“DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME”: THE GENEALOGY AND THEOLOGICAL
APPROPRIATIONS OF MEMORY IN THE WORK OF JOHANN BAPTIST METZ

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Candace Kristina McLean

J Matthew Ashley, Director

Graduate Program in Theology

Notre Dame, Indiana

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Abstract

by

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Many theologians have been influenced by Johann Metz’s theology of memory. To examine Metz’s sources and how others expand upon his work, I propose a two-part thesis. Part one arises from critical appraisal of sources upon which Metz relies in formulating his idea of memory. While the thinkers Metz draws upon are secular Jewish philosophers, Metz appropriates key notions in specifically theological ways by linking them with the memoria passionis of Jesus Christ and the Jewish religious roots of memory. Furthermore, Metz’s apocalyptic/eschatological hope for the future differs from secular and postmodern hopes for something surprising, new, and redemptive because Metz advocates real, faith-filled content for these ideas.

Part two of the thesis is critical-constructive. Metz’s idea of memory has the potential to be more than an anthropological category. While reticent to speak of God’s memory, anamnestic reason becomes a way of speaking about God’s work of salvation for and with humanity. This becomes clearer when his idea of memory is considered in conjunction with the theology of God’s memory in the writings of Latin American
liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez. The appropriation of Metz’s theological work on memory by scholars like Elizabeth Johnson, Shawn Copeland, Johann Vento, Flora Keshgegian, and Bruce Morrill bear witness to this potential.

Comparison and contrast is the way to describe what I intend to do. The first chapter aims at an exposition of what Metz developed regarding memory, including changes over time. The second chapter consists of brief reflection on memory and pertinent topics in the philosophical thought of several people whom Metz admits have influenced his theology. Each section of the chapter will focus on the contribution of a thinker and then the way that Metz has adapted the ideas. The third chapter will consider criticisms of Metz’s use of memory and possible responses that Metz offers, or which one could offer on Metz’s behalf. Chapter four continues to rely on comparison and contrast, but this time Metz’s thought is the baseline with which other theologians’ use and understanding of memory will be compared.
For Chris McLean, my husband and best friend, and Kate Johnson.
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INTRODUCTION

My theological “problem” starts with the reality of unjust suffering in history—just as Johann Metz’s does. There is horrendous evil in the world that should not be. I encountered this type of evil most personally in the murder of a close friend of mine by another person with whom I was acquainted in the Summer of 2001. I was then—and still am—confronted with several troubling questions. These include, not only why this happened, but how I am to live so as to continue my friend’s vocation in the world, bring comfort and liberation to those who still are suffering, and be able to turn to God with any sort of hope for the future?

In the wake of my friend’s Kate’s murder I heard many attempts to grapple with what had happened—mostly in religious contexts. Some people resigned themselves to the fact that it happened and were able to convince themselves that it was in accordance with God’s will. “It was her time to go….All things work for good for those who love the Lord…She is in a better place.” But somehow these statements make me angry. This could never be the will of a good a loving God. Nothing God creates is meant to be raped, tortured, and killed. And God does not will the pain, anxiety, and despair that wells up in the hearts of all who know of such a tragedy. God also does not will the loss of another precious person in the taking of Kate’s life. Deniz Aydinar, the murderer, broke with his own humanity—the image of God in himself—by doing this unspeakable evil. And yet
God does not want anyone to be lost. But how to speak about forgiveness? Especially for a wrong that was not primarily committed against myself, but upon another?

From that first day when we discovered Kate’s body to this, all I am left with are questions. Where was God as Kate gasped her last breath? How could something that I know (more certainly than anything I have ever known) was not willed by God, happen? Sometimes things do not work out for the best. Sometimes evil wins—at least so it seems. Nothing can make up for what Kate experienced and lost. But I also made some promises at this same moment of tragedy. I would always carry Kate with me—remember her. In the greatest and worst moments of my life, she would be there. I thought of her the day I married, when I had my two daughters, as I taught my first class, and every time I read theological texts. It was the least I could do for her: live my life in memory and honor of her. And this has led me to speak about what she endured and proclaim comfort and liberation to those who have experienced drastic evil. “God does not want this for you! This is not God’s will! Fight against it! Live!”

The anger I feel in the face of easy answers and explanations about what happened to Kate resurface at mass. Christ’s death is often spoken about as if it had meaning in itself, as if it were God’s will, and part of God’s plan. I struggled at first to put into words exactly why I bristled every time I heard talk about sacrifice, expiation, and atonement after Kate’s death. It was not until I started reading Edward Schillebeeckx, Johann Metz, and some feminist and womanist authors that I began to enunciate my concerns. I am torn between wanting to be faithful to the biblical and liturgical traditions that speak about Christ’s death as being “for us” and for the “forgiveness of sins” and feeling appalled by the potential consequences of such statements. Suffering and death,
especially premature and unjust death, need to be opposed as means for salvation. I want to find a way of talking about the cross, in the context of Jesus’ whole life and resurrection, that remains faithful to scripture and tradition without grounding salvation in Jesus’ torture. We need to affirm life, flourishing, and not suffering and death.

I am not willing, however, to forget the dead and what they have endured. Perhaps it is better to say that I cannot forget. I am haunted. But this haunting need not end in fear, psychological destruction, and despair. There must be a way to live that promotes salvation, both of the living and the dead. This is why Metz and memory are so helpful to me. They provide a way of talking about transformative action without leaving behind history’s victims.

Clearly many theologians—both his contemporaries and later scholars—have been influenced by and have drawn on memory as outlined by Johann Metz in his theology. To examine both Metz’s sources and explore how others expand upon his work, I propose a two-part thesis for this dissertation. The first part arises from a critical appraisal of the sources upon which Metz relies in formulating his idea of memory that operates according to anamnestic reason. Metz’s notion of memory has evolved over the course of his work, not changing drastically, but shifting in emphasis according to the pressing questions with which he is engaged at a given moment. I propose that, while many of the thinkers Metz draws upon are secular Jewish philosophers, Metz appropriates key notions in specifically theological ways by linking them continually with the memoria passionis of Jesus Christ, and exploring the Jewish religious roots of memory. Furthermore, his apocalyptic/eschatological hope for the future—for which memory is constantly vigilant in hope for the victims of history—differs from secular and
postmodern hopes for something surprising, new, and redemptive because Metz actually advocates the real, faith-filled content of these ideas. In short, he expects an actual disruption of things as they are by something beyond ourselves (God), not just the idea of coming disruption, or merely a utopian interruption.

The second part of the thesis is critical-constructive. Because Metz goes beyond the philosophical sources for his notion of memory, I also propose that his idea of memory has the potential to be more than just an anthropological category. Although he is reticent to speak of God’s memory explicitly, his anamnestic reason could actually become a way of speaking about God’s work of salvation for and with humanity. This becomes clearer when his idea of memory is considered in conjunction with the theology of God’s memory in the writings of his contemporary, Latin American liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez—a comparison not previously attempted. The appropriation of Metz’s theological work on memory by scholars like Elizabeth Johnson, Shawn Copeland, Johann Vento, Flora Keshgegian, and Bruce Morrill bear witness to this real possibility.

Comparison and contrast is the simplest way to describe what I intend to do in this dissertation. The first chapter aims at a more or less straightforward exposition of what Metz has developed regarding memory over the course of his theological writings. Because they are essays and not complete “systems,” I will consider memory as it appears across multiple works in relation to certain themes (e.g. anamnesis, exchange value, resistance). Attention will be paid to the changes or developments that take place regarding memory within Metz’s thought over time, due to the influence of a succession of different interlocutors.
The second chapter will consist of a brief reflection on memory, narrative, or other pertinent topics in the philosophical thought of several people whom Metz admits have influenced his theology. Each section of the chapter will focus first on the contribution of a thinker, and then second on the way that Metz has adapted his or her ideas.

The third chapter will again have a dialogical structure. Each section will consider a criticism of Metz’s use of memory and then the possible responses or connections that Metz either explicitly offers, or which one could offer on Metz’s behalf.

Chapter four continues to rely on comparison and contrast, but this time Metz’s thought is the baseline with which other theologians’ use and understanding of memory will be compared. One of these people will be his contemporary, Gustavo Gutiérrez, while the others will be people who explicitly draw upon Metz as a starting point in constructing sacramental and liberation theologies of their own. The conclusion, which is more constructive and creative, aims at integrating Metz’s theology of memory with additions prompted by the criticisms identified in the third chapter and in light of innovations made by theologians in chapter four.

In many ways, this dissertation has become my third child. Its coming into the world has been as painful and beautiful as either of my other two girls,’ but it has taken considerably longer. I have been helped along the way by a myriad of midwives, a few of whom I would like to thank here. I would like to thank my director, J Matthew Ashley for his unfailing patience, flexibility, encouragement, wisdom, and the tremendous amount of time it took to read and edit my drafts, as well as answer my questions—especially regarding German philosophy, about which I knew little to nothing when starting this
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CHAPTER 1

THE FUNCTION OF MEMORY IN THE THEOLOGY OF JOHANN BAPTIST METZ

The most logical way to start this chapter would be with a clear definition of what Johann Baptist Metz means when he uses the term “memory.” Unfortunately, memory in Metz’s work is less like an acorn than it is an oak tree—there are many branches, knots, and new growths instead of something concise that one can hold in one’s hand. From its first mention in 1968, there are many clarifications, modifications, and nuances of the notion of memory throughout the corpus of his writings. This is understandable when one considers the importance that Metz attaches to being actively engaged in one’s own historical context and the questions of one’s own time. His interlocutors prompt revisions and new routes of inquiry. Therefore, it is necessary to track the idea of memory as a strand running throughout his career in order to try to grasp what he means by it.

This first chapter will trace, using a biographical tone and chronology, the idea and influence of memory in Metz’s life and works. The aim is to formulate, using Metz’s own preferred theological genre of narrative, how memory functions for him by paying close attention to when it enters his writings, the language he uses in delineating what sort of memory he means, and how he describes it in relationship to other models of philosophical and theological memory that have come before. That there should be a
biographical element to this study of memory is in keeping with what Metz himself has affirmed about securing a specific subject at the heart of doing public, political theology.

In spite of many prejudices, it is precisely this political type of doing theology and this political mysticism that at least taught me to say “I” in theology, to cease orienting myself towards concepts of the system and start orienting myself towards concepts of the subject, and to see through Christian theology’s high content of apathy in so far as it is idealistic and without an identifiable subject. Theology, precisely as a politically sensitive theology, takes on traits of biography…. This does not make it subjectivist or serve to stylize theological individuality, but heightens its sensitivity to the concrete responsibility encountered in controversial talk about God.1

1.1 (Auto)Biographical Inspiration of Metz’s Theology

In general, it may be unwise to try to map the thought of a scholar onto his or her life experiences—it runs the risk of making claims about his or her psychology that one cannot possibly know. However, given the importance of memory and narrative throughout the works of Johann Baptist Metz, and the admission by him that “This biographical background shines through all of my theological work, even to this day,” it is only fitting to begin the consideration of memory by examining the stories that Metz himself tells about his own life, why he is a theologian, and the issues that drive his thought.2

The place and timing of his birth are initial factors that Metz identifies as formative for his theology. Johann Baptist Metz was born on August 5, 1928, in a small, provincial, and overwhelmingly Catholic village of Auerbach in Bavaria. Of his hometown, Metz observes “you come from far away when you come from there,


practically from the fringes of the Middle Ages." Being somewhat outside the mainstream, perhaps the modern dictums of evolution, technology and science as means of domination, and the need to forget the stories passed down for generations did not hold the same unquestionable status that they had gained in the European metropolises at the time. Maybe it is this early milieu that accounts for the “precarious relationship between tradition and modernity that finds expression in Metz’s thought.” It might also be this early immersion in the Catholic faith as an atmosphere of life that accounts for the passionate way in which he never gives up on the traditions of the faith and the Church—in which he sees so much potential and the commission to bear a the dangerous memory of suffering and redemption to the world. Perhaps too, his safe and quiet origins provided the perfect foil to the horrors that were to follow, so much so that Metz has never been able to reconcile easily the horrors of history and the comfortable lives of those who are able to ignore the sufferings of the past and present.

In Metz’s own reflections, the real story of his theology begins with a boy and his friends—friends who died before their time, and a boy who would spend the rest of his life remembering them in a way that has transformed theology and how all the victims of history are remembered. Johann Baptist Metz was only a sixteen-year-old boy when he

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4 Johann-Baptist Metz, "Productive Noncontemporaneity," in *Observations On "The Spiritual Situation of the Age"*, ed. Jürgen Habermas (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1984), 171. This is supported by Metz’s statements: “From a point quite removed I had to work my way into the academic and social discussion fronts…had to gain access to phenomena that my contemporaries seemed to master through clichés: enlightenment, pluralism, emancipation, secularization, the critique of capitalism, and Marxism.” 171.


6 Ibid., 7. Of his own relationship with the church, Metz comments in the interview: “But, as far as the church goes: I need the church…because without the church a millennium-old hope would have been forgotten long ago, a hope that is so sweeping and so improbable that no one can hope it for himself or herself alone.”
was taken from school late in the Second World War to fight as a Nazi soldier. Surrounded by boys his same age, Metz faced the onslaught of Allied forces and, due to a serendipitous assignment that took him away from his battalion, he found himself the only survivor of the company.

