

# ***Suffering in a nursing home in the light of Schillebeeckx' theology***

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## **Introduction.**

The theology of Edward Schillebeeckx is very connected with our daily situation. In the heart of his thinking we see the compassion with suffering people. This is closely related with what we can consider as another pillar in his work: the cause of men is the cause of God. I want to approach this part of his theology just in the context of my work as a pastor in a nursing home. Precisely there so much is determined by contingent distress. My leading question is: What is in the work of Schillebeeckx the place of this contingent suffering<sup>1</sup>? And how can we assess this kind of suffering in the light of God who is supposed to give salvation? Especially when we take in account the great stress that Schillebeeckx lays on the context in which theology has to be developed, not least his stress on real experience of men. Moreover his significant vision that there is no salvation outside this world. As a consequence one should have to say: also not outside the world of the people who daily have to deal with their pain and the coming nearer of their dead. We also can ask what in this specific context salvation could possibly mean. Are there any fragments or traces of salvation to find in a place where people are heavily confronted with the limits of their health and their life? We can say in general that they suffer because of illness and frailty. May be they suffer the most in being so dependent. Probably one can say that contingent suffering is for many people not less heavy than suffering by injustice. I'll try to approach this suffering in the light of Schillebeeckx' theology. One can even say that to confront his theology with this specific situation could be even a kind of test for the rationality and credibility of his thinking.

In this article I will first try to identify the notion of contingent suffering. Next I will explore how Schillebeeckx gives this item a place in his work. When this has become clear I will give some evaluative remarks and at last there will be a try to search for some fragments or traces of salvation in a nursing home, in a context of contingent suffering.

## **1. Contingent suffering.**

The word 'contingency' is derived from the Latin verb 'contingere'. This verb means intransitive: to happen, to occur, to fall to one's share. It can concern either positive facts or negative experiences which can occur in the lives of men. 'Contingent' is the opposite of what is necessary: it just happens. In this article the focus is on suffering as a result of contingency, suffering by fate such as illness that occurs, hard consequences of bad luck, and suffering as a result of being heavily, existential confronted with all the effects of finiteness<sup>2</sup>.

The notion of suffering is rather complex. Suffering could have a lot of causes. There is suffering as a consequence of having made wrong choices. Much suffering indeed is

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<sup>1</sup> E. Schillebeeckx, *Tussentijds Verhaal over twee Jezus boeken* ( here abbreviated as: TV), and: *Gerechtigheid en Liefde*, ( abbreviated as: GL).

<sup>2</sup> W. Krikilion, *De merkwaardige alliantie tussen dood en leven*, p. 26 e.v. Krikilion points to the existentialist meaning the notion 'contingency' has got in our time in relation to the traditional meaning this notion had in the philosophy of the antiques and of the Middle Ages.

arisen as a result of specific oppressive circumstances in society<sup>3</sup>. Suffering by injustice therefore is narrow interwoven with suffering as a consequence of contingency. But although these are very connected with each other it is nevertheless important to identify sharply contingent suffering because of its own great importance in itself.

## **2. Contingent suffering in the work of Schillebeeckx.**

As nearly no one else Schillebeeckx takes very serious the suffering of people in this time, precisely because he will thinking theologically about what salvation of God could mean today in this world in which every believer in God is so much confronted with suffering people and may be by own suffering. Suffering is for Schillebeeckx quite an item just because the gospel is, so he stresses, explicitly to be considered as good and liberating news for all men. That's why how to think about suffering in the broadest sense of the word is one of the kernels of the thinking of Schillebeeckx.

The most specific he deals with this item in *Gerechtigheid en Liefde* and in *Tussentijds Verhaal* (I will confine my exploration to these two books). Because there is a difference to discover in these two books, I will give a view on this theme as well from GL as from TV.

### **2.1: Contingent suffering in Gerechtigheid en Liefde**

In part IV of GL suffering of men is the main topic in a number of chapters. Although Schillebeeckx deals with this complex theme especially in the light of suffering by and for others, so to say suffering as a result of choosing for the right cause, one could notice that within the lines of these thoughts Schillebeeckx reflects also about the contingent suffering.

