FROM DANGEROUS MEMORY TO DANGEROUS HOPE: READING THE THEOLOGY OF JOHANN BAPTIST METZ*

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ABSTRACT

From the perspective of theological anthropology, the article aims to explore the possibility of hope in the contemporary world. It draws on the work of the Catholic theologian Johann Baptist Metz and presents the struggle for hope in three areas that were central to Metz and his time. All relate to the question of suffering. Specifically, these are Metz's conversation with Marxism, in which he develops an eschatological concept of creative hope; the topic of post-Holocaust theology, which must speak out on behalf of the victims of violence and at the same time work with the silence that remains after the victims no more exist; and, finally, a post-idealist approach in theology that will be able to critically view its own Eurocentrism.

Contemporary contexts are in some ways different from Metz's. Still, one can benefit from his honest efforts, at least methodologically. The article concludes by relating Metz's ideas to some selected contemporary issues, such as the relationship between activism and spirituality. The article notes a certain affinity between Metz's thought and the pontificate of the current Pope Francis, especially with regard to a commitment to reality.

Keywords

Johann Baptist Metz; Hope; Theological anthropology; Theology and Marxism; Theology after Auschwitz; European theology

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The intention of this article is to explore the theme of hope from the perspective of theological anthropology in the work of Johann Baptist Metz. The life story of this seminal thinker of the German Catholic theology of the 20th century[1] frames the search for hope against the backdrop of the great philosophical themes of the twentieth century. For Metz, these themes are mainly the Enlightenment critique of religion and at the same time the crisis of modernity manifested in particular by enormous levels of violence, typically politically motivated and organized by the state. In response to these challenges and crises, Metz is not looking for hope in an idealised past. Rather, he seeks the possibility of rediscovering hope in dialogue with the project of modernity, assuming its transformation. Modern development need not be completely closed to God as its future. In openness to its victims, it surprisingly reveals hope again.

It is not the intention of this article to present systematically the theology of Metz. In what follows I would like first to outline some anthropological aspects of Metz's theology. Metz turns out to be quite fundamentally opposed to the prevailing anthropological orientations of his time; he draws attention to the limits of individualistic anthropology and brings a political dimension to it. In the second part, I will look at three key themes through which Metz relates to hope. It will be a dialogue with Marxism, an obligation to cultivate a post-Holocaust theology, and the promise of a 'world' theology that transcends the limitations of the European space. As fragile and uncertain as hope seems in Metz's theology, it is a project that appeals for its striving for authenticity. It seems to be in close proximity to one of the guiding principles of the current pontificate of Pope Francis, 'realities are greater than ideas'.[2]

1. Metz's Political-Eschatological Anthropology

The theology of Metz grew out of Karl Rahner and his interpretation of Martin Heidegger.[3] It continued Rahner's existential and transcenden-

[1] In the biographical note on the cover of the German edition of his collected writings, Metz is regarded as one of the 'most influential and authoritative theologians of our time'. The edition contains nine volumes, two of them being in two volumes (Herder 2015–2018).

[2] Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation* Evangelii Gaudium *on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World*, 2013, 231.

[3] Calling Metz a disciple of Rahner is a little simplistic. Karl Heinz Neufeld points out that 'there is no "Rahner school". This is because almost all those who were

tal approach but extended it gradually thanks to the encounters Metz had with revisionary Marxists such as Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno.[4] Metz took 'an anthropological turn from the rational, universally understood subject to the suffering subject' in historical experience.[5] Thus, he seems to be somewhat distant from the dominant anthropologies of his time, which for him represented an individualized and privatized theology, a theology full of ideas but lacking a historical subject.[6] Metz fears that theology, by enclosing history and society, commits an anthropological reduction. By contrast, he understands his turn to suffering people politically. He says, 'Any existential and personal theology that claims to understand human existence, but not as a political problem in the widest sense, is an abstract theology with regard to the existential situation of the individual.'[7] J. Matthew Ashley argues that, for Metz, '"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.'[8]

Metz admits that theology can be understood as anthropology. 'But this anthropological theology, assuming it is not understood as eschatology, runs the risk of becoming unhistorical and of being out of this

considered to be his disciples followed their own paths.' Karl Heinz Neufeld, *Hugo a Karl Rahnerové* (Olomouc: Centrum Aletti/Velehrad: Refugium, 2004), 416. In Metz, there is both continuity with Rahner and criticism of him. In particular, Metz criticized Rahner's method for 'reducing salvation to a private individual concern and insufficiently exploring the social and political dimensions of salvation history'. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Method in theology,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 65–82, 67.