I was inducted into the military as a sixteen-year-old student. Together with a company made up of young men more or less my age, I was thrown against the Americans, who, having already crossed the Rhine, were pouring into the country. One night the company commander sent me to battalion headquarters. When I returned the next morning, passing through burning villages and forests, I found nothing but the dead. All I could see were dead faces. To this very day, all I can remember is a soundless cry. I suspect that all my childhood dreams, as well as what people call “childlike trust,” disintegrated in that soundless cry.7

Nothing in his young life had prepared Metz for the experience of seeing “only dead and empty faces, where the day before I had shared childhood fears and youthful laughter.”8 As one might expect, the senseless death of so many and the fact that he alone had lived, posed a challenge to his faith that Metz chose to bring before the Church of his youth. “A fissure had opened in my powerful Bavarian-Catholic socialization, with its impregnable confidence,” and yet Metz was not seeking consolation at all costs.9 He did, however, find within the tradition strands of spirituality of protest against that which seems unjust and wrong in the world—especially in the prophets of the Hebrew Bible, and also within Jesuit spirituality—as well as theologies of God’s presence in absence.10 As Matthew Ashley notes, “Metz was searching to grasp and articulate a mode of

7 Ibid., 44. This same story is related in many places, with some small variations in the description, although he first started sharing it in the mid-1980s, and it appears in Metz, “Communicating a Dangerous Memory,” 39-40. See also ———, A Passion for God : The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity, 1-2. Johann-Baptist Metz, Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology, trans. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Herder & Herder, 2007), 3.

8 Metz, A Passion for God : The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity, 2.

9 Ibid.

presence to God that would not be shattered by, but would emerge out of, experiences of radical evil and suffering, of the sort that Metz himself experienced in World War II, and that he finds all around us in our contemporary world.”¹¹ Part of Metz’s later theology, a mysticism of “suffering unto God,” finds early expression here, in the unwillingness to accept consolation or skip to redemption and resurrection too quickly, but dwell with the questions that may not be answered in history. What he did know was that nothing anyone could say or do could bring back those who had died; nothing could make up for what they had suffered, or the lives that had been cut short.¹² Furthermore, he refused to accept that this suffering was somehow willed or caused by God, as evinced by the importance that the theodicy question assumes in his work.¹³

Metz’s inclusion of guilt in his analysis of suffering later may also be influenced by these early experiences. As the only person to survive the massacre of his friends, there may have been some questioning of why he alone lived, of whether or not there may have been a way to save them.¹⁴ Even more profound, the experience of being German, growing up in a world after the Second World War, and in light of the increasing awareness of the Shoah, Metz must have confronted both individuals and the society as a whole grappling with feelings of guilt and the desire to exculpate themselves. From such a setting, Metz identifies in modernity the recurrence of the issue of theodicy, but now shifted to what he terms anthropodicy, as “all the guilt from the history of

¹¹ Ibid., 183.

¹² Metz, Faith in History and Society, 83, 123. That the good of the present cannot compensate for the suffering of the past is one of the main things that Metz identifies as separating utopian (especially Marxist) philosophies from Christian hope.

¹³ ———, A Passion for God : The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity, 2. “Above all, the whole of my theological work is attuned by a specific sensitivity for theodicy, the question of God in the face of the history of suffering in the world, in ‘his’ world.”

¹⁴ This is akin to “survivor’s guilt,” which can be observed after many traumatic events in survivors. See for instance Holocaust literature.
suffering [that] now seems to fall back onto human beings themselves, as history’s actors.”¹⁵ Being unable to effectively recognize and deal with human guilt without scapegoating persons or groups is one of the major deficiencies Metz identifies later in utopian visions of emancipation (as opposed to Christian redemption that is able to confront sin and guilt and still offer hope to all people).

Instead of settling on an answer to the question of why his friends had died, the memory of his fallen friends has acted upon Metz and his thought like a grain of sand inside an oyster so that “the category of memory plays a central role: my work does not want to let go of the apocalyptical metaphors of the history of faith, and it mistrusts an idealistically smoothed out eschatology.”¹⁶ Part of this rejection of “smoothed out eschatology” is his adoption of a disruptive eschatology, including the recognition that the dead are not silent, but have an outstanding future meaning in God.¹⁷ In keeping with the best of the Catholic tradition (although he does not explicitly invoke the Communion of Saints), the living and the dead continue in relationship according to Metz—so much so that the fates of the dead and the hope that they still continue as subjects before God must become the first concern for Christians, instead of their own personal and individual destinies.

One cannot help but see in his own struggle with the violent death of his friends how Metz arrived at this deep conviction. In grappling with the experience of their deaths, Metz prioritizes in his own life and thought the concern for the “suffering others”—in this case his friends, who, though beyond his help in history, have compelled him to develop a theology that goes beyond the system of exchange that dominates many

¹⁵ Metz, Faith in History and Society, 119-20. The problem of suffering, once directed at God, is redirected at human beings as the “subjects” of history. Metz hopes to once again pose the problems of suffering to God in the form of lament and questioning—his “Suffering unto God.”

¹⁶ ———, A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity, 2.

¹⁷ ———, Faith in History and Society, 109.
relationships in western societies and threatens to privatize belief in the coming of the Reign of God. His memory of his friends may be considered “dangerous” insofar as it has impelled him throughout his life to speak out against forgetting the victims of tragedy, refusing to let the present moment exist without the threat of a real future that is different because of human and divine action.

Metz’s awareness of the “suffering others” was also heightened by the second most pivotal experience he identifies for his theology. After the end of the war, he returned to his village, only to learn that a mere thirty miles away Jews had been murdered by the Nazi death machine. Flossenbürg—with its granite quarry, slave labor, executions, and burning smokestacks stoked with human kindling—was virtually on top of the quiet, devoutly Catholic town of his youth. And yet the good people there were unaware of what had been happening. Either by accident and/or by willful blindness, no one had looked far enough beyond their daily, private lives to see the atrocities committed almost in their midst, upon their former neighbors.

Over the years, Metz has come to signify the entire Shoah with the name Auschwitz because it typifies, in a very concrete, real, and provocative way to him, the systematic extermination of the Jewish people. There are names, faces, geography, and stories that accompany “Auschwitz” instead of cold statistics that can distance one from the actual atrocities and inhumanity that accompanied the “Final Solution” or the faceless huddled masses denoted by “the Holocaust.” Specificity belies euphemisms that make the truth less disturbing. It keeps the piercing eyes of history’s victims on those of us in the

18 ———, “Communicating a Dangerous Memory,” 41.

19 Ibid., 44.

20 Schuster and Boschert-Kimmig, Hope against Hope. 15.

21 Metz, "Communicating a Dangerous Memory." Metz says, “Later on, when I talked to her [his mother] about that event [Auschwitz], she always denied having known anything about it, though she — well, it was a kind of suppressed knowing. That is why I am talking about this subject.”
present. By emphasizing this, he demonstrates in a particular way his theological assertion that memories must remain specific in order to be dangerous to an existing regime that wants to eclipse suffering with only memories of victory in the name of moving forward and progress. Auschwitz is a jarring interruption of artificially smoothed out accounts of the future because it “cannot be integrated into the history which we usually talk about in our different types of modern theological hermeneutics,” and “there is no truth of history which one can defend, and no God in history which one can worship, with one’s back to Auschwitz.”

Holding steadfastly to the memory of murdered Jews only miles from his home, Metz has faced those who denied that the Shoah even happened, affirming that everything must be re-evaluated in theology, politics, and society in light of what happened there. Theology after Auschwitz is now a theology haunted by the memory-with-future-content of all those who met their ends in the death camps. There is an authority of those who suffered that is the only universal authority, according to Metz. It is the suffering and negativity in history, paradigmatically represented by Auschwitz for modern theology, that we must remember with a practical-political intention so as not to repeat them.

The catastrophes must be remembered with a practical-political intention so that this historical experience does not turn to tragedy and thus bid the history of freedom farewell. That is a great seduction: to face these catastrophes and then end up with a kind of tragic consciousness. We are not allowed to do that. What I

22 Ibid., 41-42.

23 Metz’s use of “Auschwitz” to name the entire program of Jewish elimination during World War II makes perfect sense because of his experience—he lived through the war and affirms that what it means can be typified by what happened at Auschwitz. I, however, choose to continue using the term Shoah because I did not have first-hand experience of the war or the attempted elimination of European Jews. I cannot confirm or deny Metz’s assertion. There can be other concrete memories, functioning in the way “Auschwitz” does for Metz, but termed “Dauchau” or “Belzec.” I wish to acknowledge this wider potential. Therefore, I choose to keep the Hebrew term selected by many Jews themselves to name the event.

24 Schuster and Boschert-Kimmig, Hope against Hope, 24. “And I know of only one authority which cannot be revoked by any Enlightenment or emancipation: the authority if those who suffer.”
experienced was that we have a duty to face these catastrophes and remember them with a practical-political intention so that they might never be repeated.  

Deeply etched with these experiences of his youth, Metz returned to complete his high school (Gymnasium) studies, and then spent a year in a Bamberg diocesan seminary before entering the Jesuit-run seminary at Innsbruck for diocesan priests. He completed the requirements for his doctorate in philosophy while waiting to be old enough for ordination, culminating his studies with a dissertation on Martin Heidegger. But it was his collaboration and relationship with Karl Rahner that would prove the most influential in shaping Metz’s theology.

1.2 Theology of the World

Memory does not play a central role in Johann Metz’s first major work—*Theology of the World*—although it does appear briefly. It was published first in 1968, but it is really a reflection of more than ten years of close contact with the work of Karl Rahner and some of the more recent changes brought about by the Second Vatican Council’s *aggiornamento* and openness to the modern world. A collection of essays surrounding the theme of how the church and people of faith are to understand and respond to the challenges posed by modernity and secularity, Metz does not explicitly invoke memory until the final chapters (and then only in passing). What the work does reveal, however, are the factors and historical situations that ultimately prompt Metz to appeal to memory as a way of living faithfully as disciples in the world. In order to

25 Metz, "Communicating a Dangerous Memory," 42.

26 This portion would have been written just at the time that Metz was reading Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt scholars who would have such an immense impact on his theology in the next epoch of his work. This places the writing sometime in the late 1960s.
understand how memory functions for Metz, it is therefore necessary to examine the path
that leads Metz to invoke it theologically.

1.2.1 Secularity as the Context for Christianity Today

One of the most difficult relationships to negotiate for the church and the person
of faith in contemporary western industrial societies is how growing secularity in the
public and political realms relates to the gospel. “Today’s world has become secular, and
it would appear that the process is by no means over yet. This universal secularity
challenges faith to say what its attitude to it is.”27 Metz notes the two most extreme
responses to this challenge: total rejection of secularity by Christianity and complete
reconciliation of the faith to secularization. The problem with the first position (which
notably was the majority stance of the Catholic Church before Vatican II, and seems to be
of the greatest concern to Metz in this work) is that it seeks to preserve tradition and faith
without taking seriously the historical challenges of the moment. “A faith that is so
unhistorical is not likely to feel itself threatened—that salutary state which enlivens and
widens the experience of faith…. But it lacks urgency and the taste of reality.”28 Answers
come too easily in this approach because those asking the questions refuse to
acknowledge the complexity of the modern situation. What is needed is greater
discomfort, a “lapse into a poverty of words and inspiration…. We have to find our feet
in an historical form of life in faith that is largely uncharted.”29 The practical result of this


28 Ibid., 13-14.

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approach has been a bifurcation of the world and the church, of profane history and salvation history.

At the other end of the spectrum, some approaches seek to resume the unity of the public and private by uniting the secular with Christianity (that is, Christianity subsumes the secular so that there is in reality only Christianity again, as in the Middle Ages in Europe). Proponents of this attitude rightly seek to respond to the world as it currently is, but they fail to recognize that secularity is not a single structure: it is not a monolith. It may not be possible to incorporate some strands of secularity into Christianity. It also assumes that the secular does not have a valid reason for being in itself. Metz characterizes this approach as overly optimistic and not critical enough of pluralistic secularity, some of which may resonate with the Christian message and mission and some which may not.

Both stances towards the secular, however, have one thing in common: they assume that there is some opposition between Christianity and the process of secularization.

They all [these approaches] proceed on the (to them) obvious assumption that the secularity of the world as such is something that is actually contrary to the Christian understanding of the world and must therefore be overcome by Christian means. What is common to them all is their fundamental rejection of the secularization of the world….”

It is this basic premise that Metz takes issue with in the rest of the book. Secularity, he argues, is the natural product of Christianity and not something opposed to it in se. Although there are certain developments that must be evaluated critically, modernity and secularity by and large do not need to be “overcome.” But the relationship needs to be

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., 15.
elucidated so that individuals, but the church especially, may start doing a better job of proclamining and living the gospel message today.

_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._31

Notably, Metz grounds his argument for the essentialness of secularity in creation and the incarnation. (He does not make the shift to eschatology until the mid-1960s).32 Judaism and Christianity first differed from the pagan religions by believing in a Creator God who was not part of the world, but in relationship to it.33 God created the world as not-God, and this is what makes secularity possible. “God’s divinity consists in the fact that he does not remove the difference between himself and what is other, but rather accepts the other _precisely as different from himself_.”34 Although fundamentally accepted by God—first in creation and then “with eschatological definitiveness” in Jesus (he emphasizes the Incarnation in this regard)—the world is free to accept or reject God.35 The world, in its freedom, still protests. It moves both towards and away from God in history, and so the church is part of the world to help it accept that it is already accepted by God, and work towards achieving its full potential.

Secularism cooperates with God’s plan to accept the world as it is insofar as it too opposes the over-identification of the world with the divine. Although accepted by God

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31 Ibid., 19-20.


33 Metz, _Theology of the World_, 26, 28, 34-35.

34 Ibid. This acceptance is also noncoercive because God “is not in competition with, but ‘guarantor’ of the world”—the result of which is that creation is made most free to be itself because it is accepted by God as it is.

35 Ibid., 21, 35.
despite its undecided and sinful state, the actions that people take in the world, especially in the arena of politics, must not be attributed to God. Before modern secularization, this often happened (e.g. the divine right of kings). But through secularization’s separation of church and state, it is clear that humans are making the decisions for better or worse, and not God. The same positive reality can be identified in the modern divergence of theology and other academic disciplines: the world is allowed to explore its potential and possibilities, exercising the freedom that God wants for it. Only when the world is free to be itself can it truly choose to belong to God.

