

the same reasons, the church is not a church *for* the people. It is the church *of* the people (p. 93). And politics, accordingly, is participation in God's life.

Notes

- 1 See esp. "The Revolution of Freedom," in *Religion, Revolution and the Future* (1969: 63ff.).
- 2 All emphases are Moltmann's own. I have freely altered translations from the German so that general pronouns are rendered with inclusive language, but have not indicated this in the text.
- 3 See also Moltmann's essay on Bloch, "Hope and Confidence," in *Religion, Revolution and the Future* (1969: 148ff.); and the brief discussion of Bloch in *God in Creation* (1985: 42–5).
- 4 The indices of names to *The Crucified God* and *The Coming of God* show the relevant passages.
- 5 But cf. Moltmann (1977), 187.

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CHAPTER 17

Johann Baptist Metz

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Johann Baptist Metz has frequently asserted that his is a theology oriented not by "system concepts," but rather by "subject concepts." "Subject concepts" are to be evaluated not so much by how they cohere into a system as in terms of their capacity to articulate and undergird the ways that specific persons in specific times and places struggle to become and remain subjects: agents of their own histories, persons who recognize the symbols and narratives that make up that history to be *their* symbols and narratives, rather than an alienating imposition (Metz 1984: 363). This methodological choice, as well as his preference for the short essay over the monograph, complicates the task of giving a systematic overview. The approach taken here will center on Metz's claim that his is a "fundamental practical theology." After constructing an interpretive framework whose lattices are Metz's own concerns as a theologian, I attempt an overview of the particular way in which Metz attempts to meet those concerns in a political theology. To do this I first identify the theological genre (fundamental theology), then the fundamental question (theodicy), and finally the doctrinal locus (eschatology) that limn the basic structure of Metz's theology.

Dangerous Memories and Interruptions: A Theological Itinerary

Born in 1928 in Auerbach in northeast Bavaria, Metz describes his small-town origins as follows:

One comes from far away when one comes from there. It is as if one were born not fifty years ago, but somewhere along the receding edges of the Middle Ages. I had to approach many things slowly at first, to exert great effort to discover things that

others and that society had long ago discovered and had since become common practice. (Metz 1984: 171)

This recollection places Metz, at least initially, in that generation of Catholic scholars who took it as their work to continue the dialogue with modern (viz. post-Enlightenment) culture and thought that was interrupted by the suppression of modernism in the early twentieth century. Above all, it associates him closely with Karl Rahner. Indeed, Metz's close relationship to Rahner for some three decades, as student, collaborator, and friend, provides the justification for one of this essay's principal heuristic strategies: Metz's theology can almost always be illuminated on a particular point by comparison with Rahner's.

Like Rahner, Metz understands his task as that of helping the Catholic Church make the journey from the "far away" arch-Catholic world of an Auerbach into the secularized, multicultural world of modernity. This implies neither a despairing farewell to that integral Bavarian Catholic culture, with its rich fabric of popular customs and its tacit sacred ontology, nor a complete capitulation to the terms on which modernity will accept claims about reality and how we ought to live in it. Describing Rahner's transcendental paradigm, Metz calls this task "the attempt to appropriate the heritage of the classical Patristic and Scholastic traditions precisely by means of a productive and aggressive dialogue with the challenges of the modern European world" (Metz 1998: 32). The underlying conviction is that the life of faith made possible by "Auerbach" can and must survive the storms of modernization, albeit embodied differently, precisely so as to resist those storms where necessary, and to reweave a new fabric appropriate to a new situation. Without such labors, even were the doctrines, customs, and practices of an Auerbach to survive, they would comprise little more than a museum piece, or another "lifestyle option" to embellish the lives of secularized moderns.