4 A brief introduction to the sources of Metz's thought is Břetislav Horyna, 'Předmluva – Theologie oživlé paměti,' in *Úvahy o politické theologii*, Johann Baptist Metz (Praha: ISE, 1994), 7–11.

5 Petr Kratochvíl, '*Memoria passionis*. K roli paměti v politické teologii J. B. Metze,' *Teologická reflexe* 14, no. 2 (2008): 142–153, 143. Kratochvíl's statement about Metz's turn to the suffering subject is certainly correct, but it is appropriate to make it more concrete here by linking the subject to his/her historical experience. For the experience of the suffering person could also be reflected within a transcendental theology without reference to the social contradictions from which the experience of suffering arises. Cf. Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society. Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (London: Burns and Oates, 1980), 65.

6 Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 62–65.

7 Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 62–63.

8 J. Matthew Ashley, 'Johann Baptist Metz,' in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 241–255, 247.

world. For only from an eschatological horizon does the world appear as an emergent reality whose development is entrusted to the freedom of human beings.'[9] Liberal or bourgeois society and the church influenced by its mentality avoid eschatology. They set aside the claim of eschatology, and thereby fundamentally reduce the understanding of the human being. Metz fears that they are falling into a mere spectator mentality. Referring to Kant, Metz calls it the second immaturity (*Unmündigkeit*), which is characterized by desensitization to human concerns and anxieties. But this 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'.[10] In order to counteract the spectator mentality, Metz introduces an apocalyptic eschatology with the aim of restoring human hope and action on behalf of the victims of history. Ashley argues that '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.'[11]

Insensitivity to human fears and anxieties goes hand in hand with an evolutionist view that is prevalent in modernity. Metz's point is not to reject evolution as such, but to criticize the ideological conception of evolution as a blind historical process.[12] He considers it to be mortifying to the extent that it manifests itself in indifferentism and passéism. Over against this view, he places the apocalyptic as a rhetorical device to inspire hope and creative political action. In order to challenge what 'reasonable people' accept as rational and modern, he cultivates the 'adventure of religious noncontemporaneity', 'creative naivete', and 'aggressive fidelity' to the church's tradition.[13] Ashley believes that by this Metz appropriates the heritage of Rahner, who himself wrote

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[9] Johann B. Metz, 'Tvořivá naděje,' *Křesťanská revue* 35 (1968): 51–56, 52.
[10] Ashley, 'Johann Baptist Metz,' 250.
[11] Ashley, 'Johann Baptist Metz,' 251.
[12] See e.g. Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 106–109. Pope Francis also returns to the critique of neo-Darwinism from a different perspective: 'Francis has continued to denounce the "neo-Darwinist ideology of the survival of the fittest, underpinned by an unfettered market obsessed with profit" as the hardening force at the heart of economic injustice, whose logic turns life "from gift into a product".' Kristin E. Heyer, 'Walls in the Heart: Social Sin in *Fratelli tutti*,' *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 19 (2022): 1, 25–40, 27. The author quotes from: Francis, *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 116.
[13] Ashley, 'Johann Baptist Metz,' 242.

essays on such 'outdated' topics as devotion to the Sacred Heart, purgatory, and the theology of indulgences. It is not so much about these themes themselves as it is about bringing attention to details that the grown-up modern consciousness has left aside.[14] But it is precisely these details that can help theologians expand their limited horizons. For Metz, the privileged place of this 'productive noncontemporaneity' is his apocalyptic sense of time.[15]

Metz's famous category of dangerous memory[16] stands only seemingly at the opposite end of the timeline. Metz is really concerned with the present and the future that emerges from it. He holds 'apocalyptic hope in a God for whom not even the past is fixed'.[17] Dangerous memory is dangerous because it undermines all self-confidence, especially the belief that one's future is secure and that one is morally superior.[18] There is a Christological basis of dangerous memory: 'In faith, Christians accomplish the *memoria passionis, mortis et recurrectionis Jesu Christi*.'[19] In faith, Christians return to the legacy of Jesus, who was recognized as one who took the side of the oppressed and rejected. In Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God, they recognized the liberating power of love. It is this memory of Jesus that commits Christians to a risky engagement for the future. 'It is not a middle-class counter-figure to hope (…) it anticipates the future as a future of those who are oppressed, without hope and doomed to fail. It is therefore a dangerous and at the same time liberating memory.'[20] The Church, then, is the public form of the liberating hope that Jesus brought. But in no way does the Christological hope carry elements of historical triumphalism.

