

METZ'S FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

A basic orientation and context must be provided for the theological thought of J.B. Metz. This is necessary to understand both the scope and direction of his theological reflection. Metz is a fundamental theologian. In this light, he must be viewed as a thinker who is involved with the core of theology: a core which touches all the different branches of theology. Metz's perspective embraces questions concerning hermeneutics, apologetics, ecclesiology, and the very theory about the possibility of theology itself.

A dynamic tension grounds fundamental theology, i.e., the tension between reason and revelation, reason and faith. In neo-scholasticism, fundamental theology was concerned with the apologetics about the preambles of faith: God, revelation, revelation by Christ, the church established by Christ, and the Catholic Church as the true church. Fundamental theology was a

discipline, according to most theological textbooks, that investigates the basic elements of Christian Revelation. Fundamental theology consequently, has traditionally concerned itself with the two great Christian facts: God has revealed Himself to men, and this revelation was climaxed in Christ, who founded a church that transmits the Christian revelation.¹

This traditional approach to fundamentals has changed. This change can be seen in Metz's article on 'Apologetics' in *Sacramentum Mundi*:

Apologetics first addressed itself in its defense of its hope to the pagan world of the Roman Empire ... In the Middle Ages, Islam was in particular envisaged ... After the Reformation, it was primarily non Catholic Christianity, and after the Enlightenment, the critics of religion who based themselves on philosophical, scientific or socio-political grounds. In any case, the audience envisaged was the outsider from the point of view of church theology, the unbeliever or heterodox. Hence apologetics

¹ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 6. New York: McGraw Hill, 1967, p. 222.

mainly took the form of an *apologia ad extra*. Today, apologetics is more and more an *apologia ad intra*, the account of the believers hope given to the believer himself.²

Metz has rejected the neo-scholastic view of fundamental theology, which he understands to be a 'timeless apologetic'. He turns to the biblical command of 1 Peter 3: 15 to initiate his theological enterprise. 'Always be prepared to make a defense (*apologia*) to anyone who calls upon you to account for the hope that is in you.' Christians, in Metz's view, must be able to offer a justification for hope and faith, not hope and faith conceived as timeless realities, but hope and faith as they appear in concrete situations. Metz writes:

The universal conquest Christianity aims at cannot be attained by any power except that of love and truth. It must be a responsible account of the faith to all who ask to know the grounds of its hope. This calls for complete mental integrity and unmasks the 'blind faith', which refused to reflect and see clearly as a lower and defective form. Christian theology must be the account (*logos*) of a faith which knows it must answer for its hope or for the universal divine promise which that hope accepts. Hence it cannot but try to explain itself in the terms relevant to its given historical situation.³

In this approach then, Metz envisions fundamental theology as bringing the Christian message into the concrete situation of human society. Christian existence is characterized by hope, while being without hope is characteristic of existence apart from Christ. The account given of hope to one who asks for it should be so revealing that the questioner can be 'gripped, moved and perhaps won by this hope and its setting'.⁴

The area then of Metz's theology is fundamental theology, the motivating force or question is the command of 1 Peter 3:15, his personal synthesis remains to be seen.

PLACE OF THEOLOGY AND THEORY OF THEOLOGICAL THINKING TODAY

We mentioned before that against the neo-scholastics Metz be-

²J.B. Metz, 'Apologetics', *Sacramentum Mundi*, Vol. 1. New York: Herder & Herder, 1968, p. 68.

³*Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁴H. Fries, 'Fundamental Theology', *Sacramentum Mundi*, Vol. 2. New York: Herder & Herder, 1968, p. 371.

believes that reason-revelation: reason-faith are not timeless realities, but have meaning from the concrete situation and sphere where they are present. The uniqueness of our age, according to Metz, is the growth in reason: Enlightenment.

Enlightenment can be understood in two ways: first, Enlightenment can be understood as a historical period in the history of human civilization and culture. In this sense, the Enlightenment would be a historical period reaching its high point in the 18th century: second, the Enlightenment can refer to a historical process, a process which is not finished but continuing, and which in fact is still in its infancy and beginnings. Metz understands Enlightenment in this second sense of historical process.

Enlightenment as a historical process has the meaning of liberation and emancipation discovered in the freeing of human beings and the individual and society who is Enlightened. In Enlightenment reason is so triumphant that man experiences and realizes freedom and autonomy. The emancipation and autonomy of man is discovered in the very freeing and freedom Enlightenment brings. Enlightenment is then the triumph of reason at the service of mankind.

