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Chapter 4

Schillebeeckx and Theological Ressourcement: Historical Notes on Schillebeeckx's Reception of *Nouvelle Théologie*

Jürgen Mettepenningen and Karim Schelkens

The legacy of Edward Schillebeeckx is difficult to fully grasp or to adequately categorize. His theological enterprise has developed over the course of several decades, and as a theologian he was always in conversation with the context of his time, searching for answers in the rapidly changing environment of the twentieth century¹. This contribution, however, does not so much focus on Schillebeeckx as one in dialogue with his context, but more on his indebtedness to the theological ressourcement movement of the *nouvelle théologie*. While this is underinvestigated in academic literature, it is clear that both on the level of theological ideas and intuitions, and on the factual level of direct contact and influences—certainly within his own religious order, the Dominicans—Schillebeeckx's oeuvre is molded by this intellectual horizon. This chapter seeks to contribute to the understanding of Schillebeeckx's reception of the ressourcement movement. In order to do so, we will start with a brief survey of the historico-theological setting of the “new theology” movement in France. We will also trace connections to the context of Schillebeeckx's native country of Belgium. In a second part, we will highlight elements of Schillebeeckx's indebtedness to this movement as of the 1950s, in a period when the insights of French theologians rapidly spread beyond the borders of “*la fille aînée de l'église*.” Although Schillebeeckx really began his career in earnest once he moved northward, from Belgium to the Netherlands, it is clear that his theological roots were southern: Congar, de Lubac, and Daniélou. Not only did all of these figures become prominent voices at the Second Vatican Council, and not only were all of them later promoted to the cardinalate, but they also all served as *maîtres à penser* for one of the most influential theologians of the Low Countries.

¹ Some sections of this chapter previously appeared in Jürgen Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie – New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II* (London ; New York: T&T Clark, 2010). The material is included here within the new context of this chapter.

I. “Nouvelle théologie” as an intellectual horizon: Dominicans and Jesuits

From the Dominicans in Paris ...

Whoever is acquainted with post-reformation Catholic history will be predisposed to think that the following deals with the age-old struggle between the scholastic theologians of the Order of Preachers and the Society of Jesus in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This is, however, not the case, even if the controversy on divine grace is never far off. Between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries lies the age of Enlightenment and the Romantic era, both of whom have drastically reshaped the situation of Catholics and Catholic theology to the extent that members of the two orders no longer were arrayed to combat one another's insights, but rather joined efforts to reposition themselves theologically in a new era. That era was the one following the modernist crisis of the early twentieth century, and immediately afterward, the devastating experience of the First World War, which deeply shocked the self-evident and sometimes complacent confidence that ultramontane Catholics often still placed in “authority.” In these post-crisis years, the bipolar starting point of the so-called *nouvelle théologie* might be set in 1935.

On January 18 of that year, the French Dominican friar Yves Congar, professor at the study house of the French Dominicans, Le Saulchoir, published an opinion piece in the Catholic newspaper *Sept*. The article was entitled *Déficit de la théologie*.² Congar used the piece to formulate his critique of the practice of theology. According to him it had become little more than a technical matter and had lost sight of its relationship with the faith and life of ordinary men and women. He bluntly compared the prevailing neoscholastic theology with a “wax mask”: an expressionless face, lacking genuine connection with life. Congar called for a theology rooted in faith and life, as he made clear in a second article published in June of the same year in *Vie Intellectuelle*.³ He was not alone. In that same year his confrere Marie-Dominique Chenu published an article on the *Position de la théologie*,⁴ a contribution that served as a blueprint for the third chapter of his book *Une école de théologie: le Saulchoir*, which appeared two years later.⁵ In line with Ambroise Gardeil, Le Saulchoir's founding father, Chenu too called for a reform of Catholic theology.⁶ It ought to become “faith *in statu scientiae*” or “faith in

² Yves Congar, “Déficit de la théologie,” *Sept* (18 January 1935).

³ When asked for his observations, Congar declared that the gap between faith and everyday life was due to the rise in secularization. Yves Congar, “Une conclusion théologique à l'enquête sur les raisons actuelles de l'incroyance,” *Vie Intellectuelle* 37 (1935), 214–49.

⁴ Marie-Dominique Chenu, “Position de la théologie,” *Revue de science philosophique et théologique* 24 (1935), 232–57.

⁵ Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Une école de théologie. Le Saulchoir* (Kain: pro manuscripto, 1937); new edition: Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Une école de théologie: le Saulchoir*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Étienne Fouilloux, *Théologies* (Paris: Cerf, 1985), 91–173.

⁶ Chenu alludes to Ambroise Gardeil, *Le donné révélé et la théologie*, Bibliothèque théologique 4 (Paris: Cerf, 1909). Chenu provided a foreword to Gardeil's second edition: Marie-Dominique Chenu, “Préface pour la deuxième édition, in Ambroise Gardeil,” *Le donné révélé et la théologie*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Cerf, 1932), vii–xiv.

its intellectual mode,” and the framework within which the theologian functioned was to be much broader than that provided by neoscholasticism.⁷ He insisted that it was not necessary to cut out the contingent historical context in order to engage in authentic theology. Indeed, the opposite was the case: the historical perspective focuses its research on the said reality and its concretization. With this vision in mind, Chenu fashioned a project together with his colleagues at Le Saulchoir, which was intended to provide a survey of the “history of theology in the West.” The work would pay specific attention to the relationship between theology, cultural and spiritual life.⁸ While the project was never realized, its prevailing tone was representative of its three promoters and their work.

In 1938, one year after the appearance of *Une école de théologie*, the Belgian Dominican Louis Charlier published an *Essai sur le problème théologique*.⁹ Although he had not studied at Le Saulchoir, Charlier’s ideas were remarkably close to those of Chenu. Charlier was a professor at the theologate in Leuven (or “Louvain” in French and as the University town was generally known at the time), whose work caused something of a stir and was the subject of a considerable number of book reviews.¹⁰ This publication offered food for thought as, similar to the theology of John Henry Newman which had also influenced Congar, Charlier distinguished between the “conceptual dimension” of God’s self-disclosure in revelation (the primary aspect of neoscholastic thought) and the “real dimension” thereof (which he considered to be lacking in theology). According to Charlier, revelation was first and foremost a living reality, and only appeared in a second instance in concepts, formulae, or dogmatic propositions. In themselves, these could never be said to enjoy any form of independence from lived reality. All of these attempts to renew theological language were rapidly experienced as an attack on neo-Thomism, the overarching framework of Catholic intellectual life as of the late nineteenth century.¹¹ An official response from the Vatican came when both Chenu’s and Charlier’s works were placed on the Index of Forbidden Books in February 1942.¹²

⁷ Chenu, “Position de la théologie,” 233; Chenu, *Une école de théologie*, 145.

⁸ See the folder on “Chenu, Congar, Féret: Projet d’histoire de la théologie. Kain années 30” in the Archives of the French Province of the Dominicans. It was published by Michael Quisinsky, *Geschichtlicher Glaube in einer geschichtlichen Welt. Der Beitrag von M.-D. Chenu, Y. Congar und H.-M. Féret zum II. Vaticanum*, *Dogma und Geschichte* 6 (Berlin: LIT, 2007), 47–51. On Féret, also see Quisinsky, “Henri-Marie Féret OP (1904–1992): Auf dem Weg zu einer ‘konkreten und geschichtlichen Theologie’,” “*Mutig in die Zukunft*”. *Dominikanische Beiträge zum Vaticanum II*, ed. Thomas Eggensperger and Ulrich Engel, *Dominikanische Quellen und Zeugnisse* 10 (Leipzig: St. Benno, 2007), 65–103.

⁹ Louis Charlier, *Essai sur le problème théologique*, Bibliothèque Orientations. Section scientifique 1 (Thuillies: Ramgal, 1938).