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[14] Ashley, 'Johann Baptist Metz,' 242–243.

[15] Ashley, 'Johann Baptist Metz,' 242.

[16] Metz discusses memory as a fundamental problem in Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 184–199. There he concludes in the following way, 'I shall deal with memory basically as the memory of freedom that, as a memory of suffering, acts as an orientation for action that is related to freedom. (…) Its narrative structure leads it to criticize historical technology that is dissociated from memory and to encounter the traditions of [platonic] *anamnesis* and the Christian *memoria*.' (195).

[17] Ashley, 'Johann Baptist Metz,' 250.

[18] Kratochvíl, '*Memoria passionis*,' 149.

[19] Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 90. J. Matthew Ashley admits that Metz did not develop a Christology that fully justifies his project of political theology, though his Christological reflections cannot be ignored, e.g., in *A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1998). He thinks 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'. Ashley, 'Johann Baptist Metz,' 253.

[20] Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 90.

Especially in the context of the Holocaust, to which I will return, Metz points out, 'Christology is not an ideology of historical victors!'[21] These unsettling narratives of the past lead to critical questions about the present. They '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 the future in which alone "reasonable" persons can hope'.[22]

Metz opens his troubling questioning aimed at restoring hope in several directions. In the preface to *Faith and the Future: Essays on Theology, Solidarity, and Modernity*, a book which he co-authored with Jürgen Moltmann, Metz identified three challenges or crises that his political theology sought above all to confront. He writes: 'All three centre on the question of suffering: they are in some manner "theodicy-intensive".'[23] His conversation with *Marxism* is the dramatization of the question of suffering in terms of social critique. With the theme of *Auschwitz*, the *Holocaust*, or better, the *Shoa*, Metz asks the uncomfortable question of whether theology has avoided suffering in history. And finally, reflection on the non-European world places the suffering of the (culturally, racially, ethnically) 'other' into the radius of theology's *logos*. In all three areas, Metz shows how the understanding of the human being (anthropology) is deeply related to the understanding of God (theology).

2. In Dialogue with Marxism

Jürgen Moltmann recalls how he became friends with Johann Metz in Tübingen in 1966 'on the occasion of the birthday of the atheist [Marxist] philosopher Ernst Bloch'.[24] It was the time when Metz together with Moltmann, Rahner, as well as, for example, the Czech philosopher Milan Machovec took part in the Christian-Marxist dialogue. From the West German side, the dialogues were organized by the *Paulus-Gesellschaft*.[25] The aim of dialogue with Marxism was, according to Metz,

[21] Johann Baptist Metz, *Memoria passionis. Ein provozierendes Gedächtnis in pluralistischer Gesellschaft*, Gesammelte Schriften, Band 4, ed. Johann Reikerstorfer (Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder 2017), 66.

[22] Ashley, 'Johann Baptist Metz,' 244.

[23] Johann Baptist Metz and Jürgen Moltmann, *Faith and the Future. Essays on Theology, Solidarity, and Modernity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), viii.

[24] Metz, *Faith and the Future*, x.

[25] See, e.g., Ivan Landa, Jan Mervart, et. al., *Proměny marxisticko-křesťanského dialogu v Československu* (Praha: Filosofia – nakl. Filosofického ústavu AV ČR, 2017); Ladislav

a 'fruitful conflict'. While 'theology seeks to maintain its loyalty to the message with which it is charged', it shares 'with the utmost determination the problems and queries of the world around it'.[26] Metz believed that the dialogue would not be directed towards a hasty compromise but allow both sides to transform *themselves* in the dialogue.[27]

Metz shared with Marxists the concern that Christianity tends to mythicize history, this leading to alienation. 'But was not this danger', asks Metz, 'always recognized in Christianity, which always comprised some sort of "negative theology"?'[28] In the biblical tradition, God, the totally other, represents liberation for the historical initiatives of human beings, as well as a future and hope. 'For only a future which is *more* than the projection of our own open or latent possibilities can really call us out beyond ourselves.'[29] Metz recalls the Christian primacy of hope. It is a hope which contains trust and historical imagination. The hope grounded in God's promise works as an under-current of historical initiatives, as a transformative power. Metz claims that, ultimately, 'history is kept going (…) through what is not obvious, through the "impossible", through the object of our hope'.[30]