Metz takes this new understanding and power of reason into account in his theological perspective. He writes:

I shall explain the situation from which today's theological reflection takes its starting point, by referring to a problem raised by the enlightenment and which at least since Marx, has become unavoidable ... according to Kant, a man is enlightened only when he has the freedom to make public use of his reason in all his affairs. Hence the realization of this enlightenment is never a merely theoretical problem, but essentially a political one, a problem of societal conduct.⁵

Reason can never be viewed abstractly when it becomes an element in fundamental theology. Reason must always be treated as enlightenment, with its societal and political overtones and consequences.

Revelation in the fundamental theology of Metz is also conceived differently than in the neo-scholastic tradition. Revelation for Metz is an eschatological message. Fundamental theology attempts to explain and ground the possibility of this revelation or

⁵J.B. Metz, *Theology of the World*. Herder & Herder: New York, 1969, p. 111.

eschatological message. Metz calls his apologetics for the eschatological message Political theology. He writes:

political theology claims to be not a marginal but a central task of every contemporary theology. It does not offer frustrated Christians a new area to occupy themselves with, i.e. politics. It seeks, rather, to give attention to Christian theology's ancient task which always remains the same, to speak of the God of Jesus, inasmuch as it seeks to make the connection of the Christian message with the present world perceptibility and to bring the Christian tradition to the expression in this world as a still valid and dangerous remembrance.⁶

Therefore Metz, in an attempt to answer the command of 1 Peter 3:15 in our world situation reformulates the theological understanding of reason and revelation along the lines of the contemporary notions. Reason is understood as enlightenment and consequently practical and critical; revelation is understood as eschatological and consequently directed toward the future which is an open reality. The *ratio* is the enlightenment as a historical process of our time with its practical and critical function; the *revelatio* is the eschatological acceptance of the world by God in His Son Jesus Christ. Metz himself writes about this change in perspective:

A new relation between theory and practise, between knowledge and morality, between reflection and revolution, will have to be worked out, and it will have to determine theological thought, if theological thought is not to be left at a pre-critical stage. Hence forth practical and, in the widest sense of the word, political reason must take part in all critical reflections of theology. More and more, practical political reason will be the center of the classical discussion of the relation between *fides* and *ratio* and the problem of the responsibility of faith will find the key to its solution, again, in practical public reason. Properly speaking, the so called fundamental hermeneutical problem of theology is not the problem of how systematic theology stands in relation to historical theology, how dogma stands in relation to history, but what is the relation between theory and practice, between understanding the faith and social practice.⁷

⁶ J.B. Metz, 'Toward the Presence of the Church in Society,' text of a talk at the World Congress of Concilium, 1970, p. 1.

⁷ Metz, *Theology of . . .*, p. 112.

Metz identifies three possible answers to the relation of *fides* to *ratio* or *revelatio* to *ratio*, three attempts to relate the *symbola fidei* to the concrete order of contemporary man: Theology of Secularization, a new 'Liberal Theology', and an Eschatological Political Theology. A subtle shift in the theological perspective of Metz can be detected in an examination of these three attempts. The Metz of 1970-72 is different and more developed than the Metz of *Theology of the World*.

THEOLOGY OF SECULARIZATION

Secularization is a process that has entered the consciousness of all critical thinkers. The sphere of the religious or the sacred has been in flux *vis à vis* the secular or the profane. As the enlightened mind discovers deeper levels of meaning and truth that which was formerly in principle beyond the control of man becomes in principle within his power. (Note that we have used the word in principle which means that a reality is within the horizon of man, although to this point there may not be an actual realization.) Since secularization is a constitutive part of man's current condition and history, it is a question to which fundamental theology must address itself. When we examine Metz's attitude toward the theology of secularization we notice a shift in thinking. In 1968 in the *Theology of the World* he writes:

Let us accordingly consider the theological basis of secularization, so that we can use it to orientate our understanding of the world in faith. We can formulate this intention in a preliminary way through a proposition that shows the limits within which we express our attitude to the more universal theme of 'how faith sees the world', and the manner in which we do this – that is, essentially in terms of the theology of history. This formation might be as follows: *The secularity of the world, as it has emerged in the modern process of secularization and as we see it today in a globally heightened form, has fundamentally, though not in its individual historical forms, arisen not against Christianity, but through it. It is originally a Christian event and hence testifies in our world situation to the power of the 'hour of Christ' at work within history.*⁸

Two points emerge from the perspective Metz assumes. First, the secularization of the world is not anti-Christian, but in fact a result of Christian faith. Faith gives the world a freedom *in itself*