Metz appropriated another, often underappreciated, feature of Rahner's thought. However much Rahner wished to articulate and interpret Christian faith and practices on modernity's terrain, he did not feel compelled thereby to sacrifice every feature of Christianity that appeared incongruous on modern grounds. Thus, Rahner wrote extensive and tightly argued essays on devotion to the Sacred Heart, purgatory, the cult of the saints, and the theology of indulgences (to name a few). He was willing to tarry with these allegedly archaic remnants of an earlier age. Metz praises this practice, naming it the "adventure of religious noncontemporaneity," "creative naivete," and "aggressive fidelity" to the church's tradition (Metz 1984: 171; 1998: 108, 92f.). In fact, Metz believes that "coming from Auerbach" offers a distinct advantage for this "adventure," insofar as it opens up a certain critical distance from the slogans and clichés that define modernity. This distance often enables a theologian to see resources and pitfalls invisible to those who have "grown up" taking them for granted. A theologian who cultivates this "productive noncontemporaneity" will pause just a moment longer with images and concepts that "modern consciousness" wants to discard, but precisely for the sake of "freeing" modern consciousness from the

stultifying circle of what "reasonable persons" accept as rational and practical in the public sphere. Metz's insistence on the contemporary relevance of the apocalyptic sense for time is a prime example of this "productive noncontemporaneity."

In 1963 Metz took a position in fundamental theology at the University of Münster and began to diverge from his friend and teacher. On his own account, he shifted from transcendental Thomism's focus on epistemology and the Kant of the *Critique of Pure Reason* to the Kant of the second critique and of the philosophy of history, along with the extension of that line of thought in the work of Karl Marx (Metz 1970: 63; 1980: 53f.; 1998: 33). At this point another remembrance became increasingly determinative for Metz's theology:

Toward the end of the Second World War, when I was sixteen years old, I was taken out of school and forced into the army. After a brief period of training at a base in Würzburg I arrived at the front, which by that time had already crossed the Rhine into Germany. There were well over a hundred in my company, all of whom were very young. One evening the company commander sent me with a message to battalion headquarters. I wandered all night long through destroyed, burning villages and farms, and when in the morning I returned to my company I found only – the dead, nothing but the dead, overrun by a combined bomber and armored assault. I could see now only dead and empty faces, where the day before I had shared childhood fears and youthful laughter. I remember nothing but a wordless cry. Thus I see myself to this very day, and behind this memory all of my childhood dreams crumble away. A fissure had opened in my powerful Bavarian-Catholic socialization, with its impregnable confidence. What would happen if one took this sort of thing not to the psychologist but into the Church, and if one would not allow oneself to be talked out of such unreconciled memories even by theology, but rather wanted to have faith with them and with them speak about God . . . ? (Metz 1998: 1f.; cf. 1987: 39f.)

This memory discloses a further interruption in Metz's biography. In the early 1960s Metz responded to the impact of secularization on Catholic cultural-political identity ("Auerbach") by developing a "theology of the world." While critiquing an unwarranted secularism that absolutized the world's secularity, Metz argued that faith and theology must "turn to the world," participating in God's "turn to the world" in the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity (Metz 1969). This development was shaped to some extent by Metz's encounters with a number of revisionary Marxists: Roger Garaudy, Ernst Bloch, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Walter Benjamin. A major part of their agenda had been to identify and evaluate the prospects for a genuinely human emancipation in the face of a network of mutually reinforcing modern forces – economic, scientific, technological, and political – which were proving remarkably capable of absorbing and defusing those social contradictions that Marx had argued would eventually bring capitalism down. On what would the revolutionary impulse nourish itself in a totalizing social system that could appropriate and even make a profit on human beings' utopian imagination, their

suffering, their outrage? This led them to ask whether underappreciated features of the human life-world – music, art, and literature, for Adorno and Benjamin, and even religion for Garaudy and Bloch – might offer a vantage point “outside” the juggernaut of Western capitalist modernity from which it might be critiqued and transformed in a more human direction.

Two points should be noted about the impact of this intellectual current on Metz. First, Metz eschewed those trajectories within it (or in the “postmodern” generation that claimed to follow these thinkers) that led to a rejection of the modern project *tout court*. For him, what was worth retrieving and developing in their thought was the struggle to “enlighten the Enlightenment,” to *redeem* modernity from its own self-destructive dynamic. Second, Metz rejected any tendency to “instrumentalize” religion, even for the worthy goal of social progress. To incorporate religion *within* the modern project (even to save it) would only collude with modernity’s own drive to domesticate religion, which is to paralyze it. What Metz appreciated in these thinkers were certain emphases that might help contemporary systematic theologians examine their own allegiance to modern ways of thinking more critically, and understand the dilemma of Christian faith in the modern world in a more radical way than his earlier essays on a “theology of the world” allowed (see Metz 1980: 32–48, 119–35). Let us consider two of these emphases in particular.