¹⁰ Jürgen Mettepenningen, “L’Essai de Louis Charlier (1938): Une contribution à la nouvelle théologie,” *Revue théologique de Louvain* 39 (2008), 211–32.

¹¹ It should be observed here that neo-Thomism was not one monolithic strand of thought, but was in fact marked by internal plurality and by historical evolution. For more background, see the recent book by Rajesh Heynicks and Stéphane Symons, eds., *What’s So New About Scholasticism? How Neo-Thomism Helped Shape the Twentieth Century* (Berlin/London: Walter De Gruyter, 2018).

¹² Cf. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis (AAS)* 34 (1942), 37. See also Étienne Fouilloux, *Autour d’une mise à l’Index*, in *Marie-Dominique Chenu, Moyen-Âge et modernité*, *Les Cahiers du Centre d’études du Saulchoir* 5 (Paris: Cerf, 1997), 25–56.

This prohibition marked the “end of the beginning,” and a number of historians have described it as the closure of the first stage of what became *nouvelle théologie*.¹³ Within the context of formal magisterial rejection, the expression “*nouvelle théologie*” was first coined. The credit goes to Pietro Parente, who made it clear on the front page of the Vatican newspaper that the Francophone representatives were no less than *novi heretici*.¹⁴ The Italian theologian argued that the writings of these “new heretics” had discredited neoscholasticism and brought along an (exaggerated) interest in the human subject, in personal experience, religious sentiment, and the notion of historical development. Mariano Cordovani, who ranked among the “court theologians” of Pope Pius XII, agreed. He sharply criticized this “modern theology” during a lecture at the Angelicum in 1940, on the feast day of Thomas Aquinas.¹⁵ Moreover, the words of Parente and Cordovani were applauded by the Dominican authorities, among them Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, professor at the Angelicum. Suspicion spread rapidly, and the superiors of the Dominican priory in Leuven—where Charlier had taught—likewise considered it fitting to remove Dominicus De Petter from his teaching assignment in 1942. This is not just a detail: De Petter, who had caused something of a stir in 1939 with the publication of an article on “implicit intuition” in the first issue of the journal *Tijdschrift voor Philosophie*, would become one of the theologians who most influenced

¹³ The idea that *nouvelle théologie* evolved in a number of phases can be found with authors such as Rosino Gibellini, Tarcisse Tshibangu, and Étienne Fouilloux. In 1980, Tshibangu described it as a crisis in two phases. See Tarcisus Tshibangu, *La théologie comme science au XXème siècle* (Kinshasa: Presses universitaires, 1980), 79–110. Six years later, René Guelluy suggested that the Dominican contributions of 1935–1942 served as the antecedent to *Humani generis*. See René Guelluy, “Les antécédents de l’encyclique ‘Humani generis’ dans les sanctions romaines de 1942: Chenu, Charlier, Draguet,” *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique* 81 (1986), 421–97. In a series of articles published between 1989 and 1992, Jean-Claude Petit agreed with Guelluy. See Jean-Claude Petit, “La compréhension de la théologie dans la théologie française au XXe siècle. La hantise du savoir et de l’objectivité: l’exemple d’Ambroise Gardeil,” *Laval théologique et philosophique* 45 (1989), 379–91; Jean-Claude Petit, “La compréhension de la théologie dans la théologie française au XXe siècle. Vers une nouvelle conscience historique: G. Rabeau, M.-D. Chenu, L. Charlier,” *Laval théologique et philosophique* 47 (1991), 215–29; Jean-Claude Petit, “La compréhension de la théologie dans la théologie française au XXe siècle. Pour une théologie qui réponde à nos nécessités: la nouvelle théologie,” *Laval théologique et philosophique* 48 (1992), 415–31. In 1994 and 1998 respectively, Rosino Gibellini and Étienne Fouilloux confirmed that “*nouvelle théologie*” should be divided into two phases, although the precise dating of each phase differs from scholar to scholar. See Rosino Gibellini, *Panorama de la théologie au XXe siècle*, Théologies (Paris: Cerf, 1994), 186–96; Tshibangu, *La théologie comme science au XXème siècle*, 79–110; Étienne Fouilloux, *Une Église en quête de liberté. La pensée catholique française entre modernisme et Vatican II (1914–1962)* (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1998), 193–300. While Fouilloux appears to suggest that the movement consisted of even more phases, Jürgen Mettepenningen has proposed four phases. See Fouilloux, “*Nouvelle théologie*” et *théologie nouvelle (1930–1960)*, *L’histoire religieuse en France et Espagne*, Collection de la Casa Velázquez 87, ed. Benoît Pellistrandi (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2004), 411–25; Jürgen Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie – New Theology*.

¹⁴ Pietro Parente, “Nuove tendenze teologiche,” *L’Osservatore Romano* (9–10 February 1942), 1.

¹⁵ Mariano Cordovani, “Per la vitalità della teologia cattolica,” *Osservatore Romano* (22 March 1940), 3. This text is also included in *Angelicum* 17 (1940), 133–46.

Schillebeeckx.¹⁶ On the other hand, one should refrain from too hastily ranking De Petter among the theologians belonging to the *nouvelle théologie* current. Such an identification, it has recently been pointed out, starts from the problematic premise that *nouvelle théologie* was an overarching current under which various historians, theologians, and philosophers can be filed.¹⁷

In any case, here too, the critique of neoscholasticism was difficult to ignore, and in general the “new theologians” of the years 1935–1942 reacted against neoscholasticism by insisting on a return to the “historical Thomas Aquinas,” a demand that fit within the emerging historical interest in the Middle Ages.¹⁸ Instead of referring to authoritative commentaries on Thomas from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they returned to the sources—to Thomas himself—creating a *ressourcement* in which the “authentic” thirteenth-century Thomism took pride of place over the (neo-)Thomistic system. Scholasticism was not abandoned completely—such would imply the dismissal of the accepted foundations of orthodoxy and, more than likely, one’s own dismissal—rather it was supplemented.

... To the Jesuits in Lyon

Having been confronted with the relegation of their writings on the Index and the critique of the Order’s superiors, the Dominicans withdrew into the background. But the *ressourcement* movement did not end there; henceforth it was the Jesuits who took the lead, with a series of three remarkable publications. The first of these was Henri Bouillard’s reworked doctoral dissertation,

¹⁶ Dominicus De Petter was a Belgian Dominican. In 1931 he was appointed to the Dominican study house of Ghent. In 1938 he was one of the main founders of the *Tijdschrift voor Philosophie*. His most notable publications were Dominicus De Petter, “Impliciete intuïtie,” *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 1 (1939), 84–105; Dominicus De Petter, “Intentionaliteit en identiteit,” *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 2 (1940), 515–55. For more information, see Désiré Scheltens, “De filosofie van P.D.M. De Petter,” *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 33 (1971), 439–506. More recently, also see Stephan Van Erp, “Geïmpliceerde transcendentie: De Petters ‘impliciete intuïtie’ als bevestiging van het zijn van de zijnden én het Zijn zelf,” *Subliem niemandsland: Opstellen over metafysica, intersubjectiviteit en transcendentie*, ed. Wil Derkse, Arie Leijen, and Bruno Nagel (Best: Damon, 1996), 295–310; Dries Bosschaert, “Een intuïtie voor vernieuwing: Over Dominicus De Petter (1905–1971),” *Predikbroeders in woord en daad: Dominicanen in Vlaanderen in de twintigste eeuw*, ed. Mathijs Lamberigts, Mark De Caluwe, and Anton Milh (Antwerpen: Halewijn, 2016), 245–69. See also Chapter Three in this volume.

¹⁷ On this issue and on De Petter’s philosophical position, see: Dries Bosschaert, “Dominicus De Petter O.P., a Forgotten Victim of the Crisis Caused by the *Nouvelle Théologie*?,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 93/94 (2017), 633–56.