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

and by this the world becomes secular. Metz writes:

What happens in the modern world is not fundamentally a 'de-secularization of faith because of the superior power of a world that is inimical to faith, but the secularization of the world because of the power of the Christian faith, which accepts the world and sets it free.'⁹

Second, there is a genuine Christian impulse present in the depths of the secularization process, 'and since we see this process the historical power of the Christian Spirit, secularization itself appears by no means an expression of the impotence or even the indifference of Christianity in relation to the world.'¹⁰ The purpose and meaning of Christianity in relation to the world is to make the world world, and fundamentally this means to secularize it.¹¹ Metz writes:

For in view of all that we have said, 'the Christianization of the world' must not mean to make anything else of it but simply the world. It does not mean that we throw over it something un- or supraworldly, attach a new dimension to it or, as people are fond of saying, 'fetch it' out of its worldliness into a luminously shimmering divinity.

He continues:

Hence we may say that to *Christianize the World* means fundamentally to *secularize it* – to bring it into its own, bestowing on it the scarcely conceived heights or depths of its own worldly being, made possible by grace, but destroyed or burned in sin.¹²

[I believe that Metz, in this approach to the relationship of faith and grace to the world, is appealing to the principle *gratia perficit naturam*. With this understanding, the more grace is released into the world, the more the world would be world.]

The theological basis for Metz's thesis concerning the secularization of the world and its theological significance is to be discovered in his view of the Incarnation. He formulates the Christ event in this manner: 'In His Son, Jesus Christ, God accepted the world with eschatological definitiveness.'¹³

There is a formal and a factual statement about God and the

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

world to be found in this formulation. Formally, God Himself does something for the world in an historical action. From this we learn that God is a God of history, who is in history or rather in front of history. God is not an abstract force, but a person in relation with the world. Formally, the world is a world of men, not things; and God has revealed to men the eschatological character of the world, which could not be known in itself. In fact, it was in a man of the world, that God freely chose to make this eschatological end and meaning present and known.

Factually, the statement says that God accepts the world, not by making it by Himself, but by accepting it as different and distinct from Himself and thereby recognizing its freedom. The truth of the enfleshment of God in the person of Jesus, the Christ, makes the world appear as fully world and God appear as fully God, and radically other than the world. Metz writes:

This multifarious truth of the event of Christ, according to which the Incarnation of God makes the flesh appear as wholly flesh, as earth, as secular world, and God appear wholly as God in his transcendent superiority to the world, now becomes operative in the economy of the movement of history which stands beneath the 'law of Christ' 1 Cor 9:21; it becomes the framework of a genuinely Christian view of the world.¹⁴

Perhaps a summary of Metz former view of the theology of secularization would include the following points: (1) Christianity has been the occasion through which the secularization of the world becomes possible; (2) Christian faith adds nothing to the world, but uncovers what is already there but is not clearly realized because of the reality of sin in the world; (3) to Christianize the world is to 'secularize the world,' to affirm and support the worldliness of world; (4) the theological basis for the theology of secularization is grounded in the Incarnation, which is the eschatological, definitive acceptance of the world by God in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Metz has recently shifted his thinking on the question of the theology of secularization.¹⁵ He believes that to pursue the path of a theology of secularization is ultimately to pursue a dissolution of theological thinking. In the situation and context of sec-

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁵ J.B. Metz, 'Grond en functie van de politieke theologie', *Tijdschrift voor Theologie*, No. 2, 1972, pp. 159-170.

ularization theology, theology becomes a play, but a play without social relevance. The reason for this affirmation of the inconsequentialness of theology in light of a theology of secularization is the freedom of the world *in itself*. The corollary of this statement is: the critical liberating force of Christianity in the world is finished, because faith is in another sphere than the world. Faith, if it is to have any meaning in the contemporary world, will become that of a private preoccupation.¹⁶ Metz portrays the anthropological model of the theology of secularization in the following way:

The anthropological model which the theology of the world attempts to portray fixes itself within a given 'new time' background and stands on a foundation separated from history, and this eschatological judgment is of no consequence.¹⁷

Metz believes that the anthropological model of the theology of secularization is an anthropology separated from history with its future eschatological perspective. In its concrete expression, secularization theology articulates the difference between two kingdoms, *twee-rijken-leer*: the Church vs. the State. [In this case, Metz is close to the thinking of F. Gogarten. The difference between the two is that Metz comes to the secularization and freedom of the world vis the Incarnation, and Gogarten comes to the freedom and secularization of the world via a theology of creation.]