He first starts with a review of suffering in the broadest sense of the word, including contingent suffering, about evil that strikes the lives of men. After an overview about this theme in as well other religions as in Christianity, Schillebeeckx reflects about suffering as a consequence of injustice. He notes rightly that the diverse kinds of suffering are very connected with each other, as already said above. Striking is however that Schillebeeckx does not deal with contingent suffering in a separate paragraph. The passages about these kinds of suffering are embedded in the parts about suffering by injustice. He distinguishes it but does not reflect about it really separately.

I try to focus on these specific passages in order to consider which place it has in the thoughts of Schillebeeckx and to see how he does assess it. I mention these elements about suffering that happens to people without the claim of being complete but with the intention of making clear its specific place.

By raising this theme Schillebeeckx immediately gives the fundamental tone by stating that nearly all religions reject dualism. The main point of dualism is that there is at the same time besides the good power an even strong and independent bad power. According to Schillebeeckx it was rightly to reject dualism because of the argument that God the

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<sup>3</sup> Schillebeeckx shows that in a detailed paragraph in which he rightly pays attention to the theory of Karl Marx, GL, pp. 647 – 656.

creator is at the same time as well pure positivity as the one who wants to overcome the evil.

However one can discover in the view of Israel's belief on suffering frequently a continual narrow relation with injustice and with own sin, there is nevertheless also attention for questions about contingent, innocent suffering. Even in these hard situations they kept faith in God as the promoter of the good and the opponent of the bad. In this context the author pays ample attention to Job who surrenders himself to Gods mystery and at the same time kept faith in the goodness of God. Giving attention to this theme of contingency in the Old Testament it seems striking that in the text of GL however this notion – distinct from the notion of injustice - does not much occur in Schillebeeckx' review of the religion of Israel<sup>4</sup>.

When the view of the New Testament is at stake Schillebeeckx notices that one cannot find there a separate reflection about the fact of the suffering humans because all attention is given to the Christian who suffers as a consequence of his new way of life. In general can be said that the gospel contains good news for all who suffer : 'In het messiaanse rijk is geen plaats voor lijden en tranen, zelfs niet voor de dood'<sup>5</sup>. Schillebeeckx points to the blind born, whose blindness is according to Jesus not effected by a specific sin. So it felt to his share, it just happened without any reason. Both in the New Testament as in the thinking of theologians in the after –apostolic time there is much attention to suffering for the sake of the justice. Jesus himself preached about it and did practicing it, even when dead would follow. In this context Schillebeeckx points to, as he says, the critical and productive power of this suffering<sup>6</sup>: this suffering for the sake of justice is in the service of the Reign that is intended to be liberating for anyone.

Suffering as a result of illness and of finiteness is referred to in the review of the vision of Ireneus. For him, this suffering – different from Augustine's opinion - is not a penalty but 'een teken van het mengsel van goedheid en boosheid van een mensheid- op –weg-naar heil'<sup>7</sup>. In a passage about Augustine Schillebeeckx mentions that it happened once to Augustine that suddenly a youth-friend passed away. Augustine discovered that there is not any answer to give, but at the same time, so Augustine, only God is able to give salvation. Against suffering one cannot argue, neither is faith in Jesus the answer, but still there is a 'nonetheless'. Suffering is indeed 'destructief reëel, maar heeft niet het laatste woord'<sup>8</sup>.

In the thinking in the Middle Ages Schillebeeckx sees a tendency of concentrating on own suffering. So there could arise even a culture of suffering. However this suffering has no longer a real connection with suffering for the sake of the reign of God, so Schillebeeckx. It lacks the critical power that it should have. This kind of mystical suffering is consolidating wrongly the forms in which existing injustice manifests itself.

Schillebeeckx notes after this review that the suffering-histories of man have to serve to challenge us in order to handle with them specifically, it means to reduce or even to overcome these. Suffering is not so much a problem, he notices, as well a theoretical

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<sup>4</sup> I am wondering whether Schillebeeckx adequate reflects all the exegetical material, see for instance: K. Waaijman, *Psalmen bij ziekte en genezing*. See also Ecclesiastes, There explicitly is said : "there is a time to be born, and a time to die". Eccl.3, 2.