¹⁸ In 1989, Johan Van Wijngaarden has pointed out that the measures against De Petter ought to be understood against the background of the sanctions against his confrere and fellow community member. See Johan Van Wijngaarden, *Voorstudie tot het denken van E. Schillebeeckx. D.M. De Petter o.p. (1905–1971). Een inleiding tot zijn leven en denken. Deel 1: Een conjunctureel-historische situering*, unpublished Master thesis (K.U. Leuven, 1988–1989), 114–17. It is equally clear that the withdrawal of Leuven professor René Draguet’s teaching assignment in July 1942 was linked to the condemnation of Charlier’s *Essai*. Cf. Ward De Pril, *Theological Renewal and the Resurgence of Integrism. The René Draguet Case (1942) in Its Context*, BETL 266 (Leuven: Peeters, 2016).

published in 1944 under the title *Conversion et grâce chez Saint Thomas d'Aquin*.¹⁹ In the book's concluding observations, he wrote that "a theology lacking topicality was a false theology."²⁰ This type of statement could easily be interpreted as an attack on neoscholasticism. The same goes for the 1946 article by Jean Daniélou published in the journal *Études*, under the title *Orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse*.²¹ Not only was Daniélou explicit in arguing that Thomism had a relative value, he also insisted that a return to the Bible, liturgy, and patristics was to be preferred over a theology that owed its existence to "a single medieval theologian." The commotion that followed the article caused the dismissal of Daniélou as editor of *Études*. The third publication, which appeared in the same year, was Henri de Lubac's *Surnaturel*.²² Based on a historical study, de Lubac wanted to present a sort of essay in which "contact between Catholic theology and contemporary thought could be restored," as he later stated in his *Mémoire sur l'occasion de mes écrits*.²³ Here the seventeenth-century debates on grace and on the correct interpretation of Augustinian theology did in fact filter through. Nevertheless, the traditional divisions on the subject were no longer crucial. Like his colleagues at Le Saulchoir, De Lubac did not hesitate to pepper his overview with barely concealed critique of neoscholasticism. In his opinion, the latter swallowed up the mystery of faith, and left no genuine room for the experience of the supernatural.

Their desire to inject theology with a new lease of life, grace and its associated return to the sources of the faith inspired the Jesuits of Lyon to establish the series *Sources chrétiennes* and *Théologie*, in 1942 and 1944 respectively.²⁴ Both series were based at the Jesuit house of studies located on the Fourvière hill in the city of Lyon.²⁵ It was not long before the Lyon scholasticate and the series became vehicles of the "*nouvelle théologie*," and soon de Lubac emerged as a central figure.²⁶ Fergus Kerr has convincingly argued that de Lubac's *Surnaturel* served as

¹⁹ Henri Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce chez saint Thomas d'Aquin. Étude historique*, Théologie 1 (Paris: Aubier, 1944). Bouillard defended his dissertation at La Fourvière in 1941. On his theology, see Michel Castro, "Henri Bouillard (1908–1981): éléments de biographie intellectuelle," *Mélanges de science religieuse* 60 (2003), 43–58; and Michel Castro, "Henri Bouillard (1908–1981): éléments de biographie intellectuelle," *Mélanges de science religieuse* 63, no. 2 (2006), 47–59; Karl H. Neufeld, "Von Gott reden. Henri Bouillard 1908–1981," *Stimmen der Zeit* 199 (1981), 786–88; Thomas G. Guarino, "Henri Bouillard and the Truth-Status of Dogmatic Statements," *Science et Esprit* 39 (1987), 331–43; Eileen Scully, *Grace and Human Freedom in the Theology of Henri Bouillard* (Bethesda, MD: Academica Press, 2007).

²⁰ Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce chez saint Thomas d'Aquin*, 219.

²¹ Jean Daniélou, "Les orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse," *Études* 79 (1946), 5–21.

²² Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel. Études historiques*, Théologie 8 (Paris: Cerf, 1946).

²³ Henri de Lubac, *Mémoire sur l'occasion de mes écrits*, Œuvres complètes 33 (Paris: Cerf, 2006), 34.

²⁴ Excellent studies on both theologians are written by Bernard Sesboüé, *Yves de Montcheuil (1900–1944). Précurseur en théologie*, Cogitatio fidei 255 (Paris: Cerf, 2006); and Patrice Boudignon, *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: Sa vie, son œuvre, sa réflexion*, Cerf Histoire (Paris: Cerf, 2008).

²⁵ On Fourvière, see Étienne Fouilloux, "Une 'école de Fourvière'?", *Gregorianum* 83 (2002), 451–59; Fouilloux, *Une Église en quête de liberté*, 172–91; Dominique Avon, "Une école théologique à Fourvière?," *Les jésuites à Lyon: XVIe-XXe siècle*, ed. Étienne Fouilloux and Bernard Hours (Lyon: ENS, 2005), 231–46.

²⁶ On de Lubac and the difficulties he was facing at the time, see Bernard Comte, "Le Père de Lubac, un théologien dans l'Église de Lyon," *Henri de Lubac. La rencontre au cœur de l'Église*, ed. J.-D. Durand (Paris: Cerf, 2006), 35–89, especially 73–81; Étienne Fouilloux, "Autour d'un livre (1946–1953)," *Henri de Lubac. La rencontre au cœur de l'Église*, ed. J.-D. Durand (Paris: Cerf, 2006), 91–107, especially 93–95. For a more general study, see Joseph A. Komonchak, "Theology at Mid-Century: The Example of Henri de Lubac," *Theological Studies* 51 (1990), 579–602.

a symbol in the struggle for historical theology. Even if this was unintentional, it became a landmark of critique upon the traditional approaches of Catholic theology that had heretofore relied on scholastic deductions and conclusions, and used Denzinger's collection of ecclesial fragments as its primary source. Kerr even went on to argue that *Surnaturel* brought about the greatest crisis of twentieth-century Thomism.²⁷

For the Jesuits, a return to the sources of faith was regarded as the best antidote Rome's prescribed orientation toward neoscholasticism. The embrace of historical reasoning called for Catholic theology to abandon the a-historical strand of Thomism and to criticize meta-historical "magisteriumism." In short, a kind of "source theology" was being advocated for. But just as Charlier and Chenu did in 1942, de Lubac and the La Fourvière Jesuits met with stiff opposition. Once again, the famous voice of neoscholasticism, Garrigou-Lagrange, reacted. In February 1947, he published an article *La nouvelle théologie où va-t-elle?*²⁸ The answer to the question was clear: *nouvelle théologie* was a new form of Modernism. Garrigou-Lagrange firmly stated that the weapons used in the past to combat Modernism should again be used to suppress its resurgence.

History seemed to repeat itself. Alarmed by these allegations, the Jesuit authorities took action, and here too, not only Frenchmen were involved, but also churchmen from Schillebeeckx native soil. It was the Belgian Jesuit Jean-Baptiste Janssens, the Order's recently elected Superior General, who set up an inquiry into the orthodoxy of the teaching at Lyon-Fourvière.²⁹ The screening of the faculty was led by his former Leuven colleague and close confidant, Édouard Dhanis. Dhanis traveled to Lyon in 1949 and in June 1950, and his visit resulted, among other things, in the transfer of Henri de Lubac and Henri Bouillard from Lyon to Paris. This would have been a full-fledged promotion had the circumstances been otherwise. In parallel with this discretely organized inquiry and the resulting sanctions, a war now raged between the Roman Dominicans (with the *Revue thomiste* as their mouthpiece) and the Jesuits of Lyon (speaking through the *Recherches de science religieuse*).³⁰

Slightly before the appearance of Garrigou-Lagrange's article charging the ressourcement theologians with Modernism, Pius XII—who likely had prior knowledge of the study—entered the debate. On September 17, 1946, he addressed the Jesuit general congregation,³¹ and five days later, he did the same in front of the general chapter of the Dominicans.³² The pope insisted that enough had been said about *nouvelle théologie* and that the time had come to end the debate. His words fell on deaf ears, and even provided the debate with new ammunition and publicity. Ultimately, Pius XII promulgated *Humani generis* in 1950: the encyclical can be understood as

²⁷ Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas. Versions of Thomism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 134.