SUMMARY

What is important to note in this section of the article is the change that Metz has gone through *re* theology of Secularization. It should be noted that the reason for his rejection of his own former position, or rather than rejection, perhaps a critical correction through expansion of theological thinking, lies within the approach he has to fundamental theology. Secularization theology ultimately leads to the separation and non-interrelation of *revelatio* and *ratio*, *fides* and *ratio*. Metz cannot accept this exclusion. The *revelatio* of Christianity is a *revelatio* of *Deus*, and as such must have importance for the world. This rejection of his former position does not mean that Metz has changed his attitude toward the

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 160. 'Het antropologisch model dat bepalend is deze poging om een theologie van de wereld' binnen de nieuwe tijd gestalte te geven, staat in de grond van de zaak los van de geschiedenis, en is dus wezenlijk ook niet eschatologisch gericht.

world. He still believes, as will be shown in the third answer proposed to the question of fundamental theology, that the world is a world. What has changed is a more complete understanding of the *symbola fidei* in relation to the world, which Metz characterizes as a dangerous memory. This will be explained in the section dealing with the new 'Eschatological Political Theology'.

LIBERAL THEOLOGY

The second possible answer Metz poses for an answer to the quest of fundamental theology is liberal theology, or more correctly, a new version of liberal theology.¹⁸ Metz sees liberal in this 'liberal theology' as an openness to the tendencies of the times and its enlightenment. He writes:

This theology of the World applies Christianity in such a way that it is connected with the traces of the enlightenment and the time period of criticism to the extent that it has reasonable application.¹⁹

Enlightenment is seen as a continuous process which produces emancipation and autonomy. However, the autonomy and emancipation which materialize in liberal theology arise only with what Metz calls an adaptation of Christian revelation. On this point he writes:

This positive outlook is externally but another form of louder apologetical adaptation through which Christianity becomes the sacrificial offering in light of an uncritical judgment of progress.²⁰

Liberal theology places the emphasis of its system more on enlightenment than on Christian revelation. Metz believes that this approach betrays a lack of critical perspective regarding enlightenment, and *uncritical* acceptance of enlightenment. This prejudice of liberal theology reveals itself in its anthropological model: *dat de mens ziet als heerser over de natuur*, that man is the ruler over nature. In this view of man dominating creation, man can be seen

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 160-61. 'Voor deze "theologie van de wereld" geldt als christelijk datgene wat in het spoor van de Verlichting en het tijdperk van kritiek dat er mee samenhangt, als redelijk geldt.'

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 160. 'Deze positie blijkt m.i. uiteindelijk niets anders te zijn dan een vorm van louter apologetische aanpassing, waarvan een onkritisch "progressief" gericht christendom het slacht-offer wordt.'

as nothing other than a worker and his task is to put everything in creation at the use and disposal of mankind.

Metz believes that this approach to man in the thought of liberal theology is 'eendimensionale': one dimensional. Man is seen only as a worker, and only those things that man creates have meaning. [This objection by Metz against the one-dimensional view of liberal theology finds support in the thinking of Herbert Marcuse.] If man is only a worker, then Christian faith has nothing to say about: play, spirituality, pain, suffering, joy, etc. [Here Metz appears to be headed in the direction of Cox who in the beginning also turned his attention to the theology of secularization, but in two recent books: *The Feast of Fools* and *On Not Leaving it to the Snake*, shifted his reflection to spirituality, play, joy, suffering, etc.]

Metz sees no real theology in the theology of liberation. He believes that emancipation in light of Enlightenment is to narrow a view or horizon for fundamental theology, it is too one-dimensional. Again, it is important to realize that Metz rejects the position of liberal theology from his understanding of the scope and purpose of fundamental theology. Liberal theology as he sees it destroys the *revelatio* or *fides* by adapting it to enlightenment. Christian faith again, as in the case of the theology of secularization, has nothing to bring to the world. To admit this premise of liberal theology is to destroy theology and faith for Metz.

ESCHATOLOGICAL POLITICAL THEOLOGY

Metz now offers his solution to the questions posed to fundamental theology, the question of *revelatio* in relation to *ratio*. He entitles his answer: Eschatological Political Theology. The following is the position that Metz presently holds, and as it has been pointed out, there has been a change in Metz's thinking. By adding the word Eschatological to the idea of political theology a hint is given to the reader that there has been a change in perspective from the Metz of *Theology of the World*. To say that there has been a change in the thinking of Metz is not to say that he recants all he said previously. What it does say is that there has been a deepening in his thought, a broadening of his perspective. It is true to say that there have been some things left behind in the past, i.e. theology of secularization, but Metz still maintains that theology is political and now adds his new idea of eschatological. First, a summary of the familiar idea of political theology will be presented, and then an attempt will be made to expose the

meaning of eschatological.