First, he took over Ernst Bloch’s emphasis on the power of suffering to call into question the present and the future that can be extrapolated from this present, opening up a heretofore undreamed-of “utopian” future. Second, he took from Benjamin the conviction of the importance of memories and stories (particularly those “dangerous,” unsettling ones that lead to critical questions about the present) to open up perspectives on the present that escape the power of “technical rationality,” with its ability to encompass human hope in a strangling net of facts and “scientific” accounts of that future in which alone “reasonable” persons can hope. Metz began to suspect that the same social forces that repressed human suffering and hope, or assigned them to be therapeutically managed (and depoliticized) by the psychologist – all for the sake of maintaining the political and social status quo – were also a deadly threat to the integrity and vitality of Christian belief.

When he began to ask these sorts of questions, it slowly (too slowly, he himself avers) began to dawn on him that there was one dangerous memory, one history, that had above all been suppressed from both German society and Christian faith and theology: Auschwitz.

Because of the way Auschwitz was or was not present in theology I slowly became aware of the high content of apathy in theological idealism and its inability to confront historical experience in spite of all its prolific talk about historicity. There was no theology in the whole world which talked so much about historicity as German theologies. Yet they only talk about historicity; they did not mention Auschwitz. It is clear that there is no meaning of history one can save with one’s back turned to Auschwitz; there is no truth of history which one can defend, and no God in history whom one can worship with one’s back turned to Auschwitz. (Metz 1987: 41f.)

This concern for those who have been swallowed up into the dark underside of history and forgotten by Christian faith and theology led Metz into a natural alliance with the theologians of liberation. His specific concern for Auschwitz has made him particularly sensitive to the ways in which Christianity has minimized or betrayed its still-constitutive relationship to Judaism.

These remembrances and the concerns to which they give rise set up a tensive field of desiderata, challenges, and aporias within which Metz has continually labored to find theological language and argument. They cannot all be easily accommodated by any one “system.” Indeed, Metz has increasingly come to insist that theology’s job is not so much to assimilate these remembrances into a system as it is to provide a language in which they can be articulated and allowed to irritate our “modern” consciousness. In any event, they provide a set of concerns that help one to make sense of his thought. Here I list four: (1) advocacy of an aggressive and creative engagement with modern culture and thought, along with an impatience with those who dismiss their challenges as irrelevant or external to theological discourse; (2) the concomitant willingness to rub modern culture and thought “against the grain” by holding on to counter-intuitive (to modernity) images and ideas from the tradition (Metz and Wiesel 1999: 40); (3) an insistence that theology and faith must be so constituted that remembrances of history’s catastrophes are indispensable if theology is not to become trivial and irrelevant, and Christian faith a banalized reflection of the prevailing social consensus; and finally, (4) a concern that theology “always be ready to make [its] defense to anyone who demands from [it] an account for the hope that is in [it]” (1 Pt 3.15). Theology is always for him “a defense of hope” (Metz 1980: 3) – a defense of hope, furthermore, that cannot be carried off unless it includes unconditional solidarity with and action on behalf of those who suffer, those whose hope is most endangered. In short, it is a hope that must be accompanied by the radical action of Christian discipleship.

The Structure of Metz’s Fundamental Theology with a Practical Intent

These concerns pull in different directions, a fact that goes a long way to explain the tensions in Metz’s thought. Yet there is an underlying coherence that can be disclosed by considering the genre, determinative question, and doctrinal locus of his theology. First the genre. Metz calls his a “practical fundamental theology,” or a “fundamental theology with a practical intent” (Metz 1980: ix, 49, *inter alia*). A brief historical detour into the recent history of Roman Catholic theology can help illuminate what he means by this. Fundamental theology took over many of the functions in Roman Catholic theology that philosophical theology and apologetics had carried out in neoscholasticism. In the latter, the purpose of philosophical theology and apologetics was to defend the reasonableness of the assent of faith to those truths of revelation that provide the

starting points for the construction of the various dogmatic treatises. They did this by demonstrating the existence of the ultimate object of faith (proofs for the existence of God), and by arguing for the reasonableness of the assent of faith in general, and then to the truths of scripture and tradition in particular. The latter was done in large measure by appeal to New Testament miracles and to the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in Jesus and in the church. Thus, the reasonableness of assenting to this content was defended on grounds external to the intelligibility of that content itself, the elaboration of which was left for the subsequent work of dogmatic theology.