²⁸ Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, "La nouvelle théologie où va-t-elle?," *Angelicum* 23 (1946), 126–45.

²⁹ Jürgen Mettepenningen and Karim Schelkens, "'Quod immutabile est, nemo turbet et moveat'. Les rapports entre H. de Lubac et le P. Général J.-B. Janssens dans les années 1946–1948. À propos de documents inédits," *Cristianesimo nella storia* 29 (2008), 139–72.

³⁰ For an insight into the polemics surrounding "nouvelle théologie", see Fouilloux, *Dialogue théologique? (1946–1948)*, 153–95; Fouilloux, *Autour d'un livre (1946–1953)*; Aidan Nichols, "Thomism and 'nouvelle théologie'," *The Thomist* 64 (2000), 1–19.

³¹ Cf. "Il venerato Discorso del Sommo Pontefice alla XXIX Congregazione Generale della Compagnia di Gesù," *Osservatore Romano* (19 September 1946), 1; see also, *AAS* 38 (1946), 381–385.

³² Cf. "Fervido Discorso del Sommo Pontefice ai Capitolari dell'Ordine dei Frati Predicatori," *Osservatore Romano* (23–24 September 1946), 1; see also, *AAS* 38 (1946), 385–89.

Rome's final serious defense of neoscholasticism as a normative framework determining not only the style and method, but also the orthodoxy of Catholic theology.³³ The contents of *Humani generis* ran in a striking parallel to Pius X's encyclical against Modernism: *Pascendi dominici gregis*. On the other hand, *Humani generis* nowhere explicitly mentions the *nouvelle théologie*, even when it clearly targeted this particular movement.³⁴ The pope attacked historicism, for example, insisting that it places so much emphasis on particular facts that it thereby destroys the foundations of the universal truth of faith.

II. The reception of the movement: From the 1950s to the Council

As had happened in 1942 with the Dominicans, the Jesuit scholars were also curtailed by a Roman censure. But again, this did not mark the end of their theological enterprise. As of 1950, *nouvelle théologie* swiftly sailed into new waters, and in the period between *Humani Generis* and the Second Vatican Council, it crossed the borders of France. In the German-speaking world the likes of Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar picked up its insights,³⁵ while in the Low Countries it was received by young scholars such as Edward Schillebeeckx and Piet Schoonenberg.³⁶ Schillebeeckx and Schoonenberg would eventually become colleagues at the Catholic University of Nijmegen. In his 1948 doctoral dissertation, the Jesuit Schoonenberg made it clear that a correct reading of Augustine was crucial in the turn from neo-scholastic theology to theology as an articulation of the living faith.³⁷ For Schoonenberg, this meant picking up the new evolutions in Christological thought, which were set out by Belgian theologians such as Émile Mersch and exegetes such as Stanislas Lyonnet, a fellow Jesuit who was professor in exegesis at the Biblicum in Rome. In a series of four books on *The Faith of our Baptism*, authored between 1955 and 1962, Schoonenberg elaborated an extensive approach of the creed, built upon the sources of faith: the Bible and

³³ Pius XII, *Humani generis* (August 12, 1950) http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_12081950_humani-generis.html.

³⁴ The encyclical does not mention "*nouvelle théologie*" by name, yet it does condemn thirteen matters it refers to as "new" and which were targeted at the movement.

³⁵ Bernard Sesboué, *Karl Rahner*, Initiations aux théologiens (Paris: Cerf, 2001), 193–95; Rudolf Voderholzer, "Die Bedeutung der sogenannten 'Nouvelle Théologie' (insbesondere Henri de Lubacs) für die Theologie Hans Urs von Balthasars," *Logik der Liebe und Herrlichkeit Gottes. Hans Urs von Balthasar im Gespräch*, ed. W. Kasper (Ostfildern: Matthias Grünewald, 2006), 204–28.

³⁶ Cf. Jürgen Mettepenningen, "Edward Schillebeeckx: herodero y promotor de la 'nouvelle théologie'," *Mayéutica* 78 (2008): 285–302; Jürgen Mettepenningen, "Christus denken naar de mensen toe: de 'nouvelle théologie' christologisch doorgedacht door Piet Schoonenberg," *TvT* 46 (2006), 143–60.

³⁷ Piet Schoonenberg, *Theologie als geloofsvertolking: het proefschrift van 1948*, ed. Leo Kenis and Jürgen Mettepenningen, Documenta libraria 36 (Leuven: Peeters, 2008). See also, Jürgen Mettepenningen and Leo Kenis, eds., *Theologie als geloofsvertolking: historische en theologische reflecties over het proefschrift van Piet Schoonenberg*, *Annua Nuntia Lovaniensia* 73 (Leuven: Peeters, 2016).

Patristics.³⁸ Here too, theology entered a period of return to its ancient sources, moving away from neoscholasticism. While in France the ressourcement movement was silenced, it did have connections with the work of the worker priests (*prêtres-ouvriers*), who carried out its pastoral aspect.³⁹ In any case, the internationalization of the movement allowed for the presence of non-Francophone voices, which were more widespread by the time the Council opened. Nonetheless, it should be noted that *nouvelle théologie* was not well received in countries such as Italy and Spain.⁴⁰

Ultimately, the renewals that had been fought for in the decades prior were picked up and broadly embraced by the Second Vatican Council—described by Bruno Forte as “the council of history.”⁴¹ We will not discuss the Council at length here, but we may point to the fact that it constituted a key moment of reception and rehabilitation of *nouvelle théologie*. In this regard, two documents may be singled out in particular. For starters, the dogmatic constitution *Dei verbum* contained definite echoes of “*nouvelle théologie*” on the level of the acceptance of historical reasoning and “return to the sources,” as well as its reframing theology of revelation. Studies of the initial conciliar draft on revelation have helped to clarify that the Council made a definitive step beyond framing revelation in a “propositional” manner, and that the Council resolutely opted for an approach that embraced historical contingency. That sensitivity can be felt even more strongly in another constitution, which was promulgated only toward the end of the Council. Many of those involved in ressourcement theology played an active role in the redaction and drafting of a new and unique document: *Gaudium et spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.⁴²

This influence was not a coincidence: many of the renewal movements of the preconiliar era (the liturgical movement, ecumenical movement, patristic movement, etc.) left their mark on the Council’s teachings.⁴³ As for *nouvelle théologie*, its impact could already be felt in John XXIII’s opening statement to the council, where he made a clear distinction between the lived truth and the timely formulations of truth. Several representatives of “*nouvelle théologie*” were present

³⁸ Piet Schoonenberg, *Het geloof van ons doopsel. Gesprekken over de Apostolische Geloofsbelijdenis*, vol. 1: *God, Vader en Schepper. Het eerste geloofsartikel* (’s-Hertogenbosch: Malmberg, 1955); ET: Piet Schoonenberg, *Covenant and Creation* (London/Sydney: Sheed and Ward, 1968); Vol. 2: *Jezus, de Christus, de Zoon Gods. Het tweede geloofsartikel*, (’s-Hertogenbosch: Malmberg, 1956); Vol. 3: *De Mensgeworden Zoon van God. Het derde geloofsartikel*, ’s-Hertogenbosch: Malmberg, 1958; Vol. 4: *De macht der zonde. Inleiding op de verlossingsleer* (’s-Hertogenbosch: Malmberg, 1962); ET: *Man and Sin: A Theological View* (London/Melbourne: Sheed and Ward, 1965).