In the context of the dialogue with Marxism, and also after the publication of Moltmann's groundbreaking book *The Theology of Hope*,[31] Metz further develops his concept of hope in his writings in the second half of the 1960s. Drawing on the post-Bultmanian exegesis, which shows that the word of revelation in the Old Testament is primarily a word of promise, Metz argues how the word of promise points towards the future. 'It establishes a covenant that is the solidarity of those who look to the future with hope.'[32] Metz does not mean here a passive expectation of God's promises – quite the contrary. Existence as a historical process directed toward God's promise presupposes,

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Beneš ml., 'Československý křesťansko-marxistický dialog v šedesátých letech,' *Křesťanská revue* 90, no. 3 (2023), 4–7.

[26] J. B. Metz, '*Epilogue:* Christian Promise and Revolution,' in *From Anathema to Dialogue. The Challenge of Marxist-Christian Cooperation*, Roger Garaudy (London: Collins, 1967), 109–125, 109.

[27] Metz, '*Epilogue*,' 110.

[28] Metz, '*Epilogue*,' 110.

[29] Metz, '*Epilogue*,' 111.

[30] Metz, '*Epilogue*,' 113.

[31] Jürgen Moltmann, *Theologie der Hoffnung: Untersuchungen zur Begründung und zu den Konsequenzen einer christlichen Eschatologie* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1964).

[32] Metz, 'Tvořivá naděje,' 52. A note to this article states that it is an abridged version of a lecture given by J. B. Metz at the *Paulusgesellschaft* conference in 1965 (51).

according to this biblical picture of the world, human responsibility. He goes so far as to state that those who look to the future with hope are responsible for fulfilling God's promise.

Even after the event of Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection, the future of the world is not settled once and for all. Metz believes that in preaching the cross and resurrection, Christians commit themselves to trying to transform the world toward that new world promised to them once and for all in Christ Jesus. From here, Metz reaches essentially the same conclusions as Moltmann (I quote the essential passage in its entirety):

> All this requires the development of theology as eschatology. Paul defines Christians simply as 'those who have hope' (cf. Eph. 2,22; 1 Thes. 4,13). Therefore, Christians must develop eschatology in all parts of their understanding of faith. It must not be reduced to a part of Christian theology, but must be understood radically: as the determining factor of all theological statements.[33]

Eschatology is projected in Christian hope as a creative expectation. When Metz shows where this eschatological hope is focused, he returns to the traditional images of the heavenly-earthly Jerusalem or the city of God. They do not stand before us already finished, completed as a distant goal. In words that breathe the optimism of the sixties, he claims, 'The eschatological city of God is still in the making. And as we move toward it in hope, we build it as collaborators in the future, not simply interpreters of a future whose driving force is God self.'[34] To be sure, Metz in no way limits human cooperation in God's future to some narrowly religious activity. Eschatological faith-hope implies an earthly commitment which Metz illustrates with the beautiful words of Ernst Bloch: 'Christian hope is a home at which we have not only something to drink, but also something to cook.'[35]

The image of hope as home turns Metz towards the *polis*, to political theology. If eschatology, as we saw above, is to be a part of all areas of theology, then political theology is not some special branch of theology, but a feature of all theology. It is impossible in theology to leave

[33] Metz, 'Tvořivá naděje,' 53 (reference to the Ephesians seems to lead to 2,12).
[34] Metz, 'Tvořivá naděje,' 54.
[35] Metz, '*Epilogue*,' 115; Metz, 'Tvořivá naděje,' 55.

aside the big questions of politics, technology and justice (today we would add – economics and ecology). Metz makes it clear that 'the salvation involved in the Christian hope is not simply or primarily the salvation of the individual',[36] whether as salvation of the soul or individual resurrection. It is the salvation of a people, of many. Salvation in its original, not secondary, sense is directed towards the social dimension of human existence. This dimension, however, has been overlooked in modern Christianity. Metz sees two reasons for this. One is modern theology's emphasis on the subjectivity of the believer, on the need to say one's personal yes to salvation, which, however, puts universal salvation in the background. The second reason has already been mentioned above: it is the flowering of transcendental, personalist, and existentialist theologies in the second half of the twentieth century.[37]

Recognizing that this is a generalizing judgment, it may perhaps be added that the tendency to perceive salvation only on an individual level has not fundamentally changed in the practice of the Church even fifty years after Metz's contribution to the debate, for example, in the practice of confession. For Metz in his time, Marxism played the role of an eye-opening partner in the search for hope. Who could be such a partner for churches and theologians today? In addition to the denominationally and religiously other, perhaps it could be some contemporary movement seeking lifestyle change, such as an environmentalist or degrowth movement, whose goals, though not necessarily in all respects, align with the values of the Kingdom of God.