Although his writing seems brimming with optimism about modernity and secularity, Metz is not actually uncritical of the historical manifestations that secularity has taken—not all of them positive. Metz distinguishes between the secularity intended by God in Christ and the actual process of secularization—which have not corresponded.

As new heights in the understanding of the world are attained, the abysses of possible error and corruption become deeper, and the danger of falling into them becomes greater. The reservations and protests of the Church against this modern passage of the world into its worldliness must be seen against the background of these concrete dangers and aberrations. But here we are concerned with the course of this development as such. (emphasis mine)

But negative historical manifestations and missteps in the process of secularization do not make modernity and secularization evil. In fact, it is the demonization of secularity by Christians, and not secularization itself, that has been very harmful to Christian faith by

36 This is not Metz’s example at this point, but he does mention it later in ———, Faith in History and Society. 37.

37 ———, Theology of the World, 36.

38 Ibid., 42. “The release of the world through the Christ event to find its own worldliness does not proceed into an abyss of sheer ‘fallenawayness’ from God, but into a more profound belonging to him. Man appears as the mediator, as the place where this liberated world is converted into this primary dependence on him.”

39 Ibid., 36.
making the church and belief seem irrelevant and archaic. “It is not the secularization of
the world that is a misfortune for the Christian faith, but, we feel, the attitude which we
Christians had towards it (and largely still have today).”\footnote{Ibid., 39.} People of faith need to be
involved in the process of secularization because the process is vulnerable to abuse and
has, until recently, been left in the hands of others who introduce ideologies like
utopianism and nihilism into it.\footnote{Ibid., 47.} What Christians must do as disciples and imitators of
Christ is accept, as Christ did, the world as it is and live in the tension that exists between
the love of God and a world that still resists God sometimes.

1.2.2 Relationship with Karl Rahner’s Thought

One cannot help but detect in Metz’s open and positive stance to modernity and
the process of secularization in Theology of the World the influence of his teacher and
friend, Karl Rahner. The book is actually dedicated to him, and various works of
Rahner’s are cited over eleven times. The similarities are numerous, and Metz is
obviously building on and responding to Rahner’s work.\footnote{This section in no way claims to be an exhaustive or in-depth comparison of Metz and Rahner’s
theologies, which could be a dissertation in itself. It would, however, be a gross oversight not to at least
mention the huge affect Rahner had at this stage in Metz’s work, and note a few key points.} Metz shares Rahner’s
anthropological starting point for theology insofar as he is concerned with the everyday
lived experience of the average Christian. The “historical form of life in faith” is one of
the main reasons Metz takes up the issue of secularization.\footnote{Metz, Theology of the World, 14.} Yet Metz already begins to
be critical of transcendental theologies that over-emphasize the individual and the present

\footnote{Ibid., 39.}

\footnote{Ibid., 47.}
moment at the expense of the political and the eschatological future (although Rahner does not necessarily fit into this category entirely). Metz’s “horizon” is explicitly the future—due in large part to his encounter with Ernst Bloch—and he hopes to provide a corrective to the overly personal emphasis, while still holding fast to the importance of the “subject.” Of his horizon for doing theology and his interlocutors Metz writes:

This horizon is the future. And it reveals the world as history, history as final history (*Endgeschichte*), faith as hope, and theology as eschatology. This horizon characterizes the attempt of theology to surpass and to go beyond the modern transcendental, personalistic, and existential theology without disregarding its valuable insights…. It has brought the Christian faith into a proper relationship to human existence and subjectivity. However, this theology faces two dangers. On the one hand, this anthropological theology tends to limit the faith by concentrating on the actual moment of the believer’s personal decision. The future is then all but lost…. On the other hand, this anthropological theology tends to become private and individualistic. It fails to bring into sufficient prominence the social and political dimensions of the believer’s faith and responsibility. 44

Metz, like Rahner, is also clear that God makes God’s self known to us through history—echoing Rahner’s emphasis on mediated immediacy and the Economic Trinity.45 The continual and pervasive grace of God, constantly being offered in and through creation by God to humans in history and requiring an ultimate response in favor of or against God’s offer, lies behind Metz’ assertion that God has already accepted the world as it is and now waits for our free response.

The theological understanding of creation, the theological idea of creatureliness (or finitude) is already in a context of (salvation) history….. God did not let the infralapsarian (fallen) order of nature be totally aliened from him because the sin which disturbed this order still remains held by his continuing saving will in Jesus Christ, so that the whole infralapsarian state of nature and of creation appears finally theologically as the expression of the grace of God’s will in salvation history.46

44 Ibid., 82.

In addition to sharing a generous theology of grace with Rahner, Metz also makes actual reference to the notion of Anonymous Christians when speaking of any person who openly faces the secular world, accepting it as it is, and not covering it with ideology.\textsuperscript{47}

The concern is with all people, not just those within the confines of the official church. The wider mission of the church to the world, and its ultimately provisional character, is also an idea that Metz shares with Rahner, citing him explicitly: “The Church always lives in a certain sense from the proclamation of her provisional character and from her historically progressive surrender to the coming Kingdom of God.”\textsuperscript{48}

The church must act as a force working in the world, not against secularization, but against secularization gone wrong.

1.2.3 The Church’s Mission to the World

God’s acceptance of the world as it is (that is, as not divine) does not mean that the world has already reached its final perfection. On the contrary, the acceptance of the world by God, brought about by Christ’s Incarnation, just initiates the process of secularization in which the world is free to become as genuinely “worldly” as possible.\textsuperscript{49}

But what is the role of the church and Christians then in this process? Metz already has

\begin{itemize}
  \item[\textsuperscript{46}] Ibid., 29. Note 28, in which he also cites Rahner. The parentheses are his, not mine. My own insertions will be marked with brackets instead of parentheses.
  \item[\textsuperscript{47}] Ibid., 47. Note 48. “Whoever as a non-Christian truly faces this world openly, does it out of the power of anonymous Christianity.” Oddly, Rahner is not explicitly cited here.
  \item[\textsuperscript{48}] Ibid., 94. He is citing Karl Rahner, “Kirche Und Parusie Christi,” in \textit{Schriften Zur Theologie} (Einsiedeln: 1965), 351.
  \item[\textsuperscript{49}] Metz, \textit{Theology of the World}, 67. “The final turning of God towards the world took place, rather, in man. He and only he is the place where God has for ever accepted the world and its history…. In the ‘Son of God, Jesus Christ,’ ‘Yes’ has come into history…. He, man, has become as it were the transformer between God and the world.”
\end{itemize}
made clear that believers should not oppose or vilify secularization, but what active role should Christians have?

Metz affirms that faithful discipleship means imitating Christ’s “descent into the world” and the “liberating acceptance” that resulted. Concretely, this means that we accept that the world is no longer overtly Christian but that being fully human—fulfilling to the utmost what we are created to be—in a hominized world does not oppose the Kingdom of God. Christians are to act as mediators between a world seeking its true self and the divine originator to which this search for identity should ultimately lead. “Hence we may say that ‘to Christianize the world’ means fundamentally ‘to secularize it’—to bring it into its own.”

This process is also the work of grace: “Grace perfects the true worldliness of the world.” Although we affirm that God accepts and will unite the secular world with the Kingdom of God in the end (while allowing each to keep its own identity, as in Christ’s hypostatic union) this remains only a faith conviction now, to be fully realized at the eschaton.

This eschatological proviso is what allows Christians to face the world as it is, without trying to rationalize it or cover it with ideology, because Christians know that society at present is not the final state. We are free to act because the best is yet to be realized.

The “eschatological proviso”…makes every historically real status of society appear to be provisional….It [the present condition] is valid, but in the ‘eschatological meanwhile.’ It does not bring about a negative but a critical

50 Ibid., 42.
51 Ibid., 49.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., 45-46, 50. “From all that we have said, however, it follows that this eschatologically perfected world will not be in any way a world that has been absorbed into God, divinized in the wrong sense of the word, but a world for which God is ‘everything to everyone’ (1 Cor. 15, 28), because he bestows on everything its own being and its supreme independence through his eternal love and his freedom, which lets things be themselves without envy.”
attitude to the societal present. Its promises are not an empty horizon of religious expectation… [but they] stimulate and appeal to us to make them a reality in the present historical condition…\(^\text{54}\)

The world is still a work in progress; history is not yet at an end—although there is a real end coming. Human action matters and can help the world become more itself (i.e. move towards freedom and its source and fulfillment in God) or direct it down the wrong path through sinful choices.\(^\text{55}\) The modern world helps make clear how important human action and the ability to shape history are, but finally we cannot divinize the world by our action alone, and must remember that all our efforts rely on divine promises.

The “future world,” which is promised finally and irrevocably in Jesus Christ, as the eschatological city of God, as the heavenly Jerusalem, is not something that is without a history, finished, and independent of the believer’s life, but is always “coming into being” in the historical movement of faith. Thus the believer acts not only “within” the world, but he changes it, he transforms it himself within the framework of this divine promise, which was given and is present to him as an individual only in the solidarity of the covenant.\(^\text{56}\)

Here one detects the importance not just of the individual subject for Metz, but also the communal and social aspect of salvation. It is the communal focus that makes the church important for Metz.

Metz identifies the church as the sign of God’s grace at work in the world, existing not for its own sake but for the world. “And this is why the Church or the historically tangible sign and institution of this grace within the world is not the opponent but the guarantor of the world. The Church exists for the sake of the world…. The Church itself is in the service of the universal will of God for the world.”\(^\text{57}\) As such, one

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\(^{54}\) Ibid., 114. This proviso prevents any political system from setting itself up as synonymous with the Reign of God or the goal of humanity. It precludes both a Christian state’s claim to this as well as claims by Marxism, for example, to be the perfect political system. Anything short of the eschaton falls short of perfection and, by erroneously identifying itself as such, leads to new forms of oppression and domination.

\(^{55}\) Ibid., 53-55.

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 55.

\(^{57}\) Ibid., 50.
of its central tasks at the present time must be to address the processes of secularization and “hominization,”—people coming to be the main actors in history by shaping their world instead of relying on a divinized world for guidance—identifying their Christian origins, and thereby contradicting the perception that atheism or utopian ideologies are the only tenable options for modern people.\(^5\)

The other main commission of the church is to be the bearer of “critical liberating freedom” to all the world, especially those that are oppressed. “The scandal and the promise of this salvation are public matters…. In the service of this message, Christian religion has been charged with a public responsibility to criticize and to liberate.”\(^5\) It is, Metz suggests, this task of criticizing concrete situations that demands the church be institutionalized and not just individuals acting independently.\(^6\) Among its duties are: defending the individual from objectification and being used as a means to an end; denying the deification of any one subject as the universal subject of history; and living the gospel message of love that is manifest in action.\(^6\)

But this is not in any way to suggest that the church is separate from the world. “The Church is of the world: In a certain sense the Church is the world: The Church is not Non-World (\textit{Die Kirche ist nicht Nicht-Welt})…. The decisive relationship between the Church and the world is not spatial but temporal. The Church is the eschatological community and the exodus community.”\(^6\) Only when it maintains this strong eschatological identity can the church be the sign and source of hope in the world, the

\(^5\) Ibid., 62-63, 76.

\(^6\) Ibid., 113.

\(^6\) Ibid., 115. Metz also states that the institutional church has not had the best record of proclaiming liberating freedom and that major changes need to be made (134).

\(^6\) Ibid., 118-19. There is also the need for an internal critical voice within the church.

\(^6\) Ibid., 93-94.
promise of a future that is truly new.\textsuperscript{63} But Metz is clear that such eschatology does not lead to an other-worldly fantasy that makes the injustices of the present bearable. On the contrary, “Christian hope should realize itself in creative and militant eschatology.”\textsuperscript{64}

By stressing the creative aspect of eschatology, Metz indicates that the church must accept that its role is an active one in bringing about the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is not just waiting ahead of us, but is something that human beings must help bring about.\textsuperscript{65} By characterizing the hope as militant, Metz means to indicate that the hope is not individual or private but inherently communal, social—like the covenant relationship itself. The church, therefore, must embrace a secular society and not retreat into a sectarian shell because its message is intended for all people, all nations. “Christianity should not establish itself as a ghetto-society or become the ideological protective shell for the existing society…. The ter\textit{minus a quo} of the Christian mission should be the secular society.”\textsuperscript{66} It is this corrective deprivatization that is the key to what Metz calls his “political theology.”\textsuperscript{67} Militant eschatological hope also means that the church cannot be co-opted to “canonize man’s own progress,” but must rather stand “against every hope which we place in the man-made idols of our secular society.”\textsuperscript{68}

The key to understanding the hope offered by the church is the realization that one cannot just hope for one’s self: one always hopes for others, and one is included in that hope because he or she is part of a community. The paradigmatic example of this comes in the face of death.

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 99. Already the influence of Ernst Bloch is evident here.
\item \textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 94.
\item \textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 94-95.
\item \textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 94.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 110.
\item \textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 96.
\end{enumerate}
What distinguishes the Christian and the secular ideologies of the future from one another is not that the Christian knows more, but that they know less about the sought-after future of humanity and that they face up to this poverty of knowledge…. Moreover, the Christian hope is aware of its own fatal perils; in short, it is aware of death. For in the face of death all shining promises fade away. This Christian hope is the anticipatory (proleptic) practice in dying. And even this aspect of hope should not be limited to an individualistic and worldless attitude. Christian hope is essentially directed to the world of our brother, since this hope fulfills itself in love for the other, for the least of our brothers. Only in this kenosis of love is death overcome….this is the imitation of Jesus: He did not live for himself, but for us. Hope is this living for “the other.”

Salvation is not private. We approach that final surrender to God through a life that corresponds to such a death.

1.2.4 Mentioning Memory

Memory appears for the first time in a footnote near the end of the book. The concrete, historical manifestations of secularization and hominization (which notably does not actually correspond with greater humanization), abandoned as they have been by Christianity until recently, have created a modern world that looks to the future—but a future only of human making.