<sup>5</sup> GL, p.637.

<sup>6</sup> GL, p.638

<sup>7</sup> GL, p.639.

<sup>8</sup> GL, p.640.

unsearchable and an elusive mystery that calls for a human praxis of resistance against suffering<sup>9</sup>. The main reason for that is that God does not want suffering. In the light of Jesus' resurrection it's obvious that the core is God's overcoming of the negativity of the suffering<sup>10</sup>. His resurrection is overcoming of the negativity of finiteness.

Summarizing: the contingent suffering is not to understand; God does not want suffering, on the contrary He wants to overcome suffering. God is to be seen as the promoter of the good and the fighter against evil; but still we can say that God is greater than all suffering. We men are challenged to reduce suffering in all possible ways.

## 2.2 Contingent suffering in Tussentijds Verhaal.

In chapter VI titled '*Rijk van God: Schepping en heil*' Schillebeeckx dedicates explicitly attention to the subject of contingent suffering. The author notices that one can never conclude out of the amount of pages that he gives more attention for social –political liberation – as critics said in relation to GL - in stead of for mystical liberation<sup>11</sup>. He states that for him there is no contradiction between these two aspects of the salvation of God. Obviously he corrects that critique in this chapter in TV.

Schillebeeckx raises this matter in direct connection with his view on creation. It is essential to know that creation for him is not only something of a long past, it contains at the same time an actual happening. Creation happens everyday. To articulate the core – issue of Christian faith, i.e. the Reign of God, Schillebeeckx uses the two notions 'creation' and 'salvation'. These two notions are inherently, fundamental connected. Only within these words one can think about contingency.

By raising the theme of creation Schillebeeckx starts with an explication of the biblical notion 'sovereignty of God'. He notes that in particular in the Jahwistic view on Israelite kingship there is implicitly at stake a view on human beings in which contingency has its place. This Jahwistic view tells how David once is called to the throne: he is lifted up from the dust. With a reference to Gen. 2, 7, where is written that a man is formed of the dust of the ground. The lifting of David out of the dust to be the king and his getting a great responsibility is according to Schillebeeckx the hermeneutic key that discloses our human condition<sup>12</sup>. It elucidates that the Creator gives his confidence to human beings. Every human being is formed of dust and has got within certain by the Creator appointed limits – the task to establish shalom and to reduce the chaos.

This trust of the Creator in human beings is not ashamed, so is fully revealed in Jesus of Nazareth. Despite everything, so it appears, there is essential good news – not only for the poor and the oppressed - but also for the suffering and sorrowful people. In this way Schillebeeckx asserts implicitly that men who are subjected to finiteness can derive from this good news great significance.

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<sup>9</sup> GL, p.667.

<sup>10</sup> GL, p.670.

<sup>11</sup> TV, p.121.

<sup>12</sup> TV, p.124.

In order to get a clearer insight in the view of contingency it will be elucidating to look closer at his notion of creation. Schillebeeckx rejects vehemently both a dualistic and an emanatistic view of creation<sup>13</sup>. According to the dualistic view the finiteness is not supposed to belong to the normal condition of the creation but is considered as something that is not allowed to exist. Schillebeeckx does not agree because finiteness, according to the author, is not an echee of the creation neither a result of a kind of an original sin. In both cases this would mean that finiteness would be slipped out of Gods hands. That is not the case, so maintains Schillebeeckx. According to him finiteness is an intrinsic part of creation and so of life.

According to the emanatistic view suffering could be considered as something that has nothing to do with and would fall outside the power of God because it is supposed to be flowed out of lower and more independent forms of creation. In that case suffering seems to fall out of the any power of the Creator. That opposes however sharply to the view of Schillebeeckx.

Explicitly he asserts that one cannot speak about salvation distinct from or above the human condition. Human beings are meant to be part of the creation inclusive contingency and out of this one must not want to escape in order to reach to a sort of higher level. The salvation of God is destined for the here and now, also for the suffering men and women in this concrete life. To withdraw out of this would do injustice to the intention of God who wants to be with human beings in their finiteness.