3. Theology after Auschwitz

It is remarkable that the book of dialogues which brought together Johann Baptist Metz, a German Catholic and once a Wehrmacht soldier, and Elie Wiesel, a Jew and a *Shoa* survivor, is called *Trotzdem hoffen*.[38] Where exactly does Metz see hope, given the violence perpetrated in the past and present?

[36] Metz, 'Tvořivá naděje,' 55.
[37] Metz, 'Tvořivá naděje,' 55.
[38] Ekkehard Schuster and Reinhold Boschert-Kimmig, *Trotzdem hoffen: Mit Johann Baptist Metz und Elie Wiesel im Gespräch* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1993). In English it was published under the title *Hope Against Hope: Johann Baptist Metz and Elie Wiesel Speak Out on the Holocaust* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1999).

Against the backdrop of his own biography, Metz was increasingly troubled by the question: 'Why does theology pay so little or no attention to this catastrophe – like human suffering in general?'[39] The horror of Auschwitz taken seriously shakes any theological speech. Any situationally unconditional talk about God begins to seem empty and blind. In the wake of this catastrophe, can theology continue to speak unhindered about God and human beings, 'as if there were no need to first examine the guilt or innocence of our human words', asks Metz?[40]

He turned to the question of theodicy not in an existentialist but in a political sense: 'Speaking of God as a call to save others, the unjustly suffering, victims and losers in our history.'[41] Metz realized that without resolving this question, 'after Auschwitz' we cannot even ask about our own salvation. The question present in the speech about God is primarily a question about the salvation of the unjustly suffering. The memories of suffering and guilt are not to be easily integrated into the theological system; rather, a language must be found to convey them to our consciousness.[42]

In response to these questions, Metz came up with the metaphor of the 'landscape of screams'. It allowed him to link biblical sources to the experience of suffering in history. Metz understands biblical Israel as a landscape of theodicy. It does not comfort itself with mythicizing or idealizing the conditions of life as a kind of compensation.[43] In its fear, in the strangeness of exile, and in its ever-returning suffering, Israel remains 'poor in spirit'. As a landscape of screams, Israel – and with it early Christianity – remains a land of memory and expectation. Christian Christology has taken on this eschatological restlessness, this passionate questioning of God, or '*Leiden an Gott*' ('suffering unto God', in the translation of J. Matthew Ashley[44]).

Moreover, Metz refers to the enduring relation between *ratio* and *memoria*. Communicative reason is grounded in the anamnetic one.

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[39] Johann Baptist Metz, *Úvahy o politické theologii* (Praha: ISE, 1994), 85.

[40] Metz, *Úvahy o politické theologii*, 85; see also Johann Baptist Metz, 'Nové paradigma teologie: politická teologie,' *Teologický sborník* 2, no. 2 (1996), 16–21, esp. 17 and 19.

[41] Metz, *Úvahy o politické theologii*, 85.

[42] Ashley, 'Johann Baptist Metz,' 245.

[43] Cf. Metz, *Úvahy o politické theologii*, 87; see also Johann Baptist Metz, 'Theodizee-empfindliche Gottesrede,' in *Landschaft aus Schreien: Zur Dramatik der Theodizeefrage*, ed. Johann Baptist Metz (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1995), 81–102, 85ff.

[44] Ashley, 'Johann Baptist Metz,' 252.