The so-called ‘new age’ in which the process of secularization is taking place is marked by a constant will towards the ‘new.’ This will towards the new operates on the basis of the social, political, and technological revolutions. Mankind in this new age seems to be fascinated by only one thing: the future as something that has not yet existed.

69 Ibid., 97. What is being stated here should not be confused with Metz’s later assertions about hope for the dead being the measure by which the living can hope anything for themselves. He is still operating under the influence of Karl Rahner here, in which “practicing for death” means dying a little at a time through acts of surrender and service in daily life. For more on Rahner’s view on this point see Karl Rahner, On the Theology of Death (New York, NY: Herder & Herder, 1961).

70 Metz, Theology of the World, 113.

71 Ibid., 148.
The “primacy of the future” and the desire for something totally new is not a priori bad. An eschatological view of the world itself looks to the future and hopes for the coming of the Kingdom of God, of which “eye has not seen and ear has not heard.” The problem is that the actual way that the focus on the future has developed in the modern world causes forgetfulness of the past. Metz observes:

We are ignoring here an immanent critique of this situation and the dangerous onesidedness of the view of the world we have described “under the primacy of the future.” One of the most important problems in this connection is the threatened loss of history, memory, and tradition in this view and hence the threatened loss of content in historical activity that is determined by this kind of world view. Nevertheless, there remains here also the question of whether there is not a hermeneutical pre-eminence of orientation towards the future for the understanding of history and historical reality, of whether, then, the history of the origin of something can only be seen as more than the material of historical curiosity when it is seen in connection with “eschatological history.”

Clearly Metz is operating out of the assumption that human activity finds its motivation, if not its meaning, in accountability to the past.

As the eschatological community, the church must bring to the current process of secularization a sense of the future that still takes the past into consideration: memory of the past, with a future content. Metz says as much earlier, at the start of his second chapter, but he does not link it to memory explicitly. “The Christian lives his own particular life in its historical present out of fidelity to the event and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But to remain true in every particular situation to an original historical event means to bestow upon this event in the present a future, to lay hold on the present itself as hope.” As noted above, hope includes others and not just one’s self. To hope in the present for a future for the past means that one must think and act in the present with

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72 Ibid. See the twelfth footnote in chapter six. Emphasis added.

73 Ibid., 56. Emphasis added.
others—particularly the dead, since death is the greatest obstacle to hope—in mind. It means we must remember. The Christian community, therefore, is commissioned to help modern secularized people remember in a way that transforms action.

The Christian community must bring this “tradition” of hope and love into our planned society, which is more and more losing its memory and therefore losing its history. Without it our much-vaunted progress will lack that creative and liberating resistance through which alone it has a chance of truly being called “progress.”

But why turn to memory? Metz does not discuss this explicitly at this time. The first clear introduction of memory is in 1969. For now, memory is grouped with tradition and history, without any nuance or differentiation. A few inferences may be drawn, however, from this work about what prompts the ever-increasing emphasis on memory in his later work. First, secularization, as it has developed historically, has led to dehumanization. Metz is realistic about this, although he does not dwell on any instance in particular in this book (but he will as the 1960s progress). Memory provides a way of speaking about what needs to change in the present by identifying the problem as it has developed into the present. Furthermore, memory has a way of involving those who remember. There is no objective remembrance, so by remembering one is enlisted in the task of preventing past abuses from being repeated and making way for a more humane world now and in the future.

Second, the church finds itself in an identity crisis—not sure of its role. Because it is grounded (or ought to be grounded) in the historical event of Jesus’ life, death, and

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74 Ibid., 155.

75 It first appears in: Johann Baptist Metz, "Politische Theologie in Der Diskussion," in Diskussion zur "Politische Theologie", ed. Helmut Peukert (Mainz, Germany: Matthäus-Grunewald, 1969). The memoria passionis et resurrectionis Jesu Christi does not accompany memory’s debut, prompting doubt as to the role played by Jesus in Metz’s future-oriented theology. He addresses this directly afterward by adding the memoria emphasis.
resurrection, there is an inherent historical bent to Christianity. Memory can help the church negotiate its place in the secularized world without forcing it to hide or deny the good that is potentially within the process of the world coming into its own. By remembering creation and the Christ event in a particular way, the church can recreate what it is now. The church also needs to find a way to keep that history it remembers relevant and influential, precisely because there is still a future, hoped for, aspect. Hope that is real demands that it find a way to bridge a notion of time as final—death as utter end—and so it can only be for those who have died in the past that we now can hope for future life. Memory, as it appears now in a nascent form, has the potential to bridge this gap between the past, present, and future. Both of these agendas become more pronounced in the next stage of Metz’s work, typified by his seminal work *Faith in History and Society*.

Between these two stages of his thought lies Metz’s encounter with the thinkers of the Frankfurt School. Although much more will be said about this in the next chapter, in far greater detail, it is necessary to acknowledge at this point how seminal Metz’s exposure to critical theory was for his theology—especially for that of memory. Metz first encountered the thought of the Institute for Social Research, the members of which were known as the Frankfurt School, in the early 1960s—around 1963—when he began to teach at the University of Münster. “It coincided with his abandonment of the systematic, metaphysical approach of his first decade of theology, in search of a postmetaphysical, postexistentialist, postidealist theology.”  

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the writings of Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse.\textsuperscript{77} Benjamin probably had the most influence on Metz’s theology of memory, including the focus on the memory of suffering and the forgotten of history, as well as an outstanding future for victims and the present influence of the past.\textsuperscript{78} But Herbert Marcuse is actually the one who used the phrase “dangerous memory,” that appears so prominently in Metz’s next collection of essays.\textsuperscript{79} Metz actually uses the category of dangerous memory for the first time in 1967, in his essay “Politische Theologie in der Diskussion.”\textsuperscript{80} However, a fuller treatment of dangerous memory can be found in \textit{Faith in History in Society}, to which we now turn.

1.2.5 Gleanings from this Stage

- Metz reflects the influence of his teacher and mentor Karl Rahner. He is concerned with the incarnation and creation as a starting point and affirming the presence of God in the world and in history.

- Metz has an obviously positive evaluation of the process of secularization. He claims that the process itself is the result of Christianity and God’s plan for the world to become fully what God created it to be. But Christianity’s long resistance to secularization has left the actual historical development of it vulnerable to corruption. It has resulted in dehumanization.

- The world is meant to be free to make choices and work out the coming of God’s Reign through historical action and cooperation with God. There have been many detours thus far in history, although Metz remains positive that history overall is

\textsuperscript{77} Schuster and Boschert-Kimmig, \textit{Hope against Hope}. 21.


headed in the right direction ultimately. The eschatological proviso helps keep the end goal present now as a destabilizing agent in regards to the claim of any particular system to be synonymous with God’s Reign.

- Memory is only mentioned in the end of this stage, as Metz just starts his dialogue with the Frankfurt School. It is associated with tradition and the church’s role in promoting the historical relevance of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, as well as all God’s action in history. It must help modern society remember and act as a church to help guide the process of secularization.

1.3 Faith in History and Society

The first edition of *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* appeared in 1977, so it marks roughly another decade’s worth of thought from Metz’s first publication. The tone and focus of this work differs from the first in its more critical treatment of the historical process of modernization. Although Metz nowhere retracts his previous conviction that secularization has a fundamentally Christian origin, he does direct more of his attention to the actual historical manifestations of secularization, and the abuses and dehumanization that these entailed. A comparison of the footnotes alone evinces a shift from Rahner as his main interlocutor (although the book is dedicated to him and his intellectual influence always remains) to the philosophers of the Frankfurt School and critical theory. Marxism also obviously exerts more pressure on Metz’s thought, forcing him to deal with the charges leveled against Christianity (and all religions), that it derails efforts towards change and the establishment of a more just social order.

Memory finally becomes more central to Metz’s thought in this work, along with narrative and solidarity. A major distinction that appears is the difference between “memory” that pacifies and “dangerous memories.” “[In] examining the relationship
between the church and the society within which it exists…one of the key concepts emerged that mark the transition from Metz’s first exploration of political theology in the 1960s to his mature position of the 1970s: dangerous memories.”81 The political implications of memory are central for this exposition—how memory influences not just one’s own private sphere, but the public realm, filled with other people and interests.

In order to determine how memory functions in this work, it is imperative to first examine the central problem as Metz sees it at this stage in his work. Previously the problem was mainly how Christianity (particularly the Roman Catholic Church) can interact with the modern, secularized world without surrendering its own identity. The problem during the epoch in which the essays that eventually make up *Faith in History and Society* are composed is distinct, although not altogether separate from the previous one. Now the problem has become less worrying about our own identity and more about ascertaining the identity of those whose subjectivity is all but lost (and this ultimately has implications for who we are too).82 The “suffering other” and the “victims of history,” far from being just the unfortunate price for a fundamentally good process of secularization gone wrong, now must become the main concern. Particular histories of violence, death,

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82 Metz, *Faith in History and Society*. 43, 58. Metz details the Enlightenment enthronement of the bourgeois subject secretly. Now the challenge is to expose this subject and pursue the subjectivity of those who are not recognized as such by the bourgeois political paradigm. “First, there is the emergence of a new person, the bourgeois person (Bürger), who came into being during the Enlightenment and asserted and made himself absolute in the process of modernity….a certain bourgeois concept of praxis has suppressed the genuinely Christian concept of social-critical praxis….Given this way of doing Christian apologetics, what is required is a practical fundamental theology which will counterpose the concept of praxis in its Christian radicality and unleash it precisely for the subject who is not yet established (as bourgeois), that is, so that all persons might be and become subjects.”
and resistance, remembered with public intention, provide the criteria by which current and future processes of secularization can be evaluated by Christianity.

1.3.1 History of the Victors and the Victims of History

One immediately notices the explicit concern for the least and most vulnerable in this work, as Metz’s opening paragraph in the first essay indicates when he describes hope in terms of “solidaristic hope in the God of the living and the dead who calls all persons to be subjects in God’s presence.” This foreshadows the contention he advances later in the work, that the assumed “subject” of theology to this point has been the white, European, bourgeois man, but that theology should focus instead on those whose subjectivity is the most threatened or lost. The ascendancy of the bourgeois subject is not just a feature of Christianity, but a wider phenomenon of the Enlightenment.

First, there is the emergence of a new person, the bourgeois person (Bürger), who came into being during the Enlightenment and asserted and made himself absolute in the processes of modernity. Consequently, as liberal theology embraced the Enlightenment the bourgeois subject established itself there. Finally, and above all, a certain bourgeois concept of praxis has suppressed the genuinely Christian concept of social-critical praxis; that is, it has reduced praxis to the private subject and his or her moral rectitude, existing unproblematically within society.

Those whose subjectivity is most in danger include the poor and especially the dead, who lost their lives in struggles and whose stories have not been preserved because they did not survive to tell the tales. Christianity, instead of continuing to conform to the domination of the bourgeois subject, must focus on preserving the subjectivity of these people. “What is required is a practical fundamental theology which will counterpose the

83 Ibid., 23.
84 Ibid., 43.
concept of praxis in its Christian radicality and unleash it precisely for the subject who is not yet established (as bourgeois), that is, so that all persons might be and become subjects.”85

But speaking abstractly about subjectivity itself allows one to cloak the true identity of who one means, so being clear on concrete, historical details is crucial. Metz makes clear that Christian hope cannot be spoken about in a general way, but must remain grounded in “the concrete historical-social situation in which subjects find themselves: their experiences, their suffering, struggles, and obstacles.”86 The challenge is preserving or even getting at the historical-social situation of those whose subjectivity is threatened because it is the victors who write history. They write history in conformity with how they wish to remember events, and this often involves the distortion or erasure of the victims as “other.” This telling of history from the perspective of the powerful “will be characterized throughout this book in different contexts as the ‘history of the victors.’ It is an awareness in which there is no memory of the vanquished and the oppressed.”87 In order for those who are oppressed or victimized to become subjects once more they must “break through the spell of the ‘official’ awareness of history by unveiling it to be propaganda of the powerful and the rulers.”88

Memory of the victims functions in a crucial way here: it is the placeholder of identity that is all but lost. Although the official histories may not reflect the memory of

85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., 75.
the dead or devastated, the people—and ultimately the Christian church—whisper their stories from one generation to the next because of the centrality of the memory of Jesus’ death and resurrection. These memories flow like a subterranean river, beneath the structures and systems established by the victors, but they do not stay submerged forever. The memories exert an influence upon those who remember, reminding them and exhorting them to resist because there is still hope for the dead and there is something we can do to protest what happened to them, preventing it from happening again.

1.3.1.1 Status of Modern Western Societies and the Bourgeois Subject

While memories of the victims of history have the potential to disrupt the status quo, the problem today is that the bourgeois subject of western civilization increasingly is losing interest in remembering anything or anyone at all. Metz astutely points out the fact that the generalized “subject” of history, religion, philosophy, and modern economics is actually a very specific sort of “abstract” character. The “turn to the subject” is really a turn to the white, male, European, upper-middle class, propertied individual, with the mental capacity and opportunity to make choices about his destiny, and who has recognized rights in society. No allowance is made for cultural differences, historical context, or class distinctions. When Kant speaks about the moral obligations and responsibility of the subject “come of age” in modernity, and calls on him to take an active role in molding the world, Kant is excluding from consideration all people who, because of oppression or lack of capacity, are unable to yet be recognized as subjects.89 Only the powerful and victorious are being addressed and acknowledged as human.