Karl Rahner self-consciously violated this stringent division of dogmatic (viz. systematic) from fundamental theology, and Metz carries that transgression of disciplinary borders over into his own work. Rahner argued that contemporary philosophical pluralism, the "knowledge-explosion" in general, and the impact of modern biblical scholarship combine to make the neoscholastic project untenable in fact, regardless of whether it was ever tenable in principle. Consequently, a successful justification of faith (the task of fundamental theology) would have to draw on the contents of faith, rather than leaving them to subsequent elaboration in systematic theology. This does not entail an exhaustive consideration of a given doctrine, but an investigation on a "first level of reflection." The "new fundamental theology" would elaborate doctrinal contents to the extent necessary for showing how they could cohere with, bring to words, and concretize the modern person's experience of his or her identity, especially as it is threatened by guilt and by the final, always imminent, limit-situation of death. Such an approach derives its persuasive power from its ability to illumine and empower the life of everyday Christians by grounding that life in the mystery of God's presence in the world (Rahner 1978: 3–14; 1982: 123–8).

Metz has high praise for this approach, describing Rahner's theology as a narrative theology that attempts to give a "theologically fleshed out account of life in the light of contemporary Christianity" (Metz 1980: 224; 1977: 200).¹ Yet, whereas Rahner had taken the endangered identity of the subject as an individual to be the arena within which to demonstrate the truth and relevance of Christian faith, Metz argues that the arena must be expanded to include the individual's constitutive social and political embeddedness:

In the entire approach of a practical fundamental theology it would be necessary to open this [Rahner's] biographical way of conceiving dogmatic theology to that theological biography of Christianity in which the dual mystical-political constitution of Christian faith – that is to say, its socially responsible form – would be taken even more seriously and became the motive force for theological reflection. (Metz 1980: 224; 1977: 200)

Rahner, then, conceives of the field within which theological discourse can find some purchase as mapped out by the "mystical-existential" character of human being. This presupposes a theology of grace in which the existential riches and challenges of human life are ultimately destined to be illumined by

taken up into, and fulfilled by the divine life, a destiny that entails reinterpreting and reorienting them even *now*. The consequence for theological method is that theological discourse can be grounded and justified by showing how it can make sense of and empower human existence at the level of this mystical-existential *circumincessio*, and thus at a deeper level than straightforward empirical accounts. Metz agrees, but insists that the existential-biographical framing of human existence is too narrow. It needs to be complemented, corrected, or even subsumed by a political account that stresses more radically the ways we are constitutively related to one another, not just in "I-thou" relationships of personal encounter with the other, but in and through ambivalent historical traditions and conflict-ridden social institutions (now on a global scale).

This account of Metz's approach provides an initial indication of what he thinks makes it a *political* theology. In his view, theology should address believers at those points at which their identity as persons is most threatened by the social and political catastrophes of history. "Political" denotes a basic dimension of human existence in which persons are constituted by historical traditions and social structures that connect them to the lives and experiences of other persons, both present and past. The political "problem" which correlates to Metz's understanding of fundamental theology arises when our tacit conviction that this dimension "make sense" is threatened, or the pain and guilt of our own complicity (conscious or anonymous) in structures which have brought about (and continue to bring about) the annihilation of others becomes too intense, causing us to withdraw from this dimension into a privatized existentiality or a *still-privatized* "I-thou." It is at this point that Christianity shows its "political" character: "Christian faith, if I understand it correctly, is just the capacity *to affirm and live an endangered identity*. This is the precise point at which faith and history are bound together" (Metz 1986: 181, emphasis added).

