again. This perception is concurrent with the way Jesus was making Gods' Kingdom present whilst speaking in his days. When Jesus was speaking God was present not only in his words, but also in his body and in the wider community. This was not so much new as it was, and it is, a revelation that God is present in the world: *extra mundum nullus salus*. Outside the world there is no salvation, with the emphasis on *salus* and not on *mundum*, while *salus* is salvation coming from God given to the world<sup>18</sup>. Schillebeeckx clearly positions himself against any belief that claims that *salus* is only given to a singled out institution, like the Roman Catholic Church. He does not wish to support the claim *extra ecclesiam nullus salus*, and rejects an absolute claim by the church on being the only legitimate representative of God on earth and 'possessing the keys to heaven'. The church should be pointing to, but not claiming the reign of God. Still, any final conclusion on his position on the church would require supplementary comments on his perception of church and church as a sacrament of dialogue.

It is clear that his understanding of Chalcedon shows an intricate and intimate relationship between Jesus and God and therefore also between man and God, which he explains in Christ the Sacrament of encounter with God<sup>19</sup>. This encounter with Jesus is an experience, which shakes man and changes his world. Already in his early work on sacramentology Schillebeeckx talks about the sacrament of the Gods encounter. In his encounter with man God reveals himself as a sacrament, as a life-giving token and evokes adoration and worship<sup>20</sup>. The encounter with God is salvation and offers absolute happiness, a deepest joy and ultimate meaning and signifies the flourishing of the human. The Humanum can only be understood in light of this godly encounter. But Schillebeeckx wants to go beyond the god words and tries to understand why the disciples open up to Jesus and could recognise God in Him. And it is likely that this is the same question why Jesus became the Christ and accepted the will of God till the bitter end.

### *The silence*

Schillebeeckx is convinced that we need to go back to the human experience of suffering, a lemma that is predominant in all religions and worldviews. Jesus in his parables to convince his disciples and listeners uses generic human experiences taken from a contemporary context as Schillebeeckx notes together with Paul Ricoeur. Addressing the poor, the wounded, the traumatised, and the marginalised in general Jesus knew those were the ones willing to accept the 'good message'. Like in walls in which cracks have appeared, light is able to pour in a few rays of its light. Broken people have less to lose and more to gain. Jesus understood their pain and spoke their language. It is fair to say that Jesus experienced the ultimate contrastexperience as he was deserted by his disciples but had to experience the silence of God just before his death. Most likely this forms part of the contrastexperience of every human being: deserted by the people around you, no answer, not a word from God, a deafening silence from heaven.

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<sup>18</sup> 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.

<sup>19</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of encounter with God*, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1938.

<sup>20</sup> William Hill. *Proceedings of Cath. Theol. Soc. of America* 19 (1964), p. 175.

### *Back to the gospel*

One could ask, and especially in a secularised context people do, why it is necessary to return to the gospel, once we have found ground in a common negative contrast experience and when we have developed strategic means to change the world? The answer should be: because of repeated historical failures a simple optimism of a worldly-political solidarity becomes a deceitful ideology<sup>21</sup>. It is a hard nut to crack: the peace movement in all its political endeavours is doomed to fail. Under which conditions, or perhaps from which perspectives is this work still worthwhile? The first response should be when it is serving man, and more in particular victims of war, common people, civilians who suffer innocently from violence that is used upon them by other people who are their political enemies. Fortunately this happens and peace agreements result in relief for civilians, international treaties on landmines and cluster munition may result in a production ban. But only temporary or locally or partly. Moreover the impact of its activities on the grassroots or the desert where people live and dwell is hardly measurable.

The gospel tells us how marginalised people are called to be in communion with each other and with God and that in this communion healing can be found. Healing can be understood as being able to do what is essential in one's life. The gospel comes with a promise of love, which is already taking shape when Jesus walks around, and at the same time it does not disqualify people to make their own full contribution to the desired transformation in their lives.

The gospel gives hope. It tells us that Jesus when experiencing the silence of God, even in his darkest hours, had trusting faith in his loving Father. *Eli, Eli, lama sabachtani? Why have you forsaken me?* As if he wanted to add: this is not like you. Schillebeeckx in the same quoted article underlines also that Jesus' surrender to his death in forgiveness was not calm. It was a radical protest against all 'hatred and rage, to lovelessness, to a bad world'. Because of this human-divine understanding of Jesus with the resistance and surrender there is 'an inexhaustible amount of power for cultural ethical conduct of the person in view of more human world for all'<sup>22</sup>.

Once the message has been heard after our disclosure experience are we willing to live in the new logic?