Metz ascribes two forces to be at work in political theology:

I understand political theology to be a critical correction of present-day theology inasmuch as this theology shows an extreme privatizing tendency (a tendency, that is, to center on the private person rather than 'public' 'political' society). At the same time, I understand this political theology to be a positive attempt to formulate the eschatological message under the conditions of our present society.²¹

The first force in political theology is negative. It seeks to negate the over emphasis on the individual brought about by an existential theology. It also seeks to have the future accepted as a real dimension of time against an existential view which makes the present the sole important time dimension. Metz's break with existential theology arose from a concern for history and the acceptance of the secular world and its confrontation by the Christian faith.²²

Metz explains the positive task of political theology in the following way:

It is to determine anew the relation between religion and society, between the church and societal 'publicness', between eschatological faith and societal life . . . Theology, in so far as it is political theology, is obliged to establish this second degree reflection when it comes to formulate the eschatological message under the conditions of the present situation of society.²³

Political theology is then at the heart of Metz's fundamental theology if not identical with fundamental theology. One tends toward the latter when he reads Metz's article, 'Toward the Presence of the Church in Society'. He writes:

A theology which desires the critical responsibility of Christian faith and of its traditions in this sense cannot neglect in its core this social and 'practical' relation; its theory does not allow abstraction from the problems of publicness, justice, freedom, etc. It must take into account the consequences which arise when in a particular situation God is spoken of — or there

²¹ Metz, *Theology of . . .*, p. 107.

²² F. Fiorenza, 'The Thought of J.B. Metz', *Philosophy Today*, Vol. 10, 1966, p. 249.

²³ Metz, *Theology of . . .*, p. 111.

is silence about God. In this sense it can and must be a political theology – even independently of the question of how political themes in particular should be considered under the determination of the eschatological hope of the Christian.²⁴

Metz goes further and says regarding the command of 1 Peter 3:15:

In doing this (meeting the responsibility of 1 Peter 3:15), it (the church) cannot uncritically ignore or minimize the historical distance separating our present modern times from the irrevocable situation of the biblical testimonies, i.e. it cannot simply presume that the content and intention of these biblical testimonies are known and simply ask about their contemporary application. Rather, it must take into account that this historical and social difference makes what the content and intention of the biblical testimonies themselves are a topic for discussion over and over again. In this sense, 'political theology' is not simply a theory of the delayed application of the Christian message to our present but a theory of the truth of this message as practically and critically intended for our present.²⁵

This briefly is Metz's understanding of political theology in the concept of eschatological political theology. Now the idea of eschatology must be explored especially in light of the dangerous memory.

During the Concilium World Congress in Brussels in 1970, Metz delivered a talk entitled 'Toward the Presence of the Church in Society'. He sought to describe the theological basis for the topic in the following manner:

I would like to present the thesis that the *Church must understand and verify herself in the 'systems' of our emancipatory society as the public witness to and bearer of a dangerous remembrance of freedom.*²⁶

Metz seeks to place the whole content of the Christian tradition and revelation as an object of a dangerous memory. He wishes to interpret the traditional content of Christianity as a critical liberating memory. He calls for the whole of the *symbola fidei* to be preached in a critical and dangerous way. Metz believes that *memoria* is a fundamental form of expressing the Christian faith. He writes:

²⁴ Metz, *Concilium Congress . . .*, p. 1.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

We Christians carry out the *memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis Jesu Christi* in faith. In believing we remind ourselves of the testament of his love in which the dominion of God appeared among men precisely inasmuch as dominion among men began to be put aside because Jesus embraced the insignificant, rejected and repressed, thereby proclaiming this coming dominion of God precisely as the liberating power of an unreserved love.²⁷

It is in the *memoria Christianorum* that the anticipation for the future resides and grows strong, for they hope in the promises which have been given to them, live in a joy of what has already entered the human sphere, and yearn for the fullness which is to come, the eschatological reign and kingdom of God: the absolute future of man.