89 Ibid., 41-42.
To shed some light once again on Kant’s postulate concerning maturity (*Mündigkeit*), Kant could describe maturity as a moral task because he was looking exclusively at men who had already come of age socially and economically some time before. Now clearly there is a kind of immaturity (*Unmündigkeit*), a powerlessness and an oppressed life that is not due simply to moral weakness of those who are immature, who are powerless and oppressed. And who would doubt that this is socially conditioned immaturity, this powerlessness and this state of oppression, this “poverty” would have to be a crucial object for Christian praxis? \(^90\)

Metz identifies this assumption at work even in the writings and thought of his beloved mentor, Karl Rahner. \(^91\)

This bourgeois subject behind “the subject” is shaped, not by religion, but by the economic system of exchange. This is problematic because our relationship with God, according to Metz, is critical for understanding our identities as subjects in the first place. “Men and women only came to their identity as subjects at all by means of religion, in relationship with God. It is only in this way that they became subjects of their histories.” \(^92\)

But a main feature of modern developed nations is that societies, inspired by the Enlightenment notion of a free and morally responsible subject in control of his world, have ceased being shaped by religious demands made in the public sphere. Instead, they are shaped by the market economy. The heart of this market structure is the system of exchange, which requires that everything worth pursuing or having also be given a value in an objective way.

The bourgeoisie understand that they are no longer sustained by comprehensive traditions of any sort, let alone religious ones….The bourgeoisie know that they are sustained by a new principle that rules and underpins all social relations: the principle of exchange. Production, trade, and consumption are all determined in

\(^90\) Ibid., 63-64.

\(^91\) Ibid., 73.

\(^92\) Ibid., 77.
terms of that principle. All other values that had heretofore shaped social 
existence, and that did not contribute directly to the functioning of this bourgeois 
exchange society, retreated more and more into the sphere of the private, that is, 
into the sphere of individual freedom.93

Whatever resists or cannot fit into this equation of exchange becomes confined to the 
private, and therefore optional, realm. Religion has become privatized in this way and is 
now considered something added onto the person—who is defined by the market and 
exchange—and is not essential to the core of one’s being from the start.94 The only use 
religion serves for many now is to make them feel comforted, soothed, and safe in the 
lifestyle to which they have become accustomed. This Metz terms “bourgeois religion.”

This universal claim in the Enlightenment’s concept of religion is deceptive. The 
so-called natural religion or religion of reason, which is allegedly valid for 
everyone, is as elitist as Enlightenment reason itself. In fact it only belongs to the 
new person of the Enlightenment, the bourgeois, as reason’s subject. This is why 
it is an extremely privatized religion, made to order for the domestic use of the 
propertied citizen. It is a religion of feeling and of interiority. It will never give 
rise to any danger, any resistance, or any protest when it comes to the ways that 
reality, meaning, and truth are defined in a bourgeois society of exchange and 
success. It hyperbolizes what is already valid anyway.95

When the value of something is determined by how much money one can get for 
it or what goods or services can be procured by it, the inherent worth of anything—
people included—becomes instrumentalized. This is combined with another erroneous 
assumption; that all players in the exchange system are equals, so what one actor does 
can be reciprocated by any other.96 The flaw in this supposition becomes clearest when 
looked at in the extreme—at the limit-situation of death. Even the most savvy and

93 Ibid., 49.
94 Ibid., 47, 49, 71.
95 Ibid., 57-58.
96 Ibid., 53, 209, 11.
successful player in the market faces death. He or she goes from having much to offer in the exchange system to having nothing to contribute to it. At this point the person simply falls off the radar. His or her subjectivity evaporates as if it never was.

When it comes to the dead there is no exchange relationship, no *do ut des*. The love that mourns for the dead is that form of love (the only form according to Kierkegaard) that cannot be taken up into a consumer society’s exploitation of structures. In line with this, the community of feeling with the dead dwindles away…it is blocked, trivialized, and inevitably privatized.97

Investors, consumers, and people trying to get ahead in the market choose to focus on progress and technology and not on stories or memories of events or people that no longer are part of the system of exchange. A manifestation of this forgetfulness is the lack of space in modern societies (both capitalist and communist in this time period) for mourning.98 The dead are forgotten. Their memories fade quickly, and the living cease hoping anything for the dead at all—or for the living themselves for that matter.

1.3.1.2 Importance of Particularity

By forgetting the dead and anyone who is not an equal partner in exchange, the bourgeois person easily becomes just a cog in the impersonal machinery of technology and industry. The Enlightenment goals of dominating nature and controlling as much as possible in our lives leads to a tunnel-vision focus on progress.99 Only the stories of

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97 Ibid., 51.

98 Ibid. “In socialist societies, as they currently exist, a solidaristic way of being human beings of a new sort is not really put into practice; rather bourgeois society, with its internal contradictions, is perpetuated. A symptom of this is the fact that there too men and women are forbidden any mourning or melancholy.” Metz, however, ultimately means for this to apply to both socialist and capitalist societies.

99 Ibid., 44, 56, 98-99, 159. “Nature and history, as well as this [bourgeois] subject’s sense of praxis, are almost exclusively oriented by models for controlling nature and satisfying needs, so that other ways in which one might behave as a subject, and other forms of praxis wither away….”
success in the present, gesturing towards a future of more of the same, endure. And even these stories are approached more as sources of technical, historical information, without any direct influence on our action now.\textsuperscript{100} This is a phenomenon related to what Metz calls the hegemony of evolutionary time—the opposite of Christian apocalyptic expectation of something totally new. “Locked into the infinite continuum of a time devoid of surprise, people feel like they are being sucked into the waves of an anonymous evolution that mercilessly rolls over everything from behind. With this experience of a more fragile identity a culture is in the offing; its first name is apathy, the absence of feeling.”\textsuperscript{101} Forgetfulness follows quickly on the numbness of apathy because memory, especially the dangerous variety that stimulates change and hope, requires the effort to tell stories from the past and allow one’s self to be transformed by them.

Systems and structures may retain specific characteristics in this apathetic milieu, but the identity of individuals (and even certain subgroups, like Christians) is lost with the erasure of the stories of those who have not succeeded. Ultimately, this includes all of us finite humans who die. When the specific details of the life, personality, suffering, and legacy of a person are lost, or when oppressed people’s individual subjectivity is never recognized to begin with, then the living bourgeois subject slowly loses his or her identity as well.

A society that has lost interest in their remaining subjects and has in general given up a constitutive community of interest with the dead will become more and more paralyzed in the historical fight for the living subjects and fall prey to an

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 50. “During the Enlightenment, however, tradition loses any power at all to determine and orient action and becomes the object of historical knowledge…it becomes a storehouse for meeting enlightened reason’s need for information and news….Historical knowledge is a means for relativizing and trivializing history.”

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 26.
evolutionistically tinged apathy. The God of the living and of the dead is the God of a universal justice that shatters the standards of our exchange society and saves those who died suffering unjustly, and who, therefore, calls us to become subjects or unconditionally to support others becoming subjects in the face of hateful oppression, and calls us to remain subjects in the face of guilt and in opposition both to the dissolution of individual identity into “the masses” and also to apathy.102

The particulars that make us human and hold out hope for justice and a future different from the past are lost in a technocratic society. There are no dangerous stories of the exploits and sacrifices of people long past to spark our imaginations and remind us of the fact that things could be other than they currently are.103

It is, in fact, the universal claims made by the Enlightenment about “the subject” that have helped cloak the important particular identity of the subject as the bourgeois subject from the start. By masquerading as a universal subject, the bourgeois subject is able to make itself the measure of what is normal. There is no demand for critique or conversion because the specific oppressed subjects who could disrupt the system are not even recognized as subjects. While Metz maintains that the Enlightenment has made many positive contributions that must be preserved, the bourgeois subject that it exalts as the pinnacle of freedom and liberation from tradition or arbitrary authority actually is no subject at all. The divorce of the modern subject from its history, understood as the past still present and exercising influence on our actions now, makes people forget who they are. This makes them easily malleable and vulnerable to manipulation by ideologies. The result is often violence and the devaluation of the individual.

The destruction of memory turns out systematically to hinder identity, to prevent people from becoming subjects or continuing to be subjects in their social-

102 Ibid., 80.
103 Ibid., 177. This is an idea inspired by the Frankfurt School’s Herbert Marcuse.
historical contexts. Uprooting slaves and deporting them always tends to destroy their memories, and precisely in this way serves as a powerful reinforcement of their state of being slaves, their systemic disempowerment in the interest of effecting their complete subjugation. On the other hand, the formation of identity always begins with the awakening of memory.\textsuperscript{104}

Only by being attentive to particular memories, specific historical circumstances, and actual praxis in addition to theory, can we begin to recognize this error.

1.3.1.3 Dangerous Versus Bourgeois Memories

The need for particularity naturally brings up the issue of what and how things should be remembered. This is where Metz makes a critical bridge between his previous thought and his later work. Metz introduces the distinction between “dangerous” memories and pacifying memories favored by the complacent bourgeois subject. One still holds open a future for the past—for the victims of history—whereas the other does not.

“Memory” seems to be a bourgeois counterfigure to the hope that deceitfully dispenses us from future risks. In what sense can it have a practical—critical, indeed a dangerous—liberating character? There are memories in which one does not take the relationship to the past very seriously, memories in which the past turns into an untroubled paradise, an asylum from the disillusionments of the present—the past as “the good old days.” Here memory bathes everything in the past in a mild, conciliatory light….The past passes through a filter of harmlessness; everything dangerous and haunting, everything challenging has vanished from it; it seems robbed of any future. This is how memory easily turns into a “false consciousness” of the past, an opium for the present.\textsuperscript{105}

These memories are what the powerful and ruling class promulgate and encourage. They help support the feeling that the past is inexorably behind us. They give voice only to

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 75. Amazingly the slaves of the American south tenaciously did hold to their memories. It helped them preserve identity, as Metz affirms, and inculcated a spirit of resistance and freedom amidst the situation of being slaves. For more on this, see Chapter 4, the section on Shawn Copeland’s theology.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 105.
triumph and success, forgetting the stories and names of those who did not win. One walks away unchanged and untroubled after hearing these stories.

But there are other memories too, protected in the custody of those who knew the victims of history, and who perhaps are still suffering themselves beneath the current system. These people are haunted by the faces, names, and misery of the dead and disappeared. These ones who remember carry around in their minds, hearts, and lives the hope that somehow, someway the injustices of the past will be addressed.

But there is another way to remember: dangerous memories, memories that challenge. These are memories in which earlier experiences flare up and unleash new dangerous insights for the present. For brief moments they illuminate, harshly and piercingly, the problematic character of things we made our peace with a long time ago and the banality of what we take to be “realism.” They break through the canon of the ruling plausibility structures and take on a virtually subversive character. Memories of this sort are like dangerous and uncalculable visitations from the past. They are memories that one has to take into account, memories that have a future content, so to speak.106

These memories always involve the memory of suffering because there is an undeniable authority about it.107 The very opposite of apathy, the unrequited suffering of the past provides a motivation and inspiration for action now. Because of their orientation toward praxis before any theoretical formulation, dangerous memories do not take on the preferred (abstract) argumentative forms of Enlightenment reason.108 A dangerous memory’s content is very particular and narrowly focused. “Its ‘mediation’ is in every case of a practical nature. It never happens in a purely argumentative way, but always in a

106 Ibid.


108 Ibid. “It is clear that today there is a danger that everything that is defined in terms of memory and does not obey the calculus of technical-pragmatic reason will be equated with superstition and left to the whim and fancy of the individual. But this is anything but the way to make men and women more free and more ‘enlightened.’”
‘narrative way’ too, in dangerous-liberating stories.’\textsuperscript{109} This alliance between dangerous memories, narratives, and solidarity with the past—manifest as a solidarity and praxis in the present—is not mere coincidence. All three provide an interlocking alliance that makes the past truly present again, empowers action for change, and inspires hope in a future that is radically different from what has gone before. Before delving further into the relationship between these three vital components, however, it is helpful to look at the praxis they aim to provoke.

1.3.2 Memory as Resistance

Metz establishes clearly that forgetfulness of the past or strictly bourgeois memories undermine the subjectivity of all people: the living, the dead, and those living who are treated as less than human. The way in which some Enlightenment tenets have been developed in modernity (the abstract, reasonable “subject;” our divorce from history; the human vocation to dominate and control nature; the notion that progress has and will go on without end) are to blame for this erosion of the subject. Christianity, as Metz understands it, must necessarily “enlighten the Enlightenment” now through praxis and theory that advances the subjectivity of all people—living and dead.\textsuperscript{110}

Yet Christianity cannot assume the methods used by other utopian movements for emancipation (e.g. communism) from the status quo. The reason for this is that any

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 106.

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 43. “It would seem reasonable to fight against this emancipatory front contemporary theology with the help of the old, anti-Enlightenment apologetics. Yet nothing at all can be done to undo the liberalizing self-dissolution of theological reason by taking this path, which has proven to be a false and catastrophic one. What this requires is a new way of working through the Enlightenment itself, a radical enlightening of the Enlightenment, a political-theological enlightenment concerning the real processes at work in modernity.”
purely human initiative seeks to establish another human subject in the place of the dominant bourgeois subject: these movements will inevitably recapitulate the violence and oppression of the system they destroy.\textsuperscript{111} The new system established by human initiative will have flaws, some people will have more power than others, and a new group of people will be marginalized and blamed for the failure of the ideal.

Emancipation from specific structures cannot liberate people from guilt and the tendency to scapegoat others for the continued suffering.\textsuperscript{112} Those who have been dethroned will become the ones without power, forced to carry all the burden of blame for the previous system’s failures. The cycle of oppression continues with a new group at the bottom of the heap. The human “subject” of history turns out to be even less capable of ending suffering than the God that some Enlightenment thinkers rejected.