³⁹ See Wolfgang W. Müller, “Was kann an der Theologie neu sein? Der Beitrag der Dominikaner zur ‘nouvelle théologie’,” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 110 (1999), 86–104, at 103. He has suggested that suggested that the *prêtres-ouvriers* phenomenon represents a pastoral expression of “*nouvelle théologie*”.

⁴⁰ Étienne Fouilloux, “La ‘nouvelle théologie’ française vue d’Espagne (1948–1951),” *Revue d’histoire de l’Église de France* 90 (2004), 279–93.

⁴¹ Bruno Forte, “Le prospettive della ricerca teologica,” *Il Concilio Vaticano II. Recezione e attualità alla luce del Giubileo*, ed. Rino Fisichella (Milan: San Paolo, 2000), 419–29, at 423.

⁴² Dries Bosschaert, *Joys and Hopes of Louvain Theologians. The Genesis of a Louvain Christian Anthropology and its Diverse Reception in Gaudium et spes (1942–1965)*, unpublished dissertation (KU Leuven, 2017).

⁴³ See Gilles Routhier, Philippe Roy, and Karim Schelkens, eds., *La théologie catholique au milieu du XXème siècle. Entre Renouveau et intransigeance* (Brepols: Turnhout, 2011). Schillebeeckx is referred to on several occasions in this collection.

during the Second Vatican Council as *periti* (Congar, de Lubac, Daniélou) or as a personal advisor to one of the Council fathers or Bishop conferences (Chenu, Féret, Schillebeeckx),⁴⁴ and many of them played a role in bringing the “anthropological turn” that came along with theological ressourcement, into the conciliar aula.⁴⁵ Generally speaking, one might argue that the Second Vatican Council turned the negative connotations associated with *nouvelle théologie* into positive ones which transformed into a broad acceptance of the movement’s principles within Catholicism. Later, this was reflected by the fact that several of its protagonists were made cardinals: Daniélou in 1969, de Lubac in 1983, Congar—sadly too late—in 1994, and Urs von Balthasar in 1988. Then again, this was never the case for the Belgian native Edward Schillebeeckx.

III. Schillebeeckx as a complex recipient of *Nouvelle Théologie*

Paris and Louvain: Hotspots of theological renewal

When seeking the crossroads between the German-speaking kerygmatic theology, or *Verkündigungstheologie*, and the French-speaking *nouvelle théologie*, Belgium occupies a central position. Not only did the three spoken languages (French, Dutch, and German) create opportunities for exchange, they were also home to two places where the above portrayed renewals were launched in the 1930s: Leuven, where Charlier elaborated his vision and where Draguet was among those dismissed in 1942; and Le Saulchoir, the study house of Dominicans like Congar, Chenu, and Féret, which had been located in Belgium until 1937 when it moved to Étiolles on the outskirts of Paris. A glance at his biography reveals that Schillebeeckx had ties

⁴⁴ For those among them who were faced with Roman sanctions, the Council did imply a rehabilitation, albeit without apology or explicit reinstatement Cf. Yves Congar, *Journal d'un théologien 1946–1956* (Paris: Cerf, 2001). Interesting studies on the role and impact of the French theologians and *nouvelle théologie* at Vatican II include: Michael Quisinsky, “Aggiornamento – aber wie? Die Konzilstheologen Henri de Lubac SJ und Yves Congar OP zwischen nouvelle théologie und Konzilsrezeption” *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 58 (2011), 5–33; Hans Boersma, “Néoplatonisme belgo-français: ‘Nouvelle théologie’ and the Search for a Sacramental Ontology,” *Louvain Studies* 32 (2007), 333–60; Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Brian Daley, “The Nouvelle Théologie and the Patristic Revival: Sources, Symbols and the Science of Theology,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7 (2005), 362–82; Jean-Claude Petit, “La compréhension de la théologie dans la théologie française au XXe siècle. Pour une théologie qui réponde à nos nécessités: la nouvelle théologie,” *Laval théologique et philosophique* 48 (1992), 415–31; Michael Quisinsky, *Geschichtlicher Glaube in einer geschichtlichen Welt: Der Beitrag von M.-D. Chenu, Y. Congar und H.-M. Féret zum II. Vaticanum, Dogma und Geschichte* (Berlin: LIT, 2007); Michael Quisinsky, “The ‘Interference’ between Nouvelle Théologie and Catholic Practice in Church and Society,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 90 (2014), 71–98.

⁴⁵ For reference to this “anthropological turn,” see Hans-Joachim Sander’s commentary on *Gaudium et spes*: Hans-Joachim Sander, “Theologischer Kommentar zur Pastoralconstitution über die Kirche in der Welt von heute. Gaudium et spes,” *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, ed. Peter Hünemann and Bernd Jochen Hilberath (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2005), 605.

with both places in the preconiliar era. In what follows we will focus on the way in which his early thoughts were developed within the double horizon of ressourcement theology and of the rising efforts to construct of a Christian humanism.

Born in Antwerp on November 12, 1914, Schillebeeckx entered the noviciate of the Dominican Order in Ghent at the age of twenty. His entrance in 1934 was followed by the traditional three years of studies in philosophy, which he did in the Leuven study house of the order. In 1938 Schillebeeckx did his compulsory military service in the Belgian army, where he seemingly had plenty of time to read philosophical and theological books.⁴⁶ Then, after a short stay in Leuven, he was again called to military service due to the outbreak of the Second World War. However, his military career was a brief one: he already returned to the study of theology in Leuven in by the middle of 1940 after the capitulation of the Belgian government, where he obtained his lectorate and was ordained a priest in the next year. In 1943, he defended his thesis in Leuven and was appointed as a lecturer at the study house before he even obtained a doctorate. Once the war was over, the young Dominican friar pursued doctoral studies; he moved to Paris, and became a student at Le Saulchoir. For two years, he attended lectures there, as well as at other institutes in Paris. At the Sorbonne he attended classes of Chenu on the *Renaissance et évangélisation au temps des Sommes*, and at Le Saulchoir he would listen to Congar lecturing on Karl Barth. Well trained in French *nouvelle théologie*, he was called back to Leuven in 1947, where Schillebeeckx himself began to teach dogmatic theology. The ties with the Dominicans in Paris were still strong, since he was working on his doctoral dissertation for Le Saulchoir. In 1952 it appeared as a book, entitled *De sacramentele heilseconomie*.⁴⁷

It will hardly come as a surprise that in this work, as Fergus Kerr puts it, “the historical-contextualist approach to Thomas Aquinas, characteristic of Chenu, and the trawling through patristic and medieval scholastic literature as practiced by Congar, are very evident – while the interest in phenomenological philosophy already indicates the conditions for Schillebeeckx to develop his own distinctive approach.”⁴⁸ This approach is often explicitly connected to the influence of the Le Saulchoir, but there were in fact other factors which also played a role. In the 1950s Schillebeeckx’s academic career advanced, and in 1956 he was appointed as professor at the Higher Institute for Religious Studies, of the Catholic University of Leuven. He was not there for long however, and in the autumn of 1957 he left Belgium to become professor in Dogmatics at the Catholic University of Nijmegen, where he started giving his first lectures in January 1958. It is, however, quite relevant to take a closer look at the Leuven Institute. The Institute where Schillebeeckx was hired was established in the pivotal year of 1942, by the Leuven Faculty of Theology.⁴⁹ Two pioneers were behind the launching of this autonomous institute: the biblical scholar Lucien Cerfaux and the philosopher Albert Dondeyne, who was himself well versed in

⁴⁶ Borgman, *Edward Schillebeeckx*, 48.

⁴⁷ Edward Schillebeeckx, *De sacramentele heilseconomie. Theologische bezinning op S. Thomas’ sacramentenleer in het licht van de traditie en van de hedendaagse sacramentenproblematiek* (Antwerp/Bilthoven: ’t Groeit/H. Nelissen, 1952).