The *memoria Metz* speaks of is both dangerous and liberating. This *memoria* does not dispense the Christian from the hazards of the future, but propels the Christian into the future. The *memoria* directs the Christian away from any future which does not have God as its center, be this ecclesial or societal. Such a definitive remembrance

breaks out of the magic circle of the dominant consciousness. It does not claim history only as a screen on which to project present interests. It mobilizes tradition as a dangerous tradition and, thus, as a critical and liberating power opposed to the one-dimensionality of the predominant consciousness and to the security of those 'whose hour is always there.'²⁸

Not only is the *memoria* of the Christian directing him toward the future, but it also acts as a source of critical correction on the existing structure of society and the church insofar as they do not reflect, or to the extent that they hold back the activity of God in bringing about His kingdom. In this sense, Metz also sees the *memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis Jesu Christi* as a subversive memory. He writes:

In my opinion, Christian faith can and must be seen as such a subversive *memoria*, and the church is to an extent the form of its public being. The church's credal and doctrinal formulae are formulae in which this dangerous memory is spelled out publicly. The criterion of their being genuinely Christian is the liberating,

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

but also the saving, dangerousness with which they realize the remembered freedom of Jesus in the present society and its way of thinking and living.²⁹

In a real sense then, the *memoria passionis, mortis and resurrectionis Jesu Christi* is a critical corrective of contemporary society and its structure and life. However, the *memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis* is also the heart of the Christian faith and as such is the definitive eschatological action of God toward men and the world. Metz therefore stands on firm ground in calling his fundamental theology: Eschatological Political Theology.

Unlike the theology of secularization and liberal theology, eschatological political theology envisages an intimacy and interrelation between *ratio* and *fides*, *ratio* and *revelatio*. In opposition to the theology of secularization, eschatological political theology holds for the interrelation of faith and the world. They are not totally distinct and separate realities. In opposition to the theology of liberation, eschatological political theology does not accept the movement of enlightenment as one-dimensional or always in the direction of progress which is viewed as always toward the good. Rather, enlightenment is seen as dialectical: both good and bad. Eschatological political theology has a critical apparatus for dealing with the contemporary world: the whole content of Christian faith, which is a dangerous memory that always aims for the liberation of men.

In a special way, the *memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis Jesu Christi* moves the church to care for and direct itself to the 'little ones': the poor as they are found in the beatitudes, for these are the ones who will inherit the kingdom of God. Metz writes:

This *memoria* of Jesus Christ is not a remembrance that deceptively dispenses from the hazards of the future. It is not a kind of bourgeois counterpart to hope. On the contrary, it contains a definite anticipation of the future as a future for the hopeless, broken and oppressed.³⁰

Metz's understanding of the dangerous memory also broadens the values that are important for Christianity. In the *Theology of the World* criticism stood out as the greatest Christian value. Metz has gone beyond his former thinking again. Some of the Christian values awakened by the dangerous memory can be seen in ques-

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

tions he asked during his talk in Brussels at the Concilium World Congress.

But where is this eschatological remembrance of freedom alive to overwhelm our systems of thought and action with its questions? Who can lead us to the freedom to suffer at the sufferings of others and to heed the prophecy of their sufferings, even though the negativity of suffering seems to be less expected of one and even frankly improper; to the freedom to become old, even though our public seems to be defined by a denial of age which it actually finds a secret shame; to the freedom of contemplation, even though we seem to be under the hypnosis of work, achievement and planning right into the chambers of our consciousness; to the freedom finally, to take into consideration our own finiteness and questionableness, even though our public exists with the supposition of an even more healthy and harmonious life? Who answers the claim to freedom in past sufferings and hopes? Who answers the challenge of the dead and makes conscience sensitive to their freedom? Who cultivates solidarity with the dead to whom we shall belong someday after tomorrow? Finally, who can share his understanding of freedom even with those who do not die an emphatic death but who die a terribly banal and fatal everyday death?³¹

Finally, the eschatological political theology gives spirituality its proper place in the Christian life of hope. In prayer the Christian seeks to gain the power to be free, the power of selflessness which is required by a liberating stance toward others. There is not a dichotomy between prayer and *praxis* in eschatological political theology, each is at the same time the complement and verifiable principle of the other.³²

Metz himself gives the best summary of his thinking:

Political Theology is the attempt to incorporate the eschatological message of Christendom within the proportions of contemporary times inasmuch as it takes the form of critical, practical thinking.³³

In the *Theology of the World*, Metz sees contemporary man as

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³³ Metz, 'Ground en ...', De politieke theologie is de poging om de eschatologische boodschap van het christendom binnen de verhoudingen van de nieuwe tijd uit te drukken als vorm van kritisch-praktisch denken.'

directed toward the future.³⁴ In fundamental theology the question therefore arises: Who is the subject of history, who is the subject of the future of man? Metz addresses himself to three possible contemporary answers, rejects them, and then offers his own answer in light of eschatological political theology.