As everyone knows, for as long as God was looked upon as the subject of history the concrete history of suffering was the bane of every theodicy. At the end of the day, the history of suffering also provided one of the decisive motives for God being pulled from the center of history by modern theories of history and freedom, and \textit{homo emancipator} being promoted to being the universal subject of history in place of the \textit{deus salvator}. However, the accusatory authority of suffering did not disappear when human beings took their destiny into their own hands; misfortune and need, wickedness and evil, oppression and suffering all still exist…Who is guilty? Who is to blame for all of this? When this question arises, a sort of anthropodicy, on analogy with theodicy, starts up in the emancipatory theories of history—with cumbersome mechanisms for justifying and exculpating….all the guilt from the history of suffering now seems to fall back onto human beings themselves as actors….In the face of the history of suffering he [homo emancipator] slinks away from the throne of the subject of history….Thus one finds in liberal theories of Enlightenment, as well as in liberally tinged Marxist ones, a theory of historical processes without subjects.\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 119. In speaking about Marxism, and its refusal to blame the sufferings of history on its proposed subject “the proletariat,” Metz concludes: “For it is the others, the opponents and enemies of this historical subject, who are now the only ones held to account for failures and for the guilt involved in the history of suffering; they alone are the guilty party. Thus, here too there is an exculpation mechanism at work. In every case it is the enemy…who provides the alibi.”
So purely human plans for emancipation from the unjust, technocratic modern societies turn out to be just as deleterious to the subject as the situation they aim to destroy.\textsuperscript{114}

What is needed to successfully resist the eclipse of the subjectivity of all people is the admission of guilt by the bourgeois subject instead of passing the cause of suffering—and therefore the ability to alleviate it—onto someone or something else. This must be done, however, so that people are not paralyzed by guilt, but are impelled to act creatively and urgently with that awareness. Only subjects can be response-able. It also makes clear that something more than human initiative is needed to break the cycle of oppression. Metz calls this process “redemption” in contradistinction to emancipation because, once guilt is admitted, there must be an outside liberation that does not rely solely on human effort (but it does not happen without it either). “Christian soteriology relentlessly directs our attention to the history of suffering as a history of guilt….The point of this is not, of course…to furnish the powerless with more guilt and the powerful with yet more guilt-free power” but to expose the history of suffering, finitude, and death to our consciousness—not just the successful history of the victors. It does this by keeping focused on suffering—the red thread that runs across the back of history’s tapestry. Christian promises of redemption open us to the possibility and the need for something utterly new that is both our project and also something interrupting from outside.

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 119-20.

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 122. “A universal theory of emancipation without a soteriology is continually subject to irrational mechanisms for making excuses or repressing guilt. A history of emancipation without a history of redemption subjects the historical subject to new irrational compulsions in the face of concrete histories of suffering: either the compulsion to suspend transcendentally one’s own historical responsibility, the compulsion to make enemies of others, or finally the compulsion to deny oneself as a subject altogether.”
1.3.2.1 Memory as Hope for the Future: “Suffering Other” as Key

One does not start, however, by protecting one’s own subjectivity. A praxis that aims at undermining an oppressive exchange-based system must not be founded primarily in the hope for one’s self, but concerned with those who are not one’s equals.\textsuperscript{115} This is because subjectivity must be maintained where it is most threatened first.\textsuperscript{116} It means that those who are living subjects now (i.e. the bourgeois, living in affluent western countries) must first be concerned with those who are not now recognized as subjects (the oppressed, poor) and even more fundamentally with the subjectivity of those who suffered and died without any justice. The impending moment of death, where the light of life seems to be snuffed out, is the location where the battle for all our subjectivities before God must be waged. Memory is central in this fight.

Christian solidarity of memory with the dead is not defined by some abstract interest and not in the first instance by the concern about what death will mean “for me.” Rather, the concern that defines this solidarity has to do with what death means “for you,” which is to say, for the other, especially for those who suffer (and only in connection with this does it have to do with one’s own identity in death). In its mystical-political dual structure solidarity emerges as a category of the salvation of the subject at those points where it is being threatened: by being forgotten, by oppression, by death.\textsuperscript{117}

To affirm the subjectivity of the dead, one must believe that there is still something outstanding for them; that they have not ceased to exist. They have a future. Still extant, the dead’s subjectivity maintains a claim on us to remedy where we can the wrongs done to them.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 209-10. “In a society shaped by exchange processes, solidarity can be thought of (to the extent that it is thematized at all) only as an alliance of solidarity between equal partners….the saying ‘no love allowed’ has radically [been] underscored in the world of exchange."

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 211. Worrying only about those who are equal and can reciprocate is a symptom of the exchange system’s self-centeredness that is eroding subjectivity to begin with.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
What does it mean to arrive at “resurrection” by passing through the memory of suffering?...In my view this kind of resurrection faith expresses itself in freeing one (“contra-factually”) to pay attention to the sufferings and hopes of the past, and to pose to oneself the challenge of the dead. For this kind of faith there is not only a revolution that changes tomorrow’s world for coming generations, but also a revolution that decides anew about the meaning of the dead and their hopes (W. Benjamin!). Resurrection mediated by the memory of suffering means that there is a meaning for the dead, for those already defeated and forgotten, that has not yet been made good on. History’s potential for meaning does not depend only on those who have survived, the successful, the one who made it. “Meaning” simply cannot be a category reserved to the victors.\textsuperscript{118}

The fact that nothing in the present—no amount of joy or liberation—can adequately compensate for what the dead suffered, throws into stark relief that fact that redemption—unlike utopian theories of emancipation—is not something that humans can complete alone.

For, if they do so at all, they [utopian theories] refer this universal justice only to future generations, but not to the dead, not to the victims of history, who, after all, belong just as much to the universal solidaristic community of humanity. Yet to forget and repress this question about the life of the dead is profoundly inhuman. For it means forgetting and repressing past suffering and surrendering ourselves without protest to the meaninglessness of this suffering. In the final analysis not even the good fortune of the descendents can make up for the sufferings of the parents, and no amount of social progress can reconcile the injustice that the dead experienced. If we submit too long to the meaninglessness of death, and to indifference toward the dead, then in the end we will have only banal promises to offer the living.\textsuperscript{119}

Only God, interrupting time and history in a way never experienced before, can set right all wrongs of the past, in the future. This is the apocalyptic sense of time that Metz endorses in place of evolutionary time. In identifying what has happened and is happening that threatens the subjectivity of all before God we become aware, not of how the future will be, but what it must not be. “The essential dynamism of history is the

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 109.

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 83. Metz is here quoting from a synod document promulgated by the West German Bishops Conference, \textit{Unsere Hoffnung} I, 3. See also page 123.
memory of suffering as a negative awareness of the freedom that is to come, and as a stimulus to act within the horizon of this history in such a way as to overcome suffering.”

But how does one stay focused on the expectation of something new, interrupting everything we have known before? For Metz, this focus is brought about by keeping ever before us the memories of suffering. Suffering has an authority unlike any other because it is itself disruptive: it interrupts the victorious account of history and a triumphalistic memory of continuous progress, providing grounds for criticism. There is something about suffering—particularly the unjust sort that crushes one’s humanity by threatening one’s subjectivity—which cries out from the dust for a response. All of us are tied together by this history. “It inspires us to a new form of solidarity, of responsibility for the most distant stranger, since the history of suffering unites all men and women like a ‘second nature’….it will not allow any peace or any freedom at the price of repressing the histories of suffering of other peoples and groups.”

If they are to preserve their power, memories of suffering cannot be generalized, but must remain specific—yet not privatized, as in something interior that does not function or have claim beyond one’s internal reflections. They must be public insofar as these memories influence decisions and actions in the world. Who suffered and why, as well as who inflicted the suffering, matters in making public change. It is

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120 Ibid., 104.

121 Ibid., 101-02. “Political consciousness ex memoria passionis, political action from the remembrance of humankind’s history of suffering: this could suggest an understanding of politics out of which new possibilities and new criteria for getting control over technological and economic processes might arise….Remembering suffering compels us to look upon the public theatrum mundi not only from the perspective of the ones who have made it and arrived, but also the vanquished and the victims….”

122 Ibid.
unacceptable to cloak the guilt of the victors by recognizing the fact that all people suffer. “The social and political power of the rich and of the rulers must always allow the question to be posed to it concerning the extent to which it itself is causing suffering. It cannot dispense itself from giving an account of this by appealing to the suffering that the rich and powerful themselves experience.”123 Not all suffering is alike. Some we inflict on ourselves, some is the product of finitude, and some is productive of growth and learning. But one type is absolutely opposed to all people becoming subjects before God.124 This is meaningless, radical suffering, which cannot be glorified.

What I have in mind here is that suffering which makes people fall dumb in “worldly grief”…This is a suffering that so breaks people down, so disfigures them, that it is as if they were ‘the son of no man.’…[It is] a situation of suffering that has collectively overshadowed whole peoples or groups….This history of suffering of the people…cannot be instrumentalized, not even in the interest of religion. Only cynics can interpret it as something noble and virtuous; it leads people to self-rejection and self-hatred. There is a suffering that forces whole peoples to lead a life without any affirmation, in which they can seek out affirmation at best in a bottle, and a simulated sense of identity. This suffering is not a remembering of God. There isn’t any remembering at all, and thus no hope either.125

This is the kind of suffering Metz recalls seeing and experiencing in his youth: a wordless cry unto God. Radical suffering often ends in death or a disfigurement so great that no reparation can be made afterward. Although their stories can be remembered and retold,

123 Ibid., 110.

124 Ibid. 118-119. Metz here, as well as in his later work in the 1990s, returns to suffering as a broad category that then includes suffering as a product of finitude, guilt, growth, as well as sin. See also Johann Baptist Metz, “Theology as Theodicy?,” in A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, (1990) 1998). 62. Our “suffering unto God” and the questions of “Why, God, these fearful detours on the way to salvation, why the suffering of the innocent, why sin?” (the questions asked by Romano Guardini on his deathbed) deal with all people and all suffering in their most ordinary and all-too-often occurrences. See ———, “Karl Rahner's Struggle for the Theological Dignity of Humankind," in A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, (1994)1998). 117-118.

125 Metz, Faith in History and Society, 135.
even inspiring the living to reject institutions and structures that maimed them, the victims cannot be compensated or healed this side of the eschaton.

1.3.2.2 Memory of Christ’s Life, Passion, and Resurrection as Paradigm

Although Metz starts his essays in *Faith in History and Society* from a very concrete, historical, political, and anthropological perspective, the argument he wishes to make for the memory of suffering as a form of solidarity with the dead ultimately cannot be persuasive without a concrete memory to ground it all. General memories, for example that “people suffer in war,” do not preserve the gritty details of Auschwitz, the actual horror that injustice and violence create. General memories or stories allow people to forget and cease to feel the appropriate outrage necessary to illicit a change in action. They also provide no genuine consolation because the details of what people (and God) did in a situation of suffering do not endure in a generalized memory. Conversion and discipleship require specific instructions or exhortations. Furthermore, a grounding memory needs to be something that not only reminds us of what was and is wrong, but of why and how we can bother hoping for anything else. This is why Metz’s entire project rests upon the *memoria passionis, mortis, et resurrectionis Jesu Christi*.  

This specifically Christian memory, which lies implicitly behind the whole work, is made explicit as both the ground for and the example of how memory, via narrative, creates

\[126\] Ibid., 107. Metz also asserts that this formulation is also how Christian faith articulates itself.

\[127\] This is not meant to imply that the *memoria passionis* is only an example, one memory of suffering among others. Metz definitely does not want to reduce Jesus to only a moral exemplar. This memory is a foundational, grounding memory, in which all other memories of suffering partake in some sense. The Jesus event—life, death, and resurrection—are paradigmatic because they provide the memory of transformation that has interrupted history from outside. Nothing like it has occurred before or since—
an efficacious solidarity among the victims of history, the storytellers, and those who hear the story and allow themselves to be transformed by it.

First, Jesus’ suffering was radical and unjust suffering. It marked what seemed to the world a gruesome ending to one more Jewish radical. In and of itself, this story resembles that of so many other nameless victims who are remembered by names such as Auschwitz and Ayacucho. It is precisely that God, in Jesus, “declared himself to be on the side of the invisible ones, those who are rejected and oppressed,” by sharing an ignominious death that the memory of his resurrection “holds a particular anticipation of the future as a future for the hopeless, the shattered and oppressed.”128 Since it is this context that matters, the particularity of Jesus’ suffering is vitally important—not just because of who he was—but also because the narrative memory ceases to have the power to challenge in direct proportion to the introduction of generalities.

With its message of redemption Christianity is not offering up some meaning, however washed out, for the unexpiated suffering of the past; rather it is telling a particular history of freedom: a freedom based on the redeeming liberation by God in the Cross of Jesus. It is no accident that this history of liberation includes a descensus ad inferos, in which we are in no way dealing with some mythological topos that, for not belonging to what Jesus was really about, would have to be eliminated right from the start….This is how all the apocalyptic sting has been drawn from Christian soteriology; it is also how the decisive meaning it gives to freedom is obscured. This descensus, this “being-with (of the crucified) with the dead” indicates the original liberative dynamism of the history of redemption….129

Clearly then, it is very important that Jesus’ suffering not be passed over in getting to the resurrection. Jesus’ suffering is the part of his story of which people in history still share

although such an interruption is what we hope for eschatologically (the Second Coming). That there is something new is held out in hope because of what we remember God doing in and through Jesus Christ.

128 Metz, Faith in History and Society, 89. This is how the memoria passionis functions as a ground, not just an example, for all memory of suffering and hope for victims.

129 Ibid., 124. Here is the start of talk about Christian freedom grounded in the memory of Jesus Christ.
the most experience. The promise of the resurrection is not enough to obscure what these people have, and still are, suffering. Although Christians may affirm that redemption, as an invitation, has been extended to all already, and perhaps even that we believe the outcome of God’s justice interrupting the status quo is assured, the particular histories of catastrophe must not be eclipsed. There is still the openness of history: things are not settled, the end is not yet attained.\textsuperscript{130} We must remain disturbed by individual histories of suffering that still await the resurrection that Jesus promises in the face of the dissolution of the person in death—disturbed enough to act now.