'Anamnetic reason resists forgetting. (…) It understands obedience to God in terms of listening to the silence of those who have disappeared in history.'[45] Many have come and gone in history and their forgotten heritage creates a kind of void. Knowledge (reason) here becomes a form of missing. Metz draws an analogy between this knowledge and the Old Testament faith, in which it was forbidden to create images of God. The Israelites were challenged to relate to the God whose image they did not have at their disposal and in their hands. Similarly, anamnetic reason refers to what is 'forgotten' and yet fundamentally important. Thus anamnetic reason confronts our 'progressive' consciousness and its certainties. 'It should also highlight the contours of the landscape of theodicy in our world.'[46] Contemporary projects that seek to preserve for the present and the future the evidence of past suffering can be seen as the concrete nourishment of anamnetic reason. In the Czech Republic, this includes the Malach Centre for Visual History, which provides access to video testimony archives, especially but not exclusively to Holocaust testimonies.[47] Another example is the Memory of Nations project. Its extensive collection of life stories provides a database of eyewitness accounts of twentieth-century events by survivors of two totalitarian regimes – Nazism and Communism.[48]

In his study on Metz, Petr Kratochvíl concludes that the landscape of screams is not only the landscape of the biblical tradition and of the Holocaust but in a sense also the landscape of our present. Its challenge is to 'constantly examine whether we are causing – even if only indirectly – more suffering in the here and now'.[49] The danger of fixing memory exclusively on one epoch has been pointed out by Gustavo Gutiérrez in the context of Latin America. Referring to Metz, Gutiérrez argues that for theologians in Latin America, the question is not precisely 'How are we to do theology after Auschwitz?' because they are still witnessing violation and death. In the face of suffering, God seems distant or completely absent. 'Our task here is to find the words with which to talk about God in the midst of the starvation of millions, the humiliation of races regarded as inferior, discrimination against

[45] Metz, *Úvahy o politické theologii*, 88.
[46] Metz, *Úvahy o politické theologii*, 88.
[47] Malach Centre for Visual History. Available at: https://ufal.mff.cuni.cz/malach/en.
[48] Memory of Nations. Available at: https://www.memoryofnations.eu/en/archive.
[49] Kratochvíl, '*Memoria passionis*,' 152.

women, especially women who are poor, systematic social injustice (…).'[50] From Metz, Gutiérrez adopts the conviction that in speaking of God we cannot but refer to our own time and context. Otherwise, even the memory of past suffering can become a figure obscuring sensitivity to the present.[51] Paradoxically, the memory of suffering can serve ideological interests.[52]

4. Europe and the Non-European World

In 1979, Karl Rahner published an essay in which he suggested that, at the Second Vatican Council, the Church actualized its essence as a world Church. Since then, it has gradually ceased to export European Christianity and has undergone a degree of radical de-Europeanisation.[53] Rahner's student and friend Metz took this idea and, like many other parts of Rahner's legacy, expanded it in line with his political theology.

During his lecture tour of Latin America in the 1980s,[54] Metz noticed that both the theology of liberation and political theology are characterized by a special sensitivity to the problem of theodicy. Both are post-idealist, by which he means that they have abandoned the idea of the social and political innocence of theology and have broken with

[50] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-talk and the suffering of the innocent* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987), 102.

[51] The example of public debate in the post-communist Czech Republic has shown how issues of social responsibility and economic rights were, and sometimes still are, quickly pushed aside because they supposedly belong to the era of totalitarianism and central planning and threaten contemporary freedom and independence. The stories of past injustices and finally-won freedom thus become the subtext for the establishment of new injustices. A certain breakthrough in the mainstream debate was Daniel Prokop's publication *Slepé skvrny: O chudobě, vzdělávání, populismu a dalších výzvách české společnosti* (Brno: Host, 2019), which by its very title ('Blind spots: on poverty, education, populism and other challenges of Czech society') captures the weak point of the post-revolutionary narrative of freedom and happiness.

[52] At the time of writing this article, we are witnessing such misuse of the memories of victims of the Second World War in the speeches of Russian politicians who construct an anti-Ukrainian narrative in support of Russia's aggression in Ukraine.

[53] Karl Rahner, 'Theologische Grundinterpretation des II. Vatikanischen Konzils,' in *Schriften zur Theologie*, XIV, ed. Karl Rahner (Zürich/Einsiedeln/Köln: Benzinger Verlag, 1980), 287–302.

[54] Metz's studies on Latin America are summarized in Johann Baptist Metz, *Lerngemeinschaft Kirche*, Gesammelte Schriften, Band 6, 2. Teilband: Lernorte – Lernzeoten, ed. Johann Reikerstorfer (Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder 2017), VIII. Lateinamerika – eine theologische Erfahrung.

ethno-cultural innocence, specifically with Eurocentrism.[55] While Rahner laid out the programmatic thesis of an emergent world church, Metz is worried of a 'schism': a division caused by the fact that 'we Christians of the prosperous world have torn the cloth of the Eucharistic table between us and the poor churches'.[56] The division is caused by both an unwillingness to help the poor churches in their misery as well as by not listening to their words as a prophetic call. Metz's image of the torn altar cloth interestingly outlines yet other types of church division than those typically addressed by Western (or better today, Northern) ecumenism.