Schillebeeckx notices that a human being is just only a human being and the world is just as it is and all that is not God. Men's situation is essential contingent, apparently. It exists without reason and is can't be explained out of nature or history. Because of the limits of creation man is essential not God, there is even rift between man and the sovereign God, a rift which simply is not to overbridge by human beings.

In accordance with these thoughts Schillebeeckx points out that finiteness has not to be considered as an injury that unfortunately is connected with our existence. People come and go, that is our normal condition. Precisely because God is the creator, so states Schillebeeckx, He creates what is non-divine and so the finiteness.

According to the author this view has at the same time a twofold meaning. On the one hand it means: to be a human being implies to be confronted with finiteness. We must not want to escape the status of 'the dust' otherwise we would get alienated from ourselves. The finiteness and so the contingent suffering has to be taken utmost seriously and man has to acknowledge fundamental the limits of nature. The author states: "Eindigheid of contingentie betekent dat de mens en de wereld in en uit zichzelf in een vacuüm, boven het absolute niets hangen"<sup>14</sup>, so the finiteness is inescapable. On the other hand it means that 'hanging above the absolute nothing' is counterbalanced by the absolute presence of God in and with our finiteness. The finiteness is inescapable but "het geloof in God laat dit eindige opnemen in Gods aanwezigheid" and "God is onze God in ons lijden, in onze dood"<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> TV, p.128 e.v.

<sup>14</sup> TV, p.130.

<sup>15</sup> TV, p.131.

Schillebeeckx states that we have to beware of a kind of an explanation of the creation.<sup>16</sup> Such an explanation would mean that one has to repair or restore back in an ideal situation all that goes wrong. Such an explanation would implicitly mean that finiteness has not to be accepted as normal for human beings. Creation, so the author, has to be considered as grace, a pure gift of God to human beings. It is also at the same time important to notice that contingency is not to be considered as directly given by God because of the insight that what God creates, inclusive the contingency, the finiteness and death, is not God.

Schillebeeckx rejects also decidedly a pantheistic view which would suppose that everything has got as it were a divine shine<sup>17</sup>. So there is a fundamental gap between the Creator and creature and this gap is, as said before, not overbridgable from the side of men. Contingency has even unpredictable possibilities.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless immediately has to be assured that contingency does not fall outside the presence of the creating God. That means that it 's our duty to overcome evil and suffering which we encounter with all possible means. At the same time, so Schillebeeckx, our situation of distress asks for a "flinke dosis aanvaarding en , in deze zin ook berusting"<sup>19</sup>.

Summarizing we can say: human beings are formed of dust, and contingency is a fundamental part of our existence. Contingency is, one can say, created by God and is not to be escaped. In contrary, it has to be accepted. Even resignation 'in a certain degree' is asked for. At the same time finiteness does not fall outside the presence of God. The title of this chapter of TV contains a clear summary: the loveful abiding of God with finite and humble men.

### **3. Some remarks.**

In my opinion Schillebeeckx clearly does justice to the experience of suffering a lot of human beings have in their existence, as we see so clear in the nursing homes. He describes appropriately and sensitive the pain and the void of the man 'hanging above the vacuüm', so did make clear the existential philosophers Sartre and Heidegger. Schillebeeckx acknowledges continual the fact that there are limits given in life which we human beings cannot overbridge.

Schillebeeckx asserts quite rightly also that the creation has possibilities, we can even say, has absurd possibilities for which God nor creature can be hold responsibly<sup>20</sup>. At the same time Schillebeeckx stresses the loving presence of God who stays with finite, suffering human beings and he points even out that this presence has the qualification 'absolute'. It seems to me theological correctly that Schillebeeckx stresses that this presence with the suffering men is even stronger than their bitterness and pain. God is not pure powerless and does not let men in the lurch.

We can say that Schillebeeckx keeps all these aspects together in a well balanced way: that the suffering is not to rationalize; that contingency is to be considered as a

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<sup>16</sup> TV, p.132.

<sup>17</sup> TV, p.130

<sup>18</sup> TV, p.134.

<sup>19</sup> TV, p.135.