### *From prayer to inspiration*

The peace movement started with an action for prayer, but moved towards a social action organisation with the aim of influencing political decision-making on matters involving international conflict and peace making. A possible fallacy of the peace movement is to reduce the catholic and religious identity to one of ethics and neglect faith altogether. But to reinstate prayer (as a symbol of faith) in a secularised world would merely be reactionary if not understood well what prayer means. Schillebeeckx sees anyhow a necessity for an image of man that is wider than his rationality and underscores the value for man to dance, to celebrate, to lament, etc. He sees the value of the Lords prayer that can shape us. Prayer is the moment that we can have a moment away from our ego that keeps on rattling in our ears, but to surrender to a moment of silence in which God promised to be present. In surveys in the Netherlands it has been

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<sup>21</sup> Newsletter by Edward Schillebeeckx., October 1992. p2.

<sup>22</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, The uniqueness of Christ and the Interreligious Dialog, in: Catholic Academy in Munich, Bavaria, April 22, 1997, p. 33-36

found that 80% of young people perform a form of prayer regularly, but do not call it prayer<sup>23</sup>. But they feel a clear need to let go of their dominant ego and create silence in their head, at least to have a moment of reflection in the evening on the day that passed. This type of reflection is the favourite form of prayer among youth: an evaluative prayer. Prayer becomes the moment that you try to reconnect with your source of inspiration and orientation. Prayer is inward looking while inspiration is much broader. In conversations with youth working for the peace movement they show strong desire to be inspired and they believe this is above all by meeting people, especially those in conflict areas<sup>24</sup>. Meeting with people can be very inspiring, but still it is needed to be moved and to process that what you experience, which may be part of prayer. Inspiration as the first step is only possible and thorough when the person is open, willing to be moved and evaluative. According to Schillebeeckx and limited experience gathered within the peace movement the negative contrastexperience can bring one to discover central values. It moves the aesthetic person into an ethic person when he feels that the discovered value is infringed and he is compelled to take a stand. Kierkegaard departs from here when he sees a need for people to go beyond the ethical and that they will have to take a religious position<sup>25</sup>. Schillebeeckx quotes Augustine when he says that when we participate in the Eucharist, we are becoming what we are participating in, i.e. the Body of Christ and it is shaping our identity. Prayer is the symbol for this religious position that refers one to this source of inspiration and orientation. The function of prayer as an encounter with the Other and its relationship with meeting others within the context of identity development needs further thought.

Charles Taylor claims that constitutive values, the values that evaluate other values we may choose may have this orientating function as prayer<sup>26</sup>. This is possible if firmly rooted in reality, as it is with a negative contrastexperience, but when merely imposing mission statements those values become part of ideologies. Real life is complex and in this case nicely confusing and it could be a wonderful remedy to keep us from any type of fundamentalism. Both value-based organisations as well as faith-based organisations could well fall into that trap of becoming ideological organisations if not firmly rooted in the reality of suffering. It is therefore rightfully so that all the work of Pax Christi will in the end be judged in its solidarity with victims of war<sup>27</sup>. This question of solidarity with the oppressed and the isolated is one that concerns us all, religious or non-religious, and is decisive in its affirmation or negation<sup>28</sup>. It is thus essential that the employees of the peace movement stay connected with those who suffer. Is the negative contrastexperience as an experience with suffering comprehensible and acceptable to them as a universal experience leading to the identification with the other<sup>29</sup>?

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<sup>23</sup> C.P.M. van Halen, M. Prins, M.H.F. van Uden, *Religie doen: Religieuze praktijken in tijden van individualisering*, Tilburg: KSVG, 2009.

<sup>24</sup> Edwin Ruigrok and Myriam Braakhuis, Preliminary results internal survey, 2010.

<sup>25</sup> S. Kierkegaard geciteerd in Désanne van Brederode, *Het aanzien van de kerk, reading for the Mariëburgvereniging, 31 oktober 2009*. Look at: [http://www.mariëburgvereniging.nl/upload/desanne\\_inleiding.pdf](http://www.mariëburgvereniging.nl/upload/desanne_inleiding.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> Charles Taylor, *Bronnen van het zelf*, Rotterdam: Lemniscaat, tweede druk, 2007. p.60.

<sup>27</sup> IKV Pax Christi, *Strategisch Meerjarenplan*, Utrecht, 2010.

<sup>28</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church. The Human Story of God*, New York, 1977, p 7.

<sup>29</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Schillebeeckx Reader*, edited by Robert Schreiter, New York, 1990, p. 176. Here Schillebeeckx states that the gospel is... "a practice of identification with what is non-identical, the non-I, the other, above all the suffering and the injustice of others."