In both diagnosing and proposing solutions to these problems, Metz again turns his attention to the importance of memory. He talks about the loss of anamnetic culture: 'European thought was seized by the dream of a new innocence, hand in hand with a predilection for myths, turned back on that history in which one suffers and dies.'[57] There is a kind of everyday postmodernism of hearts.[58] According to Metz, we are tempted by a form of 'tactical provincialism' in which we first define our political and social identity independently of poverty, misery and oppression in the Third World.[59] A lack of awareness of interconnectedness has not yet led us to a radical conversion. The loss of anamnetic culture is manifested in what Metz calls Euro-Darwinism, which can be seen as a variant of his above-mentioned criticism of the evolutionist view. Metz means both the 'tendency of Europeans to see themselves as the pinnacle of human evolution and our inability to see ourselves through the eyes of our victims'.[60]

In spite of this temptation of 'tactical provincialism' confronting Europe and the Euro-centric Church, Metz expresses hope. He hopes that the Church will not make excuses for the circumstances in which it finds itself, that it will not let the tension between mysticism and

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55 Metz, *Úvahy o politické theologii*, 78.

56 Johann B. Metz, 'Za hranice buržoazního náboženství,' in *Teologie 20. století: antologie*, ed. Karl-Josef Kuschel (Praha: Vyšehrad, 1995), 256–266, 264.

57 Metz, *Úvahy o politické theologii*, 83.

58 Metz, *Úvahy o politické theologii*, 82. Metz's words correspond well with a theological voice from the Third World. From El Salvador, Jon Sobrino writes: 'The current European debate about modernity and postmodernity becomes at this point absolutely unintelligible and scandalous: we can opt out of many things, but we cannot opt out of the deaths of the poor.' Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 32.

59 Metz, 'Za hranice buržoazního náboženství,' 263.

60 Metz, *Úvahy o politické theologii*, 82.

politics be removed by retreating into non-historical mythical thinking, that it will not be primarily the bearer of ethics but of eschatology, that is of the hope.[61] He concludes: 'This is the root of its strength, that it cannot resign itself to the standards of responsibility and solidarity and cannot lose its courage.'[62]

Conclusions: Dangerous Hope

The chapter on hope in Metz's seminal work *Faith in History and Society: Towards a Practical Fundamental Theology* is structured as a series of thirty-five theses conceived as a 'special tribute to the late Ernst Bloch and his apocalyptic wisdom, a vision that he inherited from the Jewish traditions and that have for too long been closed to Christianity'.[63] The last thesis quotes a sadly ironic sigh of Teilhard de Chardin: 'We go on asserting that we are awake and are waiting for the master. But, if we were honest, we would have to admit that we expect nothing at all.'[64] In his theological work, Metz sought to revive the dangerous hope that the master would indeed come and was already coming. Through his works, this hope resounds even after he passed away in Advent 2019 and 'became one of "the dead" of whom he so lovingly and insistently spoke'.[65] How can Metz's theological justification of hope be built upon? Which of his themes are relevant to us today? I would like to suggest three which – especially in the pontificate of Pope Francis – seem to be receiving renewed attention in contemporary contexts.

Metz sees hope in solidarity as an inseparable part of the definition of Christian faith. He extends solidarity to the living and future generations as well as to the dead. 'In this hope, then, the Christian does not primarily hope for himself – he also has to hope for others and, in this hope, for himself.'[66] In the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, in the section on memory, Pope Francis specifies the areas of remembering. He recalls that neither the Shoah nor the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki must be forgotten. He continues,

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61 Metz, *Úvahy o politické theologii*, 84.
62 Metz, *Úvahy o politické theologii*, 84.
63 Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 169.
64 Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 179.
65 Andrew Prevot, 'Apocalyptic Witness: Johann Baptist Metz (1928–2019),' *Political Theology* 21, no. 3 (2020), 274–277, 274.
66 Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 76.