<sup>20</sup> TV, p.137

fundamental part of existence; that God can't be blamed for the suffering but is at the same time not powerless; and at last God is absolute present with fragile men. All these elements are in the work of Schillebeeckx rightly connected, despite their in and by life given mutual tensions. By keeping these together in a right balance Schillebeeckx succeeds in my view to point truly to the message of Gods salvation for frail and finite human beings. This seems to me quite important, it is of great help in the context of contingent suffering.

Despite all similarities in both studied books a difference is to be noticed that leads to some remarks. In GL the author mentions several times as the ultimate aim of the reign of God the overcoming of the suffering. My question is whether to speak about the overcoming of suffering and death as the ultimate goal of Gods acting is not too 'massive' and too less specific. Of course it is essential to reduce and to expel with all our means unnecessary suffering. The verb 'overcome' suggests a lot that does not seem to be clear and it seems somehow to ignore the strong reality of death. Besides, death could sometimes even be a relief. Reality is also that we cannot simply escape the amount of contingent suffering finiteness implies for us, so we have to accept it, if we want it or not. In TV however we do see a more accepting attitude towards the pain and the distress of finiteness. In accepting our vulnerability we do also really have a certain degree of choice<sup>21</sup>. This notion of acceptance is as we saw indeed explicitly present in TV. There we hear even about a 'kind of resignation'. Notice the words 'a kind of', so indicates Schillebeeckx in my opinion subtle and rightly. It is indeed right not too fast to accept suffering because of a necessary resistance against every kind of mysticism of suffering as was practised in the middle ages and because of the fact that suffering when possible has to be reduced. In Schillebeeckx' view it is right to consider contingency not as an injury but in a certain sense as normal for life. All that seems for me the reason why - in the context of a nursing home - the word 'overcome' in relation to consider death theologically would not be the most appropriate. Comparizing GL and TV on the point of contingency we can conclude that we can find in TV a more adequate approach of contingent suffering than in GL. In TV Schillebeeckx' thoughts about this theme are more elaborated although he dedicates much less pages to this item.

I suppose that also in the light of the contribution of the feminist theology the term 'overcome' seems not quite appropriate. One of the important contributions from feminist theology is to consider suffering not only as something to reduce and to fight against but also as a part of life that has to be affirmed. Dorothee Sölle notices: 'Kunnen geloven is zoveel als ja-zeggen tegen dit leven, tegen deze eendigheid, daaraan te werken en open te houden voor de beloofde toekomst'<sup>22</sup>. Sölle agrees in her last book about '*Mystiek van de dood*' with the words of Ivone Gebara who states: 'De dood overwinnen...dat heb ik geleerd, zonder te begrijpen wat dat betekent'. So she summarizes what the tradition learns about the theological vision of death, but she continues: 'Ik geloof dat het mogelijk is om de dood, die behoort bij al wat leeft, veel sterker als een deel in onszelf te

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<sup>21</sup> According to the psychology who studies how to handle with negative contingent experiences, i.e. 'coping', always a certain choice whether one react positively or negatively. See: K. Pargament, *The Psychology of religion and Coping*, New York, on p. 85. "The individual, it is assumed, cannot not chose".

<sup>22</sup> D. Sölle, *Lijden*, p.84.

integreeren'<sup>23</sup>. The core of this contribution is that finiteness and so suffering is not to be considered as something we must overcome but rather as an essential part of life with which we have to handle, in which we must go our way.

Thinking in this line – as to refine a little the thinking of Schillebeeckx- one could ask whether it is not better to say that the aim of the acting of God -and of men - must be to alleviate or to relieve contingent suffering? Or in Schillebeeckx's own words: 'to be present with' them who suffer? Is the notion of compassion in relation with contingent suffering not an appropriate term?<sup>24</sup> Schillebeeckx himself is referring to that notion of compassion by quoting the name of God: "I will be there for you"<sup>25</sup>. Also he uses in TV the significant words 'absolute presence'. These notions seem to me really fruitful in this context. We could even say that in the presence of men with suffering people there is a glimpse to discover of this absolute presence of God and so it is a sign of salvation that is even stronger than death.