When interviewing people working for the peace movement it becomes clear that the contrast experience is not a general experience that everybody underwent in lighter or heavier variations. Especially many young people in western societies have not had direct confrontations with death and suffering. Life has generally been good to them, but they feel a longing to experience the world and to make it better. Surely, they see and hear the suffering in the world through the media. They receive more information than any generation before them. Nevertheless they do not fully trust that information and are convinced that they should experience situations of conflict from a closer distance themselves. This means travel to the areas of conflict and see and feel what is happening. It is important to deal with their claim. Schillebeeckx himself is adamant when it comes to importance of this experience: "...to ask people to accept the Christian revelation *before* they have learnt to experience it as a definition of their own life is an impossible and useless demand...".<sup>30</sup>

This longing for the encounter with 'real life' suggests a belief that truth is worth knowing and that the truth underpinning reality is to be trusted. This basic trust makes me to believe that God has touched them before.

#### *Universal claims contested*

Schillebeeckx has without doubt a missionary zeal<sup>31</sup>, just because of the fact that the gospel is really good news and with a universal claim: it is good news for all people and for all creation. In order to reach people we will need to make ourselves understood and this process of understanding and being comprehensible is a good work of hermeneutics<sup>32</sup>. This hermeneutics is a systematic though subjective process and claims of interpretation have to be carefully scrutinised. Schillebeeckx claims that Christianity has a universal message but is not exclusive of other interpretations, worldviews and beliefs, which also make truth claims. At the same time he categorically rejects any relativism or even a generalisation of easy metaphors (although the following metaphor is valid in itself) comparing one faith as love for one God as loving your own wife, claiming she is the most beautiful on earth, whilst knowing that others will say the same of their own wives, and in most cases not of yours<sup>33</sup>. If the gospel's claim is to be universal, i.e. referring to a total and final meaning, it must be revealing Gods and human true nature. When speaking of God it must at the same time also reflect 'the true face of humanity'<sup>34</sup>, and only in this way it can make a universal claim without becoming an ideology. Religious discourse is therefore always about God *and* about man<sup>35</sup>, and the identity of man is determined by significant others, who are from a perspective of faith Jesus, Gods Kingdom and human salvation and happiness<sup>36</sup>. This position, which I believe is in the heart of Christianity, will be at stake in our interreligious dialogue efforts. This dialogue will not have the purpose to convince, but constitutes an attempt

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<sup>30</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ. The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, 1977, New York, p. 76.

<sup>31</sup> From his writing I always sensed that Schillebeeckx was more than a zealous academic theologian, he was clearly holding a precious gem in his hands and he was trying very hard to describe the beauty and meaning of it. I felt confirmed when reading the foreword of Mgr. Ernst in Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of encounter with God*.

<sup>32</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jezus, het verhaal van een levende*, Baarn: Nelissen, 10<sup>e</sup> druk 2000, 1975, p. 494.

<sup>33</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, Identiteit, eigenheid en universaliteit van Gods heil in Jezus, in *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 30<sup>e</sup> jaargang 1990; juli/aug/sept, p. 259-275, p. 263.

<sup>34</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jezus, het verhaal van een levende*, Baarn, 1975, p. 495. (translation ER)

<sup>35</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, p. 494.

<sup>36</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jezus*, p. 550.



to explain what it means to have met and live with Jesus, and of course to listen to others how meaning in relation to the Transcendent appears in their lives, in their context. Encountering other cultures can be a true enrichment and Schillebeeckx even sees that after long years of shared experience a multi-membership of various religions would be possible<sup>37</sup>. A universal claim in faith does not mean an exclusive position, as the relationship to the Absolute can never be fully rationalised and captured within my system of faith. In my reverence to God and in my understanding of man I acknowledge how God reveals himself in different ways, in different cultures and in different times. Pax Christi is in this sense a universal, which means catholic in Greek, peace organisation with a strong social-political agenda. Pax Christi reflects and acts. Pax Christi as an organisation is inspired by the meeting with Jesus and people. Pax Christi, in the strict sense of the word, does not organise prayer. Is that a problem?

### *Conclusion and discussion*

*Extra mundum nullus salus* turns ourselves to God's presence in the world. Large majorities in the world are living in poverty and suffer from injustice and violent conflicts. In the world we meet the pain and we are able to meet God. Pax Christi is moved by the suffering of victims of violent conflict and is equally moved by the promise of peace made by Jesus to us. Between the negative suffering and the positive peace our life unrolls: here we make agreements full with compromises to live as peacefully as possible. Efforts of the peace movement are often doomed to failure, but its work is meaningful because of the conviction that God wants every human to live a good life reconciled with man and God.