In the narrative conception of Christian salvation, history and histories, the one history of salvation and multiple histories of salvation and catastrophe, emerge together and are immanent to each other, without one truncating the other. The individual histories are not devoid of a perspective on the history of salvation that has been narrated in advance; but the latter can very much take the individual histories into itself. For the narrated (and remembered) universality and definitiveness of the meaning of history does not strip the meaning from the historical praxis or resistance and render catastrophe superfluous as something that can be compensated for transcendentally or in terms of universal history. Rather, it makes that resistance indispensable.\textsuperscript{131}

Unlike his tone in \textit{Theology of the World}, Metz here affirms a greater sense of uncertainty. The end of history cannot be assumed and treated as if it is already present, despite our present actions. History is too full of horror to just overrule the possibility of failure. The eschatological proviso is changed. Not only can no system or structure claim to be synonymous with the Reign of God, but the coming of that Reign is not a foregone conclusion. The way things are going, there is no reason to think that the Reign of God will just naturally develop. We are not automatically on the right track. What we need is an interruption, something totally different than the trajectory history has had up to and

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 90.

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 154.
including this point. Our discipleship and action now, with an eye to the past and hoped for future, is absolutely necessary. “The universality of the offer of salvation in Christianity…has the character of an ‘invitation.’ The inviting Logos of Christianity does not compel; it has a primarily narrative structure with a practical-liberating intention.”

We must realize that God, in Jesus Christ, has freed us to act to help bring about God’s Reign.

But Jesus’ resurrection is in no way insignificant because of this responsibility of ours in history. It is, in fact, the expression of exactly what Christians hope for the dead and the living. Jesus—although dead, crushed, and humiliated—does not remain so. God restores to him the fullness of life, and then some. In a way we cannot yet imagine or understand, everything will be made right. Jesus remains a true subject before God. This memory, unlike the other specific memories of suffering and death, are related to “a historically unique event, an event in which it [the Christian community] believes that the eschatological redemption and liberation of human beings has irrevocably dawned.”

Without this particular memory of Jesus—his life of compassion, resistance on behalf of the poor, unjust death, and ultimate vindication—one is left hoping for an interruption without any real hope because there has been no glimpse of such an interruption with accompanying redemption before. We hope not just for a radical change, but a change

132 Ibid.
133 Ibid., 172.
134 Ibid., 165. By this I mean to imply a distinction between a Christian apocalyptic hope for interruption and the post-modern hope for something new, without there being any real content or expectation. “It is not only essential that we be concerned about the overworked ‘specifically Christian element,’ about that Christian identity that at every opportunity has us insist upon the salvation already given in Christ…’ We keep on insisting that we are vigilant and waiting for the master. But if we were
that brings consolation and healing to the victims and forgiveness to sinners. The Christian community then is principally a community that remembers a specific event, in a narrative form, out of a solidaristic hope for the living and the dead.

1.3.2.3 Memory as Liturgical, Communal, and Transformative

Metz makes very clear that dangerous memories can only be efficacious in a public format. The tendency to privatize memory, mourning, and experiences of catastrophe is a symptom of the hegemony of the exchange system and the bourgeois subject at its worst. Private means optional or unimportant in modern western societies. Instead, dangerous memories in a public/communal setting—specifically Jesus’ story—“break through the magical spell cast by the ruling consciousness. It lays claim to history as more than a screen against which we project our present interests. It mobilizes tradition as a dangerous tradition and thus a liberating power….‖

These subversive and public memories take the form of stories which, passed from generation to generation, serve to link Christians throughout time and geographic location. The past is made present in a very real way in the commemorative retelling of our common story—the memoria passionis, mortis, et resurrectionis Jesu Christi—and the millions of stories that echo innocent suffering, premature death, and hope for vindication by God throughout the ages.\(^\text{136}\)

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\(^{135}\) Ibid., 89.

\(^{136}\) Ibid., 141. Metz includes the memory-narratives of the people in theology and the vocation of the church as well as Jesus’ specific story. “In the final analysis it is critical theology that is at issue here too. But its critical concern ought to be guided by the insight that the symbols, narratives, and collective
The Christian church’s main function is to be the public bearer of this dangerous memory of Jesus. Metz writes:

In my view Christian faith has to be seen as this kind of subversive memoria. The church gives it a public form, so to speak. In this sense, for example, the church’s doctrines and creedal formulas would have to be understood as formulas in which this challenging remembrance is spelled out publicly. The criterion for their being authentically Christian would thus be the liberating but also redemptive dangerousness with which they introduce the remembered freedom of Jesus into contemporary society, its forms of consciousness, and its life praxis.137

So the narrative memory of Jesus does not just leave people the same as they were before they heard it. It does not affirm the status quo, but makes those who listen responsible by commissioning them to go and proclaim the gospel with their lives: lived discipleship is the true manifestation of Christian belief.138 “Now the church is certainly not a people in the natural sense, but rather a people called forth, a new people that has become the subject of a new, unheard-of history of God with human beings, and that finds its identity in narrating this salvation history and trying to live from it.”139

The church then is fundamentally characterized as a community of memory—dangerous memory—that tells Jesus’ story and expresses hope for all people through words and actions.140 The way it does this, first and foremost, is through speaking into memories of the people in the church are indispensable for a theology that does not want to fall into a bottomless pit.”

137 Ibid., 89. This is also restated at the start of his chapter on Memory, 169.

138 Ibid., 153-54.

139 Ibid., 131.

140 Ibid., 88. “The church must understand itself and prove itself as the public witness and bearer of a dangerous memory of freedom in the ‘systems’ of our emancipatory society. This thesis is based on memoria as the fundamental way that Christian faith is expressed…..”

Metz acknowledges that the church has not always faithfully done this (99). “Has Christianity failed historically? Has the church as the institutional carrier of this Christianity and its memoria abdicated historically?...All the judgments ‘from outside,’ and many intra muros as well, seem to suggest this….It is looked upon as an antiemancipatory remainder—with a mere feigned interest in freedom, in men and
being the freedom promised in Christ—that is, telling the story of how God promises life where there appears to be only death. We are free to act publicly to promote justice and end oppression because we have been promised that our suffering and death—the ultimate and inevitable result of a life of resistance to the powerful—is not the final word. We are not lost, but have an outstanding future because of what God has done in Jesus Christ. Such transformative liberation of members of the church happens by the communal narration of stories that engage one in memory, and by participating in ritual actions that engage the listeners in the telling. To demonstrate the power of a faithful retelling of a narrative memory, Metz relates the story of a rabbi told by Martin Buber. In it an old rabbi, who was crippled and unable to walk, regains his powers of movement by telling the story of how he remembers another rabbi leaping about when preaching. The memory, told in story, transformed the one telling it by making certain actions possible (i.e. he was able to walk again)—actions that had not been possible before.\textsuperscript{141} This demonstrates that, in a sacramental way, commemorative narratives effect what they signify. “The text from Buber points to the inner connection between narrative and sacrament, to narrative as \textit{signum efficax}, as it were, and conversely, to the fundamentally narrative character of sacrament as salvific sign.”\textsuperscript{142} They make us into the people who

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women ‘walking upright.’ It is thought of as a narcotic in painful and unjust conditions….Are all of these only modern clichés, or one-sided views that are bound to arise….we too easily overlook a deep root of the critical attitudes toward the church that are so prevalent today: \textit{people’s historical experience with the church.} We can overlook their memory of being disillusioned by this church, the awareness of generations that knows about the church’s dubious alliances with the powerful, and about the occasionally contradictory impression made by a church that is no longer about faith but about replicating itself. This memory has to be taken into account; it is more deeply embedded than most would like to admit….And it is not a problem that can be solved by ‘better’ or ‘more subtle’ interpretation of the church’s past, but rather only by the ‘proof of the spirit and of power’ of a new praxis, by painful change.”

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 189.

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 189-90.
can act to change unjust structures and oppose the destruction of the human subject.\textsuperscript{143} It also means that the church, and Christianity itself, must become unavoidably “political.”\textsuperscript{144}

If the church is a community of specific and particular memories, then tradition is the term most appropriate to describe how this memory is historical, public, and communal.\textsuperscript{145} In order to introduce people to Jesus’ story, create new storytellers, and oppose the individual’s loss of memory in modern society, the central dangerous memory of Jesus is given a more or less consistent form in creeds and doctrines. “They [biblical traditions and creedal formulas] are formulas in terms of which the claims made by past promises and past hopes for some future life, as well as by the terrors experienced in the past, are called back to memory, so as to break the spell of the dominant consciousness in its instrumentality….\textsuperscript{146} Of course this tradition, by virtue of its content, is not conservative but subversive. Tradition provides a way constantly to remember the promises and hopes of the past in a way that can influence life now—an eschatological memory of hopes and possibilities still to be fulfilled for both the living and the dead. The rites of initiation and participation in the Christian church are the ways that one

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 194. “Confronted with the human history of suffering, faith in the redemption of history and of the ‘new human being’ is passed on in dangerous-liberating stories, under the impact of which those hearers who are affected by them become ‘doers of the word.’’

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 113. “What the memory of suffering brings into political life, on the other hand, is a new moral imagination with regard to others’ suffering, which should bear fruit in an excessive, uncalculated partiality for the weak and voiceless. But this is the way that the Christian memoria passionis can become a ferment for that new political life for which we are searching, so that we might have a human future”

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 181. “This kind of theological usage sees in memory and its social cognate, tradition, a mediation between the absolute of divine revelation and the one who received it.”

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 183.
“binds herself or himself to these memories in a life-determining way.”\textsuperscript{147} This commitment binds one to all the others who have accepted, do accept, and will accept the challenge of discipleship.

It is, perhaps, this solidaristic aspect of memory identified by Metz that demands most that dangerous memories be communal—specifically, for Metz, in an institutional church. \textsuperscript{148} “It [solidarity] expands to include even those who have been conquered and run over ‘in the long run,’ indeed, even those who have by definition been left behind in the onward march of progress: the dead. The theological category of solidarity shows its mystical-political value as a solidarity that remembers the dead.”\textsuperscript{149} Because every individual is finite, and will eventually face death, the only memory that can last is one that is shared by a community. It is the memory that bridges the gap between the living and the dead, creating solidarity. The Christian church has functioned in this way. Indeed, it is one of its primary vocations.

1.3.3 Memory, Narrative, and Solidarity

It is fitting to end this section in the same way that Metz finishes \textit{Faith in History and Society}—with a close examination of the meaning of and interrelationships between memory, narrative, and solidarity. Each one has its own chapter, and they serve to

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 182.

\textsuperscript{148} Schuster and Boschert-Kimmig, \textit{Hope against Hope}. 7. “But as far as the church goes: I need the church. Not because the Pope and the bishops want it, but because without the church a millennium-old hope would have been forgotten long ago, a hope that is so sweeping and so improbable that no one can hope it for himself or herself alone.” See also Johann Baptist Metz, "Religion and Politics on Modernity’s Ground," in \textit{A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity} (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, (1995)1998). 147-149.

\textsuperscript{149} Metz, \textit{Faith in History and Society}, 210.
crystallize Metz’s overall contribution to a theology of memory to this point. It is not an over-exaggeration to state that these three are much like the Trinity for Metz: they are distinct but never separate, interpenetrating one another so that one may speak of them acting in only one form, but in reality they are always found working together.150 “Only together are memory, narrative, and solidarity the basic categories for a practical fundamental theology. Memory and narrative do not have their practical character without solidarity and solidarity does not attain its specific cognitive import without memory and narrative.”151 In his later work, memory clearly is discussed more explicitly than either of the other two. Yet the end of this work makes clear that the other two are always operative and included in what Met claims about memory.

1.3.3.1 A Brief History of the Notion of Memory

Metz relates how “memory” has had many historical formulations—although it is important to note that he does not yet say anything about the uniquely Jewish contribution to memory, which he will include in a later stage of his thought. From the Greeks—who understood truth fundamentally as a remembering, a recapitulation of knowledge one already possessed or that already exists in a preconscious form that can be called up in one’s mind—to Augustine—who considered memory a psychological faculty above others, from which one can select life incidents to reflect upon in light of God’s presence—memory has always had a significant role in philosophical and theological

150 Using this analogy reminded me of Augustine and his reflections on memory, will, and understanding.

151 Metz, Faith in History and Society, 167.
thought.\textsuperscript{152} Hegel, however, provides the first explicit formulation of memory as protest, since he acknowledges the historically conditioned nature of memory:

It [memory] does not remember truth in sheer abstraction from historical conditions. Rather, it forces philosophy to think of truth in terms of the historical stage of its mediation…it also becomes a critical memory (of the present), at least to the extent that it is ‘sensitive to every way of falling short of the presently achieved status quo.’\textsuperscript{153}

But this notion of memory does not provide a critique of the present, which is assumed to be better and more advanced than the past, much less carry with it disturbing questions from the past about how things are now.

The Frankfurt School, in developing the method of critical theory, pushes memory as criticism from being primarily critical of the past to a criticism of the present. Specifically, it demonstrates “a critical usage of memory in the problematic of how practical reason is constituted.”\textsuperscript{154} The contributions and influence of the Frankfurt School on Metz’s formulation of theological dangerous memory is the subject of chapter two, but it is clear at this point that critical memory as a critique of ideology, a remembrance of the history of suffering, and an impetus for imagining a present (and a future) different from the \textit{status quo} do have their roots in the writings of thinkers like Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, and Theodor Adorno.\textsuperscript{155}

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\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 171-73.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 173-74.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 177.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid. “This understanding of critical Enlightenment is also finding corroboration in those contemporary theories of enlightenment which are not primarily indebted to the tradition of hermeneutical philosophies of history. This means above all in the relevant theories and positions of the Frankfurt School….This is evident (and in a pathbreaking way) as early as in Benjamin’s ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History.’ In them the memory of the world’s history of suffering becomes the medium for the actualization of reason and freedom which defends itself critically from an idea of the undialectical
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Metz embraces their conclusion that reason becomes practical when a specific memory of the past, that of freedom, is made present again in conjunction with the memory of suffering. The memory then becomes an orientation to action.