⁴⁸ Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 54.

⁴⁹ See Lieve Gevers, “Vijftig jaar Hoger Instituut voor Godsdienstwetenschappen: 1942–1992,” *Hoger Instituut voor Godsdienstwetenschappen. Faculteit der Godgeleerdheid KU Leuven, 1942–1992. Rondom catechese en godsdienstondericht*, ed. Mathijs Lamberigts, Lieve Gevers, and Bart Pattyn, Documenta Libraria 13 (Leuven: Peeters, 1992), 3–58.

the Leuven phenomenological school. These founders had gained the support of the vice-rector and later cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens.⁵⁰ Since the theological faculty was at that time a clerical training center, the Institute positioned itself differently: it was made responsible for the religious formation of students who belonged to faculties other than Theology. This implied that teaching there ought to connect theological themes with the interests of lay students and that the Institute was less bound to ecclesiastical control than a traditional faculty. To make its courses available for a broader public, the series *Bibliothèque de l'Institut Supérieur des Sciences Religieuses* was set up in 1945, and would publish many of the lectures given at this institute until de mid-1950s, when it was reformed. As Dries Bosschaert has rightly pointed out, the Institute and its series became fertile ground for new forms of theology focusing on Christian anthropology: “Here ‘Christian humanism’ (Charles Moeller), ‘theology of earthly realities’ (especially Gustave Thils), ‘theology of history’ (*idem*), ‘theology of the laity’ (especially Gerard Philips), or contemporary philosophy (especially [Franz] Grégoire) were developed.”⁵¹ In fact, the Institute’s aim was similar, albeit with different points of emphasis, to the basic principles of Chenu’s Saulchoir: it was open to the articulation of lived faith in an intellectually responsible way. Through the influence of Dondeyne it cultivated a strong interest in the development of a contemporary brand of Christian humanism and in the articulation of faith through using phenomenological insights. The interest in the human person in relation to the world that typified the Leuven Institute was further developed at the Faculty’s Professor of Moral Theology, Louis Janssens, who took up that chair in 1947.⁵² All of them, including Schillebeeckx who had received his theological training precisely in the period between 1938 and 1952, could not escape the “new theology” of France

⁵⁰ Léon-Joseph Suenens (1904–1996) was a Belgian archbishop and Cardinal. For Suenens’s personal recollections, see Léon-Joseph Suenens, *Souvenirs et espérances* (Paris: Fayard, 1991); Léon-Joseph Suenens, *Les imprévus de Dieu* (Paris: Fayard, 1993); Léon-Joseph Suenens, *L.J. Cardinal Suenens: Mémoires sur le Concile Vatican II*, ed. Werner Van Laer, Instrumenta Theologica 38, (Leuven: Peeters, 2015). Regarding his role at Vatican II, see Leo Declerck and Eddy Louchez, eds., *Inventaire des papiers conciliaires du Cardinal L.-J. Suenens*, Cahiers de la Revue théologique de Louvain 31 (Louvain-la-Neuve/Leuven: UCL Faculté de Théologie/Peeters, 1988); Mathijs Lamberigts and Leo Declerck, “The Role of Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens at Vatican II,” *The Belgian Contribution to the Second Vatican Council: International Research Conference at Mechelen, Leuven, and Louvain-la-Neuve (September 12–16, 2005)*, ed. Doris Donnelly, Joseph Famerée, Mathijs Lamberigts and Karim Schelkens, BETL 216 (Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 61–217.

⁵¹ Bosschaert, *Joys and Hopes of Louvain Theologians*, 57.

⁵² Louis Janssens was Professor of Moral Theology at Leuven. He studied at the Major Seminary of Mechelen (Malines) and in 1934 was ordained a priest. He then studied theology in Leuven and obtained his doctorate with a thesis titled *La filiation divine par grâce d’après Cyrille d’Alexandrie*. In 1942 he was appointed as a professor at the Faculty of Theology. In 1978 he received emeritus status. His most well-known work was Louis Janssens, *Personne et société: Théories actuelles et essai doctrinal*, Dissertationes ad gradum magistri in Facultate Theologica vel in Facultate Iuris Canonici consequendum conscriptae series II 32 (Gembloux: Duculot, 1939). For more information see Roger Burggraave, “Le personnalisme holistique du professeur Louis Janssens,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 78 (2002), 267–76; and Jan Jans, *Some Remarks on the Work of Professor Emeritus Louis Janssens, Personalist Morals: Essays in Honor of Professor Louis Janssens*, ed. Joseph A. Selling, BETL 83 (Leuven: Peeters, 1988); Johan De Tavernier, “The Historical Roots of Personalism: From Renouvier’s Le Personnalisme, Mounier’s Manifeste au service du personnalisme and Maritain’s Humanisme intégral to Janssens’ Personne et Société,” *Ethical Perspectives* 16 (2009), 361–92.

and Belgium. He did not go and study at the Angelicum in Rome, but rather he had received his training in Leuven and Le Saulchoir. As a result, he had direct contact with both the Belgian and French protagonists of renewal. In our next and final part, we would like to illustrate how this filtered through in his theological writings.

IV. The theological imprint of *Nouvelle Théologie* and Christian anthropology

To portray Schillebeeckx as both an inheritor of *nouvelle théologie* and of the Leuven school of Christian humanists helps avoid mistaking him for a full member of the movement. Nevertheless, the similarities are at times striking, and Schillebeeckx's early writings display a combination of both backgrounds. In a perhaps a rather general way, Schillebeeckx had a strong aversion to neoscholasticism. Already during his student years this caused him to switch from dogmatics to exegesis, in order to study the sources of faith. One of Schillebeeckx's biographers has pointed to "his discontent with speculative theology" as the origin of a two-year study of biblical exegesis.⁵³ and later, in his "theological testament," Schillebeeckx noted that he had "no positive memories of the rather old-fashioned Leuven theologate of the Dominicans".⁵⁴ At this point, there is a third factor of influence to consider. While he thought of most of his early training as irrelevant, he was deeply influenced by one confrere, and would keep on stressing this: Dominicus De Petter was one of the rare figures who had been able to combine modern philosophy with classic metaphysics. He considered the then-dominant form of theology as static, impersonal, non-historical, and immovable. Theology at the time was, in fact, purely based on the interpretation of Thomism by the magisterium, consolidated in a tradition of theological handbooks, or "manuals." As a student, Schillebeeckx reacted against the speculative manualist system, when writing a thesis on *The Sinful Past History of Christianity Following Saint Paul*.⁵⁵

It was in this year, 1942, in which Rome reacted to what was happening in the Dominican Order: two teachers of Schillebeeckx at the Leuven Dominican house were under scrutiny by the magisterium. In February the *Essai sur le problème théologique* of Louis Charlier was placed on the Index of Forbidden Books, along with Chenu's programmatic book on Le Saulchoir, and the publications of Leuven University professor René Draguet. Later that year, the superiors of the Dominican Order removed De Petter from his responsibilities as master of studies in the Leuven study house on account of the aforementioned article on implicit intuition. Although this occurred in the midst of the *nouvelle théologie* condemnations, De Petter's case was slightly different.⁵⁶ The renewal of theological discourse was felt in several religious orders in Belgium

⁵³ John Bowden, *Edward Schillebeeckx: Portrait of a Theologian* (London: SCM, 1983), 28.

⁵⁴ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Theologisch testament: Notarieel nog niet verleden*, 2nd ed. (Baarn: Nelissen, 1995), 25.

⁵⁵ Edward Schillebeeckx, *De zondige voorgeschiedenis van het christendom volgens Sint Paulus*, unpublished thesis (Louvain, 1942).