Second, this comparison with Rahner sheds some light on why Metz does not engage in detailed analyses of specific doctrines and develop arguments for specific praxes in particular social settings, a point on which he has been widely criticized (e.g. Browning 1991: 67f.; Chopp 1986: 79–81). Metz's "practical fundamental theology" *will* appeal to specific doctrines, rather than attempting to justify the hope that Christians have purely by means of philosophical argument or a sociological-historical "metatheory." Yet Metz is convinced that Christianity's crisis cannot be met in the first instance by a more sophisticated elaboration of its doctrines or a detailed "plan" for their application (as important as these might be), without a basic defense of their cognitive-transformative trustworthiness for Christian believers in danger of losing the sense that they are "good news" in the modern world. Metz's theology is an attempt "at a first level of reflection" to demonstrate the truth and transformative power of Christian faith, but now within the arena of historical catastrophes and political struggle rather than that of the individual's attempt to make sense of his or her own existence.

Finally, the comparison suggests another way of illumining Metz's procedure. A fundamental theology of the type described above cannot succeed unless

it is able to arouse in its audience that fundamental uneasiness with one's identity that provides the angle of vision from which the truth and relevance of Christian faith is to be displayed. Crudely put, Christian faith cannot be proposed as "the answer," unless a "question" is first aroused and articulated in its hearers. This is not necessarily an easy task. The question can lie deeply buried under everyday concerns, especially in technicized cultures that reserve all important questions to the sciences and drown all others in a tidal wave of information and entertainment. In *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger discussed the ways that "forgetfulness of being," or the covering over of the question of being in favor of questions about beings, makes it impossible genuinely to do metaphysics, to disclose the meaning of being. Rahner, who attended Heidegger's seminars from 1934 to 1936, took over this awareness of the challenge facing any fundamental discipline (be it fundamental ontology or fundamental theology). The fundamental question for Rahner has to do with the cohesiveness and authenticity of the vast constellation of everyday decisions that over time make up the "answer" that one gives with one's life to the "question" of one's being (Rahner 1978: 90–116). Do these decisions really belong to me, or are they results of the anonymous pressure of "the they"? The point, let it be noted, is not, however, to "answer" the question or to integrate it into a system. Rather, the question is to be continually opened up anew and allowed to irritate human awareness, thus enabling true thinking, rather than the shallow instrumental-technical thinking that characterizes modern society.

Metz too is concerned that a certain crucial question is taboo in modern societies. Its repression makes it impossible creatively to face the issues raised both by the Enlightenment project and, at a deeper level, by Christian faith. We have already encountered this question and its privileged locus. It is a question that, Metz tells us, forced itself on him in the light of the third remembrance cited above: the remembrance of Auschwitz.

As I became conscious of the situation "after Auschwitz" the God question forced itself on me in its strangest, most ancient, and most controversial version: that is, in the form of the theodicy question, not in its existential but, to a certain degree, its political garb: discourse about God as the cry for the salvation of others, of those who suffer unjustly, of the victims and the vanquished in our history. (Metz 1998: 55)

This question about the salvation of history's vanquished ones "leverages" a genuine justification of Christian faith ("on a first level of reflection") by opening a clearing where the mystery of God can be encountered in the dense and ambiguous forest of our histories and political involvements. It is a *political issue*; it concerns the fate of *others*, and the ways that social-political structures implicate me in what happens to them. Metz applies Kant's well-known claim that a fully worked out answer to the question "For what may I hope?" comprises the philosophy of religion. Metz emends as follows: "A basic form of Christian hope is also determined by this memory. The question 'What dare I hope?' is trans-

formed into the question 'What dare I hope for you and, in the end, also for me?'" (Metz 1987: 40). It is a question of hope, and of a threatened hope, but now worked out in terms of what threatens *the other*. It is a question with a deep social-political tone. Elsewhere he elaborates on this social rendering as the only framework within which Christian faith can provide an "answer" to the human predicament:

[Jesus'] images and visions of the Reign of God – of a comprehensive peace among men and women and nature in God's presence, of a home and a father, of a kingdom of peace, of justice and of reconciliation, of tears wiped away and of the laughter of the children of God – cannot be hoped for with only oneself in view and for oneself alone . . . In believing that others can rely on them, in communicating them to others and hoping them "for others," they belong to oneself as well. Only then. (Metz 1998: 164f.)