I did not notice that in the studied books the notion of 'contrast-experience' is elaborated in relation with contingent suffering. This notion is indeed fruitful to use in relation with experiences of injustice. It struck me that Philip Kennedy – in line with the thinking of Schillebeeckx – and may be in line with his thoughts about contrast-experiences- states that contingency is referring to God's infiniteness<sup>26</sup>. It seems worthwhile to me to study the work of Schillebeeckx further on this point. How does finiteness referring to infiniteness, how can we think the relation between these two notions and what does salvation actually mean when we acknowledge that our existence is so characterized by contingency?

Another remark concerns speaking about 'fragments of salvation'<sup>27</sup>. Schillebeeckx points to experiences of salvation in the midst of pieces of suffering. These fragments are a sign of the coming reign of God in the midst of all that seems contradictory to it. In the Prologue of *The Praxis of the Reign of God* he points explicitly to the parable of the good Samaritan and there he uses the term 'trace': "the trace of God is to be found especially in the face of the rejected and the poor looking at you, ... There is where you see the invisible God "as passing by"<sup>28</sup>.

I am wondering if the notion 'trace' is indeed not more appropriate in this context than the word 'fragment'. The word 'fragment' suggests something that is more visible or even tangible while the word 'trace' refers more to ambiguity. Is ambiguity not more own to experiences of salvation? A trace one can quickly overlook, is not continually visible, can even disappear. That's why 'trace' is – in the context of contingent suffering a little more adequate.

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<sup>23</sup> D. Sölle, *Mystiek van de dood*, p.119.

<sup>24</sup> D. Sölle, *Lijden*. Sölle states on p. 136: "De enige manier om deze grenzen ( of finiteness JvS) te overschrijden bestaat daarin dat men de pijn van hen die lijden met hen deelt, hen niet alleen laat en hun schreeuw versterkt".

<sup>25</sup> E. Schillebeeckx, 'Prologue', in: C. Hilker and R. Schreiter, *The Praxis of the Reign of God*, xvii.

<sup>26</sup> P. Kennedy, 'God and creation' in: C. Hilker and R. Schreiter, *Op.cit.*, p. 49: "Believers experience contingency, and (...)interpret it precisely as a referent to what is not finite, namely God."

<sup>27</sup> TV, p.139.

<sup>28</sup> C. Hilker and R. Schreiter, *Op.cit.*, xvii.



It seems to me in line with the thoughts of Schillebeeckx – see *Mensen als Verhaal van God*- that the abiding of God with the suffering takes place in and by human beings. Although Schillebeeckx does not mention it explicitly in the studied chapters, it is nevertheless a consequence of his thinking. Because humans are the liberating story of God.

As in the introduction of this paper already is noted, Schillebeeckx explicitly stresses how important the context is in which theology has to be developed. Thinking further about what just is said about ‘traces of salvation’ the question rises whether there are some traces of salvation to discover in the context of a nursing home, amidst of suffering people. I am convinced that such traces could be found there. Some examples will follow.

#### **4. Traces of salvation amidst of contingency in a nursing home?**

##### **a. Courage to be.**

Are there any of traces of salvation to discover in a nursing home? The care in a nursing home in general is not highly regarded. It is known that most people fear to have to be cared of in a nursing home. Almost everyone who for the first time walks in a living room of such a home and looks around, sees at first sight patients who look only fatigued and or even apathetic, sitting in a wheelchair or lying in their beds. Whoever looks longer and more precisely, and takes some part in their lives, and who takes while respecting them a look behind the passive attitude of these frail men and women, sees however a lot more. Much residents do indeed have- besides and despite their painful situation and their sorrowful losses of so much that was precious to them – some pieces of impressive courage. These patients are trying hard to make the best of it and so they are searching after some meaning. They try to be courageous and they are. Most people even do grow mentally above their illness.

Their will to search for a way in this situation could may be partly to be explained by a basic will to live, but this seems to me not the only reason. Their courage to resist in a certain way, to accept what felt to their share, their acceptance even of death, seem to come out of a deeper source. Their courage could be considered as a real trace of Gods salvation. It 's to be seen as a glimpse of the abiding of the Eternal with frail people.