> 'We cannot allow present and future generations to lose the memory of what happened. It is a memory that ensures and encourages the building of a more fair and fraternal future.' Neither must we forget the persecutions, the slave trade and the ethnic killings that continue in various countries.[67]

Remembering is important because it keeps us from accustoming ourselves to suffering. But it is healthy to remember not only the horrors and suffering, but also the people who 'amid such great inhumanity and corruption, retained their dignity and, with gestures small or large, chose the part of solidarity, forgiveness and fraternity'.[68] The Pope also works with the figure of memory in the context of responsibility towards future generations. In addition to the sustainability of the environment, solidarity also extends to the project of the common good, 'the earth "is lent to each generation, to be handed on to the generation that follows"'.[69]

Further, despite his critique of the Enlightenment, Metz does not escape into the realm of technology that could perhaps bring salvation. He still puts his hope in the human being. 'Political theology (…) opts for a historical anthropology and a practice of education based on the Enlightenment that do not too easily give way to the illusion that salvation in the future can be found by means of genetic manipulation and a computer ideology.'[70] On this point, Metz meets Pope Francis, who warns against the technocratic paradigm, whether it is related to technology or politics.[71] Both Metz and Francis would agree that human crises must again be resolved by the transformation and education of the human being. It is in the interest of all people of God, Francis believes, to cultivate especially, but not exclusively, in theological education 'a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform'.[72] The Pope's concrete initiative in this regard is the launching of a global education alliance, the Global Compact on Education in 2019. Its seven goals are aimed at supporting underdeveloped groups and areas, such

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[67] Francis, *Encyclical letter* Fratelli tutti *On the Fraternity and Social Friendship*, 2020, 248.
[68] Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 249.
[69] Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 178.
[70] Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 103.
[71] Francis, *Encyclical letter* Laudato si' *On Care for our Common Home*, 2015, 109.
[72] Francis, *Apostolic Constitution* Veritatis gaudium *on ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties*, 2018, 3.

as listening to the voices of children, youth and women, as well as finding new ways to understand economics and politics.[73]

Finally, even though Metz's theology seems to swing towards activism, he postulated a kind of spirituality. Ashley claims that it is a spirituality 'that 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'.[74] Metz spoke of this spirituality as a form of open-eyed mysticism. With this deliberate verbal provocation, Metz wants to qualify the Christian, Jesus-like, character of mysticism. He also often speaks directly of political mystics.[75] Efforts to link the mystical and the political (or prophetic) currents of theology are highly relevant for our time. Pope Francis devotes a chapter to spirituality (along with education) in his encyclical *Laudato si'*. In words that are close to Metz's open-eyed mysticism, he says: 'More than in ideas or concepts as such, I am interested in how such a spirituality can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world. A commitment this lofty cannot be sustained by doctrine alone, without a spirituality capable of inspiring us.'[76]

In order to take seriously Metz's warning against a subjectless theology, we must also link the language of hope found in intergenerational solidarity, education, and spirituality to the subjects who bear that hope. In the 1970s, Metz contributed to the document *Our Hope* for the Synod of the German Church. In it, he asserted that the bearer of hope is the Church, provided it develops as 'a living Church of the people, in which all of its kind know themselves to be responsibly involved in the destiny of this church and in its public witness to hope'.[77] Metz's ecclesiology of the Church as a subject is followed today by Pope Francis' ecclesiology of (God's) people. His view of the people is rooted in the so-called theology of the people. He writes:

> Yet becoming a people demands something more. It is an ongoing process in which every new generation must take part: a slow and arduous effort

[73] Global Compact of Education: Commitments. Available at: https://www.educationglobalcompact.org/en/commitments.
[74] Ashley, 'Johann Baptist Metz,' 250.
[75] Johann Baptist Metz, *Mystik der offenen Augen*, Gesammelte Schriften, Band 7, ed. Johann Reikerstorfer (Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder 2017).
[76] Francis, *Laudato si'*, 216.
[77] Metz, *Lerngemeinschaft Kirche*, 48.

calling for a desire for integration and a willingness to achieve this through the growth of a peaceful and multifaceted culture of encounter.[78]

In conclusion, if Metz's theological appeal to a faith grounded in hope seems perhaps too challenging for our history, we may be encouraged by a remark found in one of his essays. It concerns the helplessness that comes with a bad conscience. Metz writes: 'Do not be afraid of the helplessness of your bad conscience. For with a bad conscience many things begin.'[79]

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[78] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World, 2013, 220. Presumably, a comparison of the conceptions of the Church in Metz and Francis could yield interesting results.

[79] Metz, 'Za hranice buržoazního náboženství,' 266.