As with the fundamental question in transcendental ontology (Heidegger) or transcendental fundamental theology (Rahner), Metz's question is not posed in search of a conceptual-systematic "answer." Metz's purpose is continually to arouse the question in human subjectivity, so as to initiate the person into a mode of life which is itself an authentic "response" to the question: a Job-like spirituality of lamentation and complaint.

In taking up once again the theme of theodicy in theology I am not suggesting (as the word and its history might suggest) a belated and somewhat obstinate attempt to justify God in the face of evil, in the face of suffering and wickedness in the world. What is really at stake is the question of how one is to speak about God at all in the face of the abysmal histories of suffering in the world, in "his" world. In my view this is "the" question for theology; theology must not eliminate it or over-respond to it. It is "the" eschatological question, the question before which theology does not develop its answers reconciling everything, but rather directs its questioning incessantly back toward God. (Metz 1998: 55f.)

If this be the "question" that eventually emerges as determinative for Metz's theology, it is evident why his theological itinerary has always included a critique of the ways that theologies privatize the Christian message. Only if the remembrances of historical catastrophe are not conjured away by theology but are "taken into the Church and into theology" to orient our belief and our talk about God can the endangered character of human identity-in-history become the arena in which Christian faith and action prove themselves true, relevant, and trustworthy, and this dimension be saved and reaffirmed as fundamental to human being. It also becomes clear why his concern has increasingly focused on the way that European culture has abandoned Enlightenment aspirations for a world organized according to universal norms of justice, in which individuals take responsibility for themselves and for their histories. He worries that this great utopian vision, ultimately inspired, in his view, by Christian values, is threatened with exhaustion:

Do we not see in our social context a new and growing privatization, spread through a gentle seduction by our modern culture industry? Is there not a kind of weariness with being a subject: trained to fit in, do we not think in terms of little niches? Is there not a growing spectator mentality with no obligation to perceive critically, a rather voyeuristic way of dealing with social and political crises? Are there not in our secularized and enlightened world signs of a new, to some extent, second immaturity [*Unmündigkeit*] . . . ? (Metz 1998: 105)

Unmündigkeit clearly alludes to Kant's definition of Enlightenment as that state in which humans emerge from immaturity or tutelage, making use of their reason (at least in arguments in the public sphere) to take charge of history and render it more human. In Metz's view, if the concerns and anxieties that accrue to achieving such a demanding – indeed, perhaps unreasonable – ideal can be soothed and anesthetized by late modern culture, it is not only the end of the Enlightenment project, but a disaster for a Christianity whose authentic sense can only be disclosed against the backdrop of those concerns and anxieties. That is why theology must continually raise the “theodicy question,” and why the remembrances of history's catastrophes are indispensable to it.

The theodicy question was described above as an “eschatological question, the question before which theology does not develop its answers reconciling everything, but rather directs its questioning incessantly back toward God.” This brings us to the doctrinal focus of Metz's theology: eschatology. While Metz has been concerned from early in his career to demonstrate Christianity's constitutive concern for the world and its history, the way he argued this concern theology shifted dramatically in the 1960s. From a focus on incarnation as the proper doctrinal locus in which to work out the autonomy proper to the world, he turned to eschatology as the proper way to understand the openness of the future and Christians' obligation in faith to participate in history's movement into that open horizon. His meeting with Ernst Bloch in June of 1963 gave decisive impetus to this shift. Bloch, who was so formative for Jürgen Moltmann, had a similar impact on Metz. *Eschatology*, that area of theology that emphasizes history's orientation toward a future that can only be glimpsed now “as in a mirror, darkly,” became the sphere within which Metz argued for the church's need to respect and foster the legitimate autonomy of the world as it was drawn toward its future eschatological consummation. But, as arguments over what Jesus meant by the imminence of the reign of God have dramatically illustrated, there is more than one way to make a theology “eschatological,” and Metz's movement in this regard, seen against an ecclesiological backdrop, is instructive.