##### **b. Compassion of nurses.**

The profession of a nurse in a nursing home is in general not highly estimated, this counts once more in comparison with many other professions. Their payments are not special either, when taken in account the high work-pressure. Their circumstances one could label even as heavy. That's the reason why there is not so much motivation for young people to choose for this profession<sup>29</sup>. Nevertheless it is striking how much of the nurses

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<sup>29</sup> A. The, *In de wachtkamer van de dood*. Anne- Mei The is an anthropologist. Se writes about her observations during some years of working in a nursing home. She states on p. 90 :.'de jeugd voelt er niks voor, ze vinden het vies, zwaar werk voor weinig geld'. She notices that the doctors are not highly esteemed by their colleagues in the hospitals either, p. 91: "Over de behaalde successen op een Intensive

carry out their activities with great compassion. Many nurses treat yet the old fragile patients with human warmth. Striking is also their will to carry on with this heavy job and to make the best of it<sup>30</sup>. One can even see a great amount of loyalty to the patients who are entrusted to their caring.

The question is whether the special compassion they show in taking care of these ill residents is not a trace of salvation and so a sign of Gods coming Reign. Their compassion seems to be no less a glimpse of the compassion God himself has with suffering men.

### c. Resistance against economization of care.

Already years ago economic thinking became a dominant factor in health care. Models from the company stick were applied also in the domain of the care in order to organise care much more effective and efficient. Health care had to be considered in businesslike way, had to be managed and organised according economic standards. That would benefit the care, was supposed. 'Residents' of a nursing home became for example 'clients', to indicate the amount of the residents in a certain moment one did even use terms of 'production' as if it is all about dead things in stead of living human beings, who are in need of care. Care was conceived as a product one has to buy. In this way the nucleus of care, to give and to receive care in a reciprocal relation, became hollowed out and negated. It will not surprise that to give compassion in a care-relation became under pressure. This thinking in terms of 'clients' denies fundamentally the situation of these vulnerable men who are confronted by their finiteness. They are 'patients', what to the letter means that they suffer and have to endure their situation of distress.

Another reason why labelling them as clients is doing them injustice lies in the fact that the word 'client' presupposes a great amount of autonomy. However, men who suffer in their illness and are fatigued by pain are not always capable to decide deliberately about their situation.

As well the residents as the nurses feel intuitively resistance against this economization by which something so precious might be lost<sup>31</sup>. This opposition and the advocating of a more human approach of contingency can, in my opinion, be considered as an important trace of salvation.

### **Conclusion.**

The view of Schillebeeckx on contingent suffering is well balanced in relation to all the divers aspects which play a role in thinking about this complex theme. He does as well justice to the destructive power of suffering as at the same time to God who does not want suffering and whose honor it is to help men decisively by his absolute presence

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Care kun je leuk vertellen op feestjes. Wat verpleeghuisartsen meemaken vinden mensen niet leuk om te vertellen", and : "het is net alsof de ellende in het verpleeghuis op ons afstraalt".

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. : Anne-Mei The tells that nurses pay of their own pocket some small things for the residents to make their staying there a bit more comfortable. I can add here as another example that nurses regularly voluntary spend a whole week to go on holiday with the residents of their department. They do so because they esteem such a week as precious!

<sup>31</sup> Not only in the basis so to say they got uneasy feelings, there also started resistance against this dominant economic view out of several sides, see the diverse publications of *Reliëf*, Christelijke Vereniging van Zorgaanbieders.

which is yet stronger than the burden of the suffering. For workers in and residents of a nursing home this is a well argued and so a fruitful theological vision.

I noted a remarkable difference between the two studied books concerning this subject. TV offers more elaborated thought than GL on this point, although the core of this view in TV is already present in GL but so to say in a more embedded way.

Speaking about Gods goal as 'overcoming' the suffering – in GL – is in my view from the perspective of men who contingent suffer rightly changed and refined in LV. There Schillebeeckx writes not about just overcoming but about 'accepting' the finiteness and 'in some degree resign in it'. According to the feminist- theologian view, in which finiteness has in some way to be affirmed because it is to be considered as an integral part of our existence, we can supplement and even further refine this way of thinking shown in TV.

At last I am questioning if it would not better to speak - in relation with suffering- about traces of salvation in stead of about fragments. Some of these traces of salvation are to be discovered even in a context so characterized by contingent suffering: a nursing home.

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