⁵⁶ Cf. Bosschaert, "Dominicus De Petter O.P., a Forgotten Victim of the Crisis Caused by the Nouvelle Théologie?," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 93/94 (2017), 633–56.

who had study houses near the Catholic University of Leuven. With the Dominicans, it had been De Petter who had constructed the foundations of a Catholic philosophy and metaphysics open to the importance human experience, and this connected well with the interest of other in Leuven for Christian anthropology. The loss his position as *regens studii* did not, however, prevent him from influencing students such as Schillebeeckx and the Belgian Dominican, Jan Hendrik Walgrave (1911–1986).⁵⁷ The former of whom discovered in De Petter’s thought the possibility of connecting theoretical insights with lived reality. This was a possibility that Schillebeeckx believed could make the Christian faith relevant again. In addition, Schillebeeckx had, based on the theology of Chenu, found a new path toward establishing a theology that was responsive to everyday life. Walgrave was appointed to a position at the Dominican study house in 1943, and he became just as important to Schillebeeckx. In 1957 Walgrave also started teaching at the Higher Institute for Religious Studies, and he ranked among the strongest proponents of a Christian humanism in the Belgian province of the Dominican Order. As Bosschaert observes:

Walgrave’s book, *Op menselijke grondslag. Christelijke verantwoording van de cultuur*; testified to a broad humanist formation and the will to establish from a Christian perspective an ideal view of the human person and its relationship with culture. Moreover, under the pseudonym *Humanus*, he advocated in the journal *Kultuurleven* for a renewal of culture based upon an increased humanist consciousness.⁵⁸

Walgrave had hoped that his humanism would “be able to bridge the gap between a disincarnated way of being Christian and a world without Christianity.”⁵⁹

That said, Schillebeeckx picked up various strands of theological thought in the years just before and during the Second World War. These influences would ring through his work in the preconciliar era. In what follows, we will enumerate some examples. Let us begin with a brief look at the inaugural lecture delivered by Schillebeeckx on September 26, 1943, as a professor in Dogmatics at the Dominican study house in Leuven. The search for a philosophy that was engaged with the actual life of people was perhaps best expressed in this lecture, which pleaded in favor of a strong relationship between theology and life.⁶⁰ The unpublished address is entitled “Towards a Theology of Life?” There, Schillebeeckx first reacted against the non-scientific way in which kerygmatic theology tried to connect life and theology. Next, he rejected the drastic separation of theology and life, as promoted by Georg Koeppen in his 1939 book *The Gnosis of Christianity*.⁶¹ Rather, Schillebeeckx put forward his own vision in contrast to these two

⁵⁷ For more information on Walgrave see Georges De Schrijver, “De theoloog Walgrave,” in *Selected Writings. Thematische Geschriften. Thomas Aquinas, J.H. Newman, Theologia Fundamental* by Jan H. Walgrave, ed. Georges de Schrijver and James Kelly, BETL 57 (Leuven: Peeters, 1982), xi–xxvi; Hans Kothuis and Ron Rolheiser, *Jan Hendrik Walgrave, Louvain Studies* 8 (1981), 219–26.

⁵⁸ Bosschaert, *Joys and Hopes of Louvain Theologians*, 58. See Jan Hendrik Walgrave, *Op menselijke grondslag: Christelijke verantwoording van de cultuur* (Antwerp: Sheed and Ward, 1951); second edition: Jan Hendrik Walgrave, *Op menselijke grondslag: Grond-pijlers voor een christelijk humanisme* (Antwerp: ’t Groeit, 1955); Jan Hendrik Walgrave, “Humanisme en christelijk humanisme, de groei van de idee,” *Kultuurleven* 15 (1948), 293–300.

⁵⁹ De Schrijver, “De theoloog Walgrave,” xii.

⁶⁰ This inaugural lecture can be found in the Schillebeeckx Archives: *Arch.* 358.

⁶¹ Georg Koeppen, *Die Gnosis des Christentums* (Trier: Spee, 1978).

currents. In his biography, Erik Borgman discusses this as follows: “It was very important for him that faith was not just an existential experience, as the kerygmatic theologians emphasized, or an unconditional submission to the absolute mystery, as it was for Koepgen. Faith was also a form of real, albeit diffuse, knowledge of God.”⁶² One page prior, Borgman makes it clear that Schillebeeckx’s address advocated for a theology which was both scientific and closely associated with a living faith, and he stated that:

Although he did not spell this out, here at the same time he indicated that the dominant scholastic theology which exclusively occupied itself with the statements defined by the magisterium as ‘truths of faith’, did not meet the demand for a scholarly theology as seen by Thomas Aquinas, the one who by its own account was *the* philosophical and theological authority.⁶³

This, of course, is very close to the critical voice of the French Dominicans.

Four days after Schillebeeckx’s inaugural address, Pope Pius XII promulgated *Divinu afflante Spiritu*. In this encyclical the door was carefully opened for the implementation of the historical-critical method into biblical research, especially exegesis. This was a milestone in the history of the attitude of the magisterium toward historical criticism. The encyclical is also important in light of Schillebeeckx’s own attention to the Bible. Undoubtedly he felt confirmed in his conviction of the great value of a historical approach, such as the one present in the *nouvelle théologie* and defended by Chenu. The need for ressourcement (and the interest in both tradition and the Scriptures) can be felt strongly here, and, later, in his “theological testament,” Schillebeeckx wrote:

Under the guidance of Chenu I read St Thomas from a historical perspective and not just literally, in the context of the philosophy of the time. At Le Saulchoir I learned to tackle problems from a historical perspective. In my courses, in succession, I went through the Old and New Testaments, the teaching of the Fathers, of St Thomas and the post-Tridentine era. I was convinced that faith and reflection on the faith should be in close contact with the tradition.⁶⁴

Together with Chenu, Féret, and Congar, he felt himself to be among the promoters of a historical *ressourcement*. Half a century later, he would state that his feeling for history developed a great deal while he was in Paris. Schillebeeckx could not but take notice of the polemic concerning the *nouvelle théologie*, especially after 1942. Following Schillebeeckx, his interest in historically based renewal “can be traced quite easily” in the book that he published in 1952, *De sacramentele*

⁶² Erik Borgman, *Edward Schillebeeckx: A Theologian in His History* (London: Continuum, 2003), 65.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁶⁴ Edward Schillebeeckx, *I Am a Happy Theologian: Conversations with Francesco Strazzari* (London: SCM, 1994), 8. Similar information is provided in Schillebeeckx’s *Theologisch testament*: “Under the guidance of Chenu I studied the twelfth century and Thomas from a historical point of view, in the context of his time. Also at Le Saulchoir all theology was seen in a perspective of historical development. Later, in my own lectures, I tried to clarify historically all tracts, from the Old Testament to the twentieth century, which was, in fact, unfeasible. I am, however, convinced of the fact that faith, history and theology have to be considered in close connection to each other.” Schillebeeckx, *Theologisch testament*, 28. Our translation.

heilseconomie, in which he “began with Thomas Aquinas and went back from him to the Church Fathers and then forward to the problems of today.”⁶⁵

The Christian humanist influence had certainly not escaped him, nor did the interest in the training of lay people that was also present in Leuven. This is at best felt in a 1949 article in the “journal for spiritual life,” *Tijdschrift voor Geestelijk Leven*, where he wrote that:

The Catholic community of the laity should acquire a deeper responsibility for their vocation and be more competently prepared to take up their Christian task in the world. That they may be conscious of their calling to the very summit of the life of prayer and an intense sacramental life so that they might in turn fully engage in a world-conquering, earthly realization, *ut adveniat Regnum Dei*, so that the Kingdom of God might come. May Thomas More, the sainted lay-humanist, serve as their example!⁶⁶

We mention this passage because it makes clear that by the beginning of the 1950s, Schillebeeckx had integrated various schools: Le Saulchoir’s historical renaissance, Leuven’s Christian humanism, and De Petter’s emphasis on a metaphysically grounded ethos. His grounding in the latter also resulted in Schillebeeckx being at times closer to the French Dominicans, and at other times to his Leuven colleagues, of whom, on he could be quite critical. This threefold legacy characterized his attitude before the Council, and remained a part of him, even after he moved to Nijmegen, where he would eventually become one of the key theologians of his age. These influences can be traced in his writings from the preconciliar decade. For instance, it is striking that in a three-volume Dutch theological dictionary (1952–1958) all of the contributions relating to key-themes of *nouvelle théologie* are authored or co-authored by Schillebeeckx. This includes keywords such as: “Development of Dogma,” “History,” “*Humani generis*,” and “Theology.”⁶⁷ Even the term “*nouvelle théologie*” is laid out in the dictionary by Schillebeeckx,⁶⁸ wherein he writes that: “most of the time *nouvelle théologie* is connected with the admonitions of *Humani generis* against modernizing theological tendencies, at least so far they would deny or minimize speculative thought in theology.”⁶⁹ In his contribution on the “Development of Dogma,” Schillebeeckx extensively discussed the aforementioned book by Charlier and the series of articles by Draguet, just as he did in the lemma “Theology.”