Most young people in the West live an aesthetic life<sup>38</sup> and have hardly met serious suffering in their lives. They have a desire to meet the large majorities who suffer from violent conflicts. They want to contribute to a better world and they want to get to know themselves. A negative contrast experience is an experience that brings people to their central values and to an ethical position. At the same time people experience this as an often shocking but meaningful transformation. From that moment people either become bitter and frustrated, or become committed and engaged. In both cases a major transformation has taken place. The fact that people while experiencing the infringement of their central values also experience a silence and a clear 'yes, it can be and has to be different' suggests that people carry an extremely powerful positive image within them of a better world. Schillebeeckx however describes this image of a better world in which man is in communion with his fellow man and God. This image of a better world is clearly not a world without suffering, as it will know innocent suffering. People experiencing a promise for a better world despite all the suffering they encounter, must believe that the world is not absurd and that helping people is therefore meaningful. Schillebeeckx would say that we move to social action in order to make God visible.

The triad prayer (inspiration)-study (reflection)-action in a secularised society is most contentious for its prayer part. Prayer in Pax Christi can be understood historically, but also theologically and spiritually. Spiritually it forms the process of inner reflection and orientation on the primary source of the movement. Again historically this primary

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<sup>37</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, Identiteit, eigenheid en universaliteit van Gods heil in Jezus, in *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 30<sup>e</sup> jaargang 1990; juli/aug/sept, p. 259-275, p. 273.

<sup>38</sup> After Kierkegaard who describes aesthetic as open to daily interesting events, and hopping to the next if it looks more exciting. D. van Brederode, 2009.

source has to be Jesus, but for many employees Jesus may be seen as one of the possible inspirational figures and they would object against an exclusive claim on Jesus as the only mediator to God. Schillebeeckx does not agree with the exclusiveness of Jesus as the only mediator and it is precisely his *extram mundum nullus salus* that points at the presence of God in other religions. He is even very clear when stating that Jesus not only reveals, but also conceals God, "where he appears non-Godly creaturely humanity"<sup>39</sup>. Still, he does not simply accept a relativist position.

Theologically prayer is part of the liturgy which is the instrument to nurture, to cultivate, to put in perspective, to interiorise the connectedness with those who suffer, and with the One who is holy and able to heal us, with God who is a God of salvation and hope. Prayer and liturgy form an essential part of the deepening of faith. Pax Christi has not found an alternative for the liturgical part. It is tempting to consider the meeting of French and German people just after WWII as a form of prayer, but this would only hold if the meeting between people would lead to an openness and inner transformation and evaluation of the encounter. Such an encounter could be interpreted as a negative contrastexperience where it deals with the encounter of the suffering other. In the encounter both parties experience their conciliation as very meaningful, as it is both recognition of their suffering, their often implicit outcry of indignation and their belief in a better world. Schillebeeckx is underscoring the importance of prayer when defining churches as praying communities and distinguishing them from action groups<sup>40</sup>. Pax Christi is an action group with roots in the churches and follows the ethical demand to be in solidarity with those who suffer from violent conflict. The ethical demand was once inspired by religious inspiration. How is God present in the inspiration people say to get outside the religious centres? Where does the modern employee of Pax Christi work on inner transformation?

Another major question remains yet unsolved. Why is it that some people can receive this great gift of communion and others reject it in bitterness? How can some people continue in great difficulties while others accumulate more hatred and turn to revenge or apathy?

One convincing way to answer that question is to tell about the Good News in such a way that it becomes good news. Schillebeeckx ends his *Jesus, an experiment in Christology* with a Hasidic story by Martin Buber: "A rabbi, whose grandfather had been a disciple of the Baal Shem, was asked to tell a story. "A story," he said, "must be told in such a way that it constitutes help in itself." And he told: " My grandfather was lame. Once they asked him to tell a story about his teacher. And he related how the holy Baal Shem used to hop and dance while he prayed. My grandfather rose as he spoke, and he was so swept away by his story that he himself began to hop and dance to show how the master had done. From that hour on he was cured of his lameness. That's the way to tell a story!"<sup>41</sup> This judgment Edward Schillebeeckx also expects from his own work: "If this book could be a justified introduction to a reinsertion of "narrative believing", with practical-critical effect, while lingering in prayer in the world of the kingdom of God and his appropriate praxis, then I am happy."<sup>42</sup> I believe this is the wish and challenge for all theologians and the peace movement.

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<sup>39</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church. The Human Story of God*, , 1977, p. 9.

<sup>40</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 1977, p. 14.

<sup>41</sup> Maurice Friedman: *A Dialogue with Hasidic Tales*, Human Science Press, N. Y., 1988, p. 26.

<sup>42</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jezus, het verhaal van een levende*, Baarn, 1975, p 549.