The first school Metz treats is positivism and neo-positivism. Positivism does not speak of a universal sense or subject of history. This is due to their empirical bent, with its insistence on the verification principle. It is impossible to speak of an absolute future in this system. The question itself has no meaning since it cannot be verified. Positivism, *ipso facto*, surrenders the most important parts of social life to irrationality. If you cannot say anything without verification, you can only speak of impersonal things (since the affairs of the heart, emotions, and feelings cannot be placed under a microscope; and even if the sensual reactions could be measured electronically, the meanings of these reactions would still fall outside the principles of verification.) Metz quotes J. Habermas who says that there is a validity to the technical instrumental thinking of positive science, but if you limit rationality to this level, the most important part of human existence is excluded. Communication between human beings is a big if not essential part of social life. There can be constraints in power through communication for emancipation, liberation and enlightenment.³⁵

Metz also rejects the approach of classical Marxism to the question of: Who is the subject of universal history? Unlike the positivists who can make no meaning of the question, the question in classical Marxism is of great importance.

The Marxists speak of an absolute future, i.e. the realization of communist society. They also speak of the subject of history who will realize this future, i.e., the proletariat without alienation. There is, however, within Marxism today a breakdown of the certitude of this process. This can be seen in the thought of H. Marcuse and E. Bloch. Marcuse says that the subject of classical Marxism, the proletariat, has been absorbed in society. For him, the proletariat is no longer the subject of moving force of universal history. Marcuse has turned to the students, the third world, and the marginal groups of society. Bloch, who is a metaphysician sees an intrinsic problem which Marxism has not answered to

³⁴ Metz, *Theology of . . .*, p. 83.

³⁵ Metz, *Ground en . . .*, p. 162-63.

date: the perfect state will become a boredom and the question of death will not as yet be answered. The answer of classical Marxism is not complete, even though it speaks of an absolute future and a subject to universal world history.

Metz also rejects the answer of the classical Ideologist who come off of Hegel. Politics is not dealt with in a pragmatic way in this system, and therefore is not in the service of the real.

Finally, Metz presents the answer of eschatological political theology to the question: Who is the subject of universal history? God is the subject of universal world history, and also the full meaning of this history, for Metz.³⁶ God is not the *futurum*, the actualization of primordial matter in categories of being. God is the *adventus*, the coming and arrival of a person and event. *Zukunft*, the future, is expected from the coming God. Since the future is not a simple evolution from the past and the present, the being of God does not lie in the process of the world's becoming. If God was contingent on the evolution of the world and perfection of the present then He would be the *finis ultimus*, point omega. But God is not a god with *futurum* as His mode of being, *Zukunft* is the mode by which He acts upon the past and the present. It is in this sense that God is the initiator and the end of universal history. God is the possibility of man hoping for the future and also the very future man can hope for. As Rahner says: God is the absolute future of man.³⁷

The certainty of the absolute future hinges on the distinction and difference between the *adventus Dei* vs. the *futurum*. The *futurum* is extrapolated from the factors and processes of the past and present. Prediction and futurology mark this methodology. On the other hand, the future as *adventus Dei* cannot be extrapolated from history, but is historically anticipated insofar as it announces itself.³⁸ Because the God of eschatological political theology is not an extrapolation, real newness can be brought into reality. The *adventus Dei* draws out possibilities for freedom and transcendence which have never been before.³⁹

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

³⁷ Gerald McCool, 'Rahner's Anthropology', *America*, Vol. 123, 1970, p. 343ff.

³⁸ This idea is expounded by Moltmann in the *Theology of Hope* and by Pannenburg in Vol. II of *Basic Questions in Theology*.

³⁹ Metz, 'God before us instead of a Theological Argument', *Cross Currents*, Vol. 18, 1968, pp. 296-306.

In the creation of the new and the future, the past in contradicted by the *Adventus Dei*. This does not mean that the past is merely cast aside; the past attains a new meaning in this process. In light of fulfillment announcing itself in a new way, the past again becomes present. In the appearance of the new, the past which was once itself future and present, is reborn as a sign that the new does come into being. The *Adventus Dei* is not only the future of the present, but also of the past. A continuity is therefore established between the past, present and future. The God of hope reaches from the future into the present and creates history through His word of promise and mode of existence.⁴⁰

The power of the future, God, brings newness into reality. In the experience of the 'novum', man is pointed back to the eschatologically new, and anticipate more newness. Also, the past again comes to life in the experience of the new, it is revived by the power of the future (God). The future is the not yet – but what can be or become. The power and force of history in this system is not an organic development from the past, but a luring from the power of the future (God) which is always ahead of man and calling man into the fullness of the future through the revelation of its power in the present, which is the horizon or frontline of this future.