⁶⁵ Schillebeeckx, *God Is New Each Moment*, 15.

⁶⁶ Edward Schillebeeckx “Theologische grondslagen van de lekenspiritualiteit,” *TGL* 5 (1949), 146–166, at 166: “Dat de katholieke leken-gemeenschap een inniger roepingsverantwoordelijkheid zou verwerven en deskundiger dan voorheen zou opgewassen zijn voor haar christelijke wereldtaak. Dat zij zich geroepen wete tot de hoogste toppen van gebedsleven en van intens sacramenteel leven om zich dan weer ten volle uit te engageren in een stout wereldveroverende, aardse verwezenlijking *ut adveniat Regnum Dei*, opdat ‘Gods rijk kome.’”

⁶⁷ Henricus Schillebeeckx, *Theol. Woordenboek*, s.v. “Dogma-ontwikkeling,” (Maaseik/Roermond: J.J. Romen & Zonen, 1952–8), cols. 1087–1106; “Geschiedenis,” cols. 1838–40; “*Humani generis*,” cols. 2300–02; “Theologie,” cols. 4485–542.

⁶⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Theol. Woordenboek*, s.v. “*Nouvelle théologie*,” cols. 3519–20. For general background on the importance of sacramental thought in the preconciliar writings of Schillebeeckx, see Chapter Seven in this volume by Leo Kenis and Joris Geldhof.

⁶⁹ Schillebeeckx, “*Nouvelle théologie*,” col. 3520.

From the beginning of his first full academic year at Nijmegen, in October 1958, Schillebeeckx taught two courses, namely, Fundamental Dogmatics and History of Theology. Because of his activities during the Council the latter soon was dropped. Nonetheless, Schillebeeckx was convinced that History of Theology has its rightful place within Dogmatics. This is evident in the way he treated themes like “Christ” and “grace.” Only after Schillebeeckx had collected all of the basic elements from the Bible and tradition, he could penetrate into the subject matter, in search of a synthesis. Thus, the nature of the preliminary research was biblical-theological and theological-historical. Yet he never became merely a “historical theologian”; he always also maintained an openness for phenomenology, inherited from his years in Leuven, as well as the metaphysics inherited from De Petter, which were dear to him. When, in 1961, Dondeyne published his famous book *Faith and World (Geloof en wereld)*, Schillebeeckx was more than simply positive about it. In fact, he argued in an article, which described Dondeyne as a *maître à penser*, that the book was ground-breaking and would become crucial in the events leading up to the Second Vatican Council. Schillebeeckx congratulated Dondeyne for what he dubbed a “beacon of light” on the eve of the Second Vatican Council.⁷⁰ And yet, the formation by De Petter again left its traces. “*Although his review was generally laudatory, Schillebeeckx remarked that Dondeyne’s emphasis on Ethos*” was a rather weak attempt to connect Christianity to the modern world.⁷¹ It gave up the metaphysical foundation that was always required, or as Schillebeeckx put it:

It is precisely this *theistic* moment, understood as a person’s *rock-bottom position* in the world [...] and for that reason also as the *basis* for an actual religious relationship to God, that I find lacking in the work of professor Dondeyne. And it is precisely this *natural moment* – the highpoint of temporal capacity and the low point or basis of the capacity that is only by grace, or of theological devotion – that seems to me to be the real connection between the temporal and the religious.⁷²

As for Schillebeeckx, he was already actively involved in helping to steer the conciliar expectations. In 1960, the Dutch episcopate entrusted him with the task of drafting their pastoral letter, entitled “The Dutch Bishops on the Council.”⁷³ Although this text would ultimately become a problem for Schillebeeckx, as it would prevent him from becoming a conciliar *peritus*,

⁷⁰ Edward Schillebeeckx, “Ter school bij prof. A. Dondeyne,” *TvT* 2 (1962), 78–83, at 83.

⁷¹ Bosschaert, *Joys and Hopes of Louvain Theologians*, 105.

⁷² Text translated by Bosschaerts from Schillebeeckx, “Ter school bij prof. A. Dondeyne,” 82: “Juist dit *theïstische* moment als *dieptepunt* van de mens-in-de-wereld (men zou ook kunnen zeggen als hoogtepunt) en daarom tevens als *basis* van de feitelijke religieuze verhouding tot God mis ik bij prof. Dondeyne. En juist dit *natuurlijke moment* – hoogtepunt van het binnenwereldlijke kunnen en laagtepunt of basis van het slechts-ingenade-kunnen of van de theologale godsdienstigheid – lijkt mij de eigenlijke bindingsfactor tussen het binnenwereldlijke en het religieuze.” Cited in Bosschaert, *Joys and Hopes of Louvain Theologians*, 105.

⁷³ Nederlandse Bisschoppenconferentie, “De bisschoppen van Nederland over het concilie,” *Katholiek Archief* 16 (1961), 369–84. On this document, and further on Schillebeeckx at Vatican II, see Erik Borgman, “Introduction: Living Contact with Human Reality Gave Them This Openness – Schillebeeckx on the Second Vatican Council,” *The Council Notes of Edward Schillebeeckx, 1962–1963*, ed. Karim Schelkens, *Instrumenta Theologica* 34 (Peeters: Leuven, 2011), xv–xxiii.

it also echoed all of the theological strands we have examined so far: it called for an historically grounded renewal, and it aimed at rereading tradition in order to rethink the role of the laity and more strongly involve them in the life of the church.

Conclusion

Just before the opening of the Second Vatican Council, Schillebeeckx's attention turned to establishing a real connection between the temporal and religious elements of reality. To the extent that Schillebeeckx used historical sources from both scripture and tradition, he did present himself as a *ressourcement* theologian. However, his emphasis was broader than that, and his attention to church structures, to the theology of ministry, and the role of the laity in a modern world was becoming more and more pronounced. In that sense, he was less of an inheritor of *nouvelle théologie* than his colleague, the Dutch Jesuit Piet Schoonenberg. In 1964 Schoonenberg became Schillebeeckx's *collega proximus* at Nijmegen, although the two professors never really worked together amicably. As his later career would make clear, Schillebeeckx never lost an interest in metaphysical debates and he always remained a speculative theologian. In this regard, he stayed close to one his own teachers in the Dominican Order, De Petter. Finally, Schillebeeckx's attention for phenomenological discourse and the strong emphasis on Christian anthropology seem to mark him out an inheritor of the Leuven school as well. All three of these exceedingly important currents in twentieth-century Catholic theology helped to shape Schillebeeckx and what he became in his later career, but they were also instrumental in the discussions prior to and during the Second Vatican Council. Schillebeeckx is, therefore, a theologian of the Council in several respects, and certainly also a theologian of his time and context.