Metz's initial appropriation of eschatology had clear ecclesiological implications. He reconfigured the revisionary Marxist deployment of the theory and practice of “ideology critique” to work out an understanding of the church as the “institution of critical freedom.” The church is to safeguard the openness of historical processes from the endemic human temptation to freeze them into ideological absolutes that then underwrite the kind of violence so horrifically characteristic of the twentieth century. It does so by means of an insistence on the sovereignty of the God of the future, which relativizes every particular human

project in history (Metz 1969: 107–24). While he never disavowed this notion of “the eschatological proviso,” it becomes notably absent in his later work. As always, it is his sensitivity to what “endangers” the political dimension of human subjectivity (as defined above) that lies behind this shift.

As the sixties came to a close and gave way to the more placid seventies, Metz began to diagnose modernity's deepest malady not as a susceptibility to ideologically charged paroxysms of violence, but (as we have already seen) a growing apathy, a “weariness with being a subject.” Insofar as, for Metz, being a subject means taking responsibility for oneself and for those others with whom one is always already involved in history and society, what this weariness means is an increasing inability and/or unwillingness to intervene actively in social and political processes that determine what it means to be persons – most seriously, to be precise, processes that determine *who* will count as persons. Metz worries that our sense for the endangered character of human becoming in history has been numbed. We are more informed than ever about catastrophes in our world, but less and less moved to act: “Catastrophes are reported on the radio in between pieces of music. The music plays on like the ‘passage of time’ rendered audible, rolling mercilessly over everything, that nothing can interrupt. ‘When atrocities happen it's like when the rain falls. No one shouts ‘Stop it!’ anymore’ – Bertolt Brecht” (Metz 1980: 170f. 1977: 150).

Metz's aphorism is taken from his tribute to Ernst Bloch in a set of 35 theses entitled “Hope as Imminent Expectation, or the Struggle for Lost Time: Untimely Theses on Apocalyptic” (Metz 1980: 169; 1977: 165). These theses express Metz's continual concern with time and temporality. This concern eventually sent him back to his early engagement with Heidegger – now, however, not as a source for a Christian existential anthropology, but as the twentieth-century thinker who most understood that modernity has covered over the temporality of human existence. However, while Metz highlights Heidegger's prescience in pointing out our exhausted and dysfunctional dealings with temporality, Metz contends that, rather than turning to the pre-Socratics, “he would have done better to look at the apocalyptic traditions” (Metz and Wiesel 1999: 29). Metz shifted to a strongly apocalyptic form of eschatology.

Metz contends that the backdrop to our deadened sense of time's passage is the modern symbol of evolution, a mythical universalization of the empirical concept, according to which everything passes away, and nothing genuinely new can “interrupt” the course of history. It is the dominance of this mythic symbol that paralyzes human hope and action on behalf of the victims of history, and therefore needs critique and “correction” by an *apocalyptic* eschatology. Metz advocates apocalypticism for its capacity to energize a life full of hope in the God who can interrupt history, who sets bounds to history. Such an apocalyptic hope nourishes *political* hope and action on behalf of others:

A passionate expectation of the “day of the Lord” does not lead to a pseudo-apocalyptic dream-dance in which all the claims made by discipleship would be dissipated or forgotten. Neither does it lead to that unreflective fanaticism that cannot

see in prayers of longing and expectation anything other than transparent forms of evasion or self-deception. Imminent expectation does not allow discipleship to be postponed. It is not the apocalyptic sense for life that makes us apathetic, but the evolutionistic! It is the time symbol of evolution that paralyzes discipleship. Imminent expectation, on the other hand, proffers perspectives on time and expectation to a hope that has been evolutionistically anaesthetized and seduced. . . . Apocalyptic consciousness . . . stands under the challenge of practical solidarity with "the least of your brothers," as it is called in the little apocalypse of Matthew's Gospel. (Metz 1980: 176f.; 1977: 156)