History, man, and the church therefore exist under what Metz calls God's eschatological provisio. He writes:

Today more than ever, when the church is faced with the modern political systems, she must emphasize her critical, liberating function again and again, to make it clear that man's history as a whole stands under God's eschatological provisio. She must stress the truth that history as a whole can never be a political notion in the strict sense of the word, that for this reason, it can never be made an object of a particular political action. There is no subject of universal history one can point in this world, and whenever a party, a group, a nation, or a class sought to see itself as such a subject, thereby making the whole of history to be the scope of its political action, it inevitably grew into a totalitarian state.⁴¹

No one group or party can claim to be the subject of history, only God is the subject. Two things should be connected to the idea of

⁴⁰ Metz, *Theology of . . .*, p. 118.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

God as the subject of universal history. First, the critical role of eschatological political theology becomes clarified. In *memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis Jesus Christi*, the church knows the meaning of history and the end of history: in Jesus the end of history has become present. As critic, the church must call men to turn away from any institution, movement, or subject which would proclaim another than God as the meaning and subject of Universal history. (Again we see that Metz is dealing with a question of *ratio-revelatio, ratio-fides*, the starting point of fundamental theology.) It is the dangerous *memoria* which enables the church not to deviate from the faith and revelation which is the ground of her critical function. Second, the subject of this universal history, God: the absolute future of man, is in a special way concerned with the 'little ones', the poor and suffering of this world, as they are singled out in the beatitudes. The church as a critic, in light of its responsibility to the dangerous memory which has been given to her, must have a preoccupation for the poor and suffering of this world. For as the poor and suffering are close to Christ in his *passionis* and *mortis*, they will be close to him in his *resurrectionis*.

The eschatological accomplishment of the kingdom of God will not arise from our meager efforts. Its completion, just as its initiation, depend on the infinite love, mercy and faithfulness of God. As long as the eschatological end is not finalized our world is in a dialectic: Christian faith knowing the meaning of history and experiencing the first fruits of the kingdom vs. that which has not been made free and still remains bound by sin.

Briefly, it might be beneficial to see how Metz answers objections to his theological system. Four objections will be presented.

First, eschatological political theology is merely an expression. In this sense, it is no different than classical theology. Metz responds that in eschatological political theology a *critical* attitude *will be* expressed. The power and perseverance of this criticism will come from the proper place and force given to eschatology. (Here eschatology is conceived in the scope which has been presented earlier in this paper, i.e. including the notion of *memoria*, God as subject of universal history, and concern for the little ones.)

Second, eschatological political theology is a new form of clericalism, an attempt on the part of religion and theology to dominate the state. Metz responds that we do not want to dominate the state, but to wake up its conscience, the conscience of people.

Third, eschatological political theology will lead to the politicalization of the church. Metz responds that the church must deal with politics and political questions, since these are part of the present contemporary structure of man's world, but the church itself will not be a political party, but political as a critical body. He writes:

The church is a particular institution in society, yet presents a universal claim; if this claim is not to be an ideology, it can only be formulated and urged as criticism. Two important aspects may be pointed out on this basis. In the first place, it is clear now why the church, being a social critical institution, will not, in the end, come out with a political ideology. No political party can establish itself merely as a criticism; no political party can take as its object of political action that which the scope of the ecclesiastical criticism of society, namely, the whole of history standing under God's eschatological provisio.⁴²

Finally, Metz must answer the objection that his theological perspective is merely an adaptation of the Christian message to contemporary times, and in the process becomes absorbed into enlightenment in much the same way that 'liberal theology' was an adaptation. Metz points out that the critique of society comes out so much from the historical process of enlightenment, but from the *memoria Christi* and the content of the eschatological message of Christianity. Metz points out that a distinction must be made between *ungleichzeitig* (non-contemporaneousness) and *unzeitgemass* (untimely or timeless). Although the church must adapt herself to the questions and problems she finds in any particular age or culture, the content of her faith has an aspect and reality of timelessness: a validity for all ages, i.e., the *memoria passionis, mortis, et resurrectionis Jesu Christi*, the dangerous memory which serves a critical function of calling men to accept the Father of Jesus as the subject of all history and the absolute future of man.

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⁴² Metz, *Concilium Congress*, p. 7.