This appeal to apocalypticism does not, therefore, culminate in an attempt to calculate the time and events of the last day. It is, rather, a rhetorical device to inspire hope and creative political action. It does so by countering the deadened sense of time and history that, in Metz's view, engenders both fatalistic apathy and desperate fanaticism (see Ashley 2000). Since this hopeful orientation toward the future is always a hope *for the other, even for one's enemy*, Metz insists that it does not engender a violent praxis demonizing and seeking the annihilation of the other, but rather a patient, albeit apocalyptically insistent praxis that bears suffering and disappointment, continuing a struggle for the full humanity of all persons no matter what the cost: "Discipleship in imminent expectation: this is an apocalyptic consciousness that does not cause, but rather accepts suffering – resisting both apathy and hatred" (Metz 1980: 176; 1977: 156). Ecclesiologicaly rendered, this apocalyptic eschatology leads not to a focus on the church as the "institution of critical freedom," with its indispensable contribution to history of the eschatological proviso, but to an emphasis on those groups (often small, controversial, and marginalized) in the church that keep this unreasonable (on modern terms) apocalyptic hope alive. This emphasis is particularly evident in Metz's reflections on the place of religious life in the church (Metz 1978; 1998: 150–74).

Let us close with the particular spirituality that Metz associates with this apocalyptic eschatology. An apocalyptic hope in a God "for whom not even the past is fixed," which measures its actions accordingly, is sustained by a certain mystical disposition that Metz calls "*Leiden an Gott*." I have translated this "suffering unto God" in order to draw the connection with that other active disposition that Metz names "*Rückfragen an Gott*," going back to God with one's questions. *Leiden an Gott* is not a passive acceptance or endurance, as alternative translations such as "suffer from God" or "suffer God" might suggest. It is an active stance whose exemplars are Job and the Jesus of Mark's passion account – crying out to God and calling God to account. This spirituality can endure the remembrance of suffering, and act out of that remembrance no matter how hopeless such action seems, because it hopes for God's promised response, and calls God to make good on that hope. It is "a God-mysticism with an increased readiness to perceive, a mysticism of open eyes that sees more and not less. It is a mysticism that especially makes visible all invisible and inconvenient suffering, and – convenient or not – pays attention to it and takes responsibility for it, for the sake of a God who is a friend to human beings" (Metz 1998:

163). When Metz speaks of the dual mystical–political character of Christian faith, it is this that defines the mystical complement to the political stance that acknowledges the other in his or her alterity, and, above all, acts politically out of compassion for the other's suffering (Metz, forthcoming 2003).

Conclusions

I have not discussed here several crucial particulars of Metz's project, such as his appeal for a recovery of the Jewish roots of Christianity (Metz 1999). Nor have I examined particular critiques of Metz's work. It has been argued, for example, that Metz's relentless focus on theodicy, on the memory of suffering, and on the still radically endangered project of becoming and remaining a human subject reacts so severely to an ahistorical, triumphalistic Christianity (itself a distortion, to be sure) that he cannot do justice in his Christology and soteriology to the genuine victory that Christian faith asserts has happened, "once for all," in Jesus' death and resurrection (Reno 1992; Tück 1999). I judge that these critiques arise in part from a failure adequately to consult those places where Metz does work out at least the outlines of a Christology that would do this (Metz 1998; Metz and Wiesel 1999), in part from a deep disagreement over the severity of the challenge that the twentieth century's "histories of suffering" pose for Christian faith and theology. These problems do show, however, that Metz has not offered the specific elaborations of doctrinal issues (even in essay form) that were the trademark of his teacher Karl Rahner. I suspect that the Christology of Jon Sobrino both "fits" the underlying approach laid out by Metz's work and answers critiques of Metz's Christological lacunae, but this suggestion can here be only offered, not argued.

Finally, Metz's is a *fundamental* theology, and that is where its contribution lies. It intends a justification "at a first level of reflection" of Christian faith's truth and relevance, and particularly of the *hope* that it offers contemporary men and women. This is particularly pressing in a world in which persons are threatened with a "second immaturity," with giving up on the Enlightenment ideals of freedom, the inalienable dignity of every human being, justice, and the obligation to struggle for these ideals no matter what the cost. What Metz's political theology shows so well is that a Christianity that cannot "render an account of its hope" against the backdrop of these ideals is not just politically irrelevant. More seriously, it is unfaithful to the challenge of the *memoria passionis, mortis, et resurrectionis Jesu*, which can and must animate us toward its own distinctive way of hoping for the future out of a remembered common historical past.

Note

- 1 Because of flaws in the English translation of *Glaube in Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, at times I give my own translations. As an indication that I have emended the

translation I follow the citation to the English with a reference to the German second edition in italics, thus: (Metz 1980: 224; 1977: 200).

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