The concept of memory that comes to light against the backdrop of the problematic that has been sketched out thus far grasps the process of remembering as the medium for reason to become practical as freedom. In this fundamental definition memory is the memory of freedom that becomes an orientation to action as a memory of suffering (a). Its narrative structure (b) leads it to critique a technology of history devoid of memory, as well as to new encounters with the traditions of anamnesis and of Christian memoria (c).

“Remembering as the medium for reason to become practical as freedom” means that remembering specific instances of suffering and resistance frees those who remember from thinking that freedom only applies to those who are powerful and dominant. There is a freedom that comes from being unwilling to surrender or capitulate to oppression. One can make decisions and reason based upon motivations and expectations of the future not entirely defined by the exchange system or the logic of the victors. We remember that things can be other than they are and are freed to pursue a different trajectory. The practical, action orientation of this freedom, because it is always in the presence of the memory of suffering, takes a form that rejects domination. It does not want to replicate the history of suffering (although Metz earlier asserts that it cannot help but replicate the system it opposes if it remains at the level of emancipation—without God and the eschatological proviso). This is the authority of suffering: it has the power to

‘progress of reason’ that is just as unreflective as it is banal. The insight surfaces in Marcuse (first of all in a psycho-analytic frame of reference) that ‘the rediscovered past…supplies us with critical standards’; the insight that ‘the restoration of the power of memory… [goes] hand in hand with the restoration of the cognitive content of the imagination,’ and thus ‘the recherché du temps perdu… [becomes] a vehicle for liberation.”

156 Ibid., 179.
direct practical reason, as freedom. Freedom without the dangerous memory of suffering is not an impetus for change.

Respect for ‘the suffering that has accumulated historically’ makes reason “open to learn” in a way that cannot explicitly happen in the abstract counterposing of “knowledge and authority,”…In this “openness to learn,” history—as a remembered history of suffering—wins the form of a ‘dangerous tradition,’ which cannot be silenced or “superceded”…157

Only in more recent times has memory been impoverished to mean a technological storehouse of (computer-like) historical data, in which everything is saved exactly as it was, and nothing is ever lost. There is nothing evaluative or reflective about memory in this sense because history is kept separate from the idea of who we are now: it just is, in a neutral sense (which turns out not to be neutral at all because data memory does nothing to protect the subject, and is in fact the tool of inhuman forgetting). Both the authority of suffering and the practical reason of freedom are lost here.

Metz takes the development of memory a step further, in the direction of Christian belief and theology. His central innovation is linking the memory of suffering, and its ability to direct the practical reason of freedom now, with hope not just for changing structures in the present, but providing hope for the outstanding potential of those who died before their time. The specificity of memory, as narrative, is not only necessary to resist universal claims and systems of domination, but also because it preserves the identity of those who suffered and died without justice. Their names, their stories, their lives are not just cautionary tales to keep similar catastrophes from happening again. They are, rather, the remnants of those people’s subjectivity—which

157 Ibid., 180.
continues before God—which will someday (Christians believe) be actualized to their fullest.

1.3.3.2 Narrative as the Structure and Soul of Dangerous Memory

The thinkers of the Frankfurt School, in their development of memory as critical, make it clear that such memories must take the form of stories. Narratives should always be specific. In the context of Christian theology, which “has to do with underivable and original experiences” like creation and covenant with God, narrative is the only way to speak because the event being remembered goes beyond what argument or more “scientific” forms of presenting material can afford.158

These experiences, as dangerous memories, are being narrated in the first place in order to convey some practical meaning to the present. “What becomes visible…is the way narrative presses toward the practical communication of the experiences amassed in it, as well as the way that the narrator and the one listening are interrelated to one another in a liberating way in the experience being narrated.”159 To narrate a past experience is, in some sense, to relive the experience one’s self, making it present again. “The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale.”160 It is due to solidarity that, when one has shared in the past experience via a narrative remembrance, the listener

158 Ibid., 187.

159 Ibid., 188. Metz also quotes Walter Benjamin: “An orientation toward practical interests is characteristic of many born storytellers…All this points to the nature of every real story. It contains, openly or covertly, something useful. The usefulness may, in one case, consist in a moral; in another, in some practical advice; in a third, in a proverb or maxim.” Metz is quoting from Walter Benjamin, Illuminations, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 86-87.

160 Benjamin, Illuminations, 87.
feels compelled to make the questions and protests of the people in the story his or her own. It is not ambiguous that the narrative has a point or an agenda—it admittedly is advancing a position based on the experience remembered. In the case of the memory of suffering, these narratives serve to evoke a sense of outrage at injustice and inspire a praxis that keeps such atrocities from happening again. Narratives can also provide hope through retelling stories containing fragmentary experiences of salvation. In this way, a specific narrative can preserve the Christian conviction that salvation has been won in Christ without forgetting the immense suffering of history that still needs a response from us.

In my view, introducing a notion of remembering salvation narratively…offers for the first time the possibility of giving expression to salvation in history—history that is always a history of suffering—without mutual truncation. The category of remembering narratively does not allow the theme of redemption to fall back into the ahistoricality of pure paradox;…narrative operates on a ‘small scale’ and unpretentiously.

It is, in fact, the structure of narrative itself that allows it to break the bonds of the thinking, reasoning, and argumentation of the victors. Those who tell the stories, and are the subjects of them, are the “little ones,” the poor, and endangered of history. Narratives allow them to speak for themselves.

For a reason that holds on to this respect [for the history of suffering], history takes the form of a tradition whose continuation happens “narratively” in “dangerous stories”—never in a purely argumentative way. Such stories break

161 Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 189. Regarding Buber’s story of the dancing rabbi who is healed in telling the story, Metz writes: “In our context, there are two features of this text that are especially remarkable. First, it offers a successful instance (for the critical ears of our postnarrative age) of how narrative didactics can be connected with a narrative self-enlightenment concerning the interest that underlies the narrative process. Here the narrative is not unaware (in a way that would make it suspect of being ideology) of the interest that is guiding it. It puts that very interest to the fore and ‘tests’ it in the narrative process.”

162 Ibid., 193.
through the spell of a total reconstruction of history by abstract-instrumental reason.\textsuperscript{163}

So narratives are accessible to everyone, telling the stories of everyday life. They do not exclude anyone as a subject because of a lack of “rationality” or the ability to reciprocate in a way found acceptable by the exchange system.

1.3.3.3 Solidarity with the Suffering Critical to Christian Memorative Praxis

Solidarity is the third member of Metz’s Trinity, which seems to be where he branches away the most from his philosophical interlocutors. While they remain atheist, or at best secular agnostics, Metz is free to appeal to God and hope beyond what is tangible here and now. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Metz’s staunch insistence that the living must not give up on the dead. They cannot be offered up as the necessary, albeit unfortunate, sacrifice for a better world now or in the future. True solidarity means that the living must really offer something to the dead that is worthy of their humanity and subjectivity before God. So Christian solidarity is “not only a solidarity ‘looking forward’ to coming generations, but also a solidarity ‘looking backward’ in order to underscore what is distinctive about being human and about the humanitarian reserves of Christianity….”\textsuperscript{164}

Since it is impossible for humans alone to free the dead from their historical oppression and suffering, this definition of solidarity likewise preserves the “eschatological proviso,” which states that only God can fully bring about the redemption of all, who will then be fully subjects before God and others. It can do this without

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 196.

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., 208.
neglecting the impetus to responsible and transformative praxis now, making it possible for Christian memorial praxis to avoid duplicating the unjust structures it opposes or vilifying the opponents so as to blame them for human failure to achieve perfect salvation in our own right.

Ultimately, solidarity is as vital as the other two components of Metz’s theology in *Faith in History and Society* in holding everything else together. All three must be present together. It makes no sense to bother remembering through stories if one’s philosophy is entirely self-centered (as the exchange system and bourgeois subject seems to be) because nothing else matters. It is easy to see how such a narcissistic focus quickly becomes a form of privatization in which there is no universally and publicly important goals that spring from one’s concern for others. Metz’s fundamental political theology, being concerned primarily with “the public” and society, depends on solidarity. As Metz moves into the third stage of his theological thought, this solidarity—ensconced in particular dangerous narrative memories of suffering—becomes concretized in Christianity’s relationship with the Jews and the inhumanity of Auschwitz.

1.3.4 Gleanings from this Stage

- “Dangerous memories” as memories of suffering that go against the grain of the “history of the victors” appear for the first time, inspired by the influence of the Frankfurt School. Metz becomes much more critical of modernity, the Enlightenment, and the general trajectory in which history is going on its own.

- Dangerous memories threaten the *status quo* because they remind people that things can and should be other than they are because the current system (whether capitalist or communist) is unjust. They help us remember radical breaks in a smoothed out account of time and history as rational or inherently progressive.

- Dangerous memories require specific memories, the paradigmatic one for Christians being that of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. This memory reminds
us of our freedom to resist, even to the point of death, evil in the world. It also reminds us of God’s promise of life and new creation in the face of historical failure, suffering, and death.

- Dangerous memories of suffering help preserve the subjectivity of those who are non-subjects in the history of the victors. The memory of the dead especially is disruptive because the dead have no value in the exchange system of modern technological societies. Affirming them as subjects before God is one of the central projects of Christian theology.

- Dangerous memories are communal because they cannot be preserved adequately by any one, finite, individual. The church’s main mission is to be the bearer of the dangerous memory of Jesus Christ in the world and foster the transformative action of discipleship that comes forth from encounter with those memories.

- Metz shifts from the incarnation and creation as the focus of his theology to apocalyptic eschatology.

1.4 Essays on Specific Narrative-Memories of Suffering

The next epoch of Metz’s writings takes the insights about memory he has already begun to develop in Faith in History and Society and places them in very specific dialogue with concrete, historical instances of suffering. Metz himself, in the preface to a reprinting of select important essays of his—Faith and the Future: Essays on Theology, Solidarity, and Modernity—identifies these interlocutors as threefold.

There are three challenges and crises that this political theology has sought above all to confront. All three center on the question of suffering; they are in some manner “theodicy-intensive.” I have grasped the conversation with Marxism as a coming to grips with the dramatization, in terms of social critique, of the question of suffering. Auschwitz, the Holocaust, or better, the Shoah, has thrust me more and more relentlessly before the question of why we hear and see so little of this horrible suffering—or, for that matter, of any of the story of the world’s suffering—in our Christian theology. And the inclusion of the non-European world, especially the hitherto so-called “third world,” into the purview of theology has shifted social suffering and misery, as well as the suffering of the (culturally, racially, ethnically) “other,” quite into the radius of theology’s logos.
Most of the selections published here are readily identifiable in terms of this “theodicy triad.” 165

The essays themselves span the period between 1972 and 1993, and highlight the need for memories that disturb and disrupt the accounts of history (which also control the present) told by the powerful and the conquerors. These new interlocutors appear alongside previous themes, as is apparent in the first essay, “Future in the Memory of Suffering.”

Memory, which Metz stipulates as the specific memoria passionis of the crucified Lord, must be “a dangerous memory of freedom in the social systems of our technological civilization.” 166 It is the memory of a future freedom guaranteed by Christ’s suffering and resurrection. The dead victims’ futures and ours are preserved in the face of overwhelming and massive suffering because Christ too was there and yet still lives. “We remember the future of our freedom in the memory of his suffering—this is an eschatological statement that cannot be…generally verified.” 167 We are free to act boldly and even to suffer if necessary because our future is caught up in Christ’s. “The Christian memoria passionis articulates itself as a memory that makes one free to suffer from the sufferings of others, and to respect the prophetic witness of others’ suffering.” 168

One of the greatest problems, however, is that the messianic expectation of a future that is radically different from the present has begun to fade in modern (and even perhaps post-modern?) industrialized societies. Being a tool of such domestication by the status quo is exactly the criticism he levels against “bourgeois” religion in his 1979


166 Johann-Baptist Metz, "Future in the Memory of Suffering," in Faith and the Future: Essays on Theology, Solidarity, and Modernity, ed. Concilium Foundation (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995 (1972)). 7. This is not new to this period of Metz’s thought. It can be found in Faith in History and Society.

167 Ibid. 10. This is part of what he and others term the “eschatological proviso of God.”

168 Ibid. 11.
article “Messianic or ‘Bourgeois’ Religion?” Christian hope becomes merely an
affirmation and assurance of what subjects in an industrialized nation already have come
to expect, which mostly entails a continuation of what has been, but now into an infinite
future. “In this way, the messianic future frequently becomes a ritual rounding off and
transfiguration of a ‘bourgeois’ future already worked out and—as death approaches—an
extension of this ‘bourgeois’ future and the ego which that [sic] thrives in it into the
transcendence of eternity.”169 There is little to no room for stories or memories of the
victimized here because what these subjects expect is set by the official account given by
those who are victorious. “There really are no dangers, no contradictions, no downfalls
left,” in such a safe and closed system writes Metz.170 But this perversion must not be
confused with actual messianic future expectation. Just as pacifying memories differ from
dangerous memories, so too does hope for a future of more-of-the-same differ from
genuine messianic expectation. The true expectation ought to be something that disrupts,
interrupts, and disturbs the complacency and assumed control that middle class, white,
western people have. Metz also calls this effect “repentance…which drops like a bomb
on our complacent present.”171 Obviously then this expectation cannot remain a private
or solely inward thing. It needs to be manifest in action and readiness for change.

Metz then gets more specific about his criticisms and the possible solution
through repentance. For really the first time he focuses on the church in Latin America
concretely, commending it, since Medellín, for shifting from being “a Church that
ministers to the people to a Church of the people” in which “The suffering and oppressed

169———, “Messianic Or "Bourgeois" Religion?,” in Faith and the Future: Essays on Theology,
17.

170 Ibid. 19.

171 Ibid. 18.
people are finally becoming the masters of their history...."172 The appropriate response for Metz’s primary audience should be one of self-evaluation and critique. “The direct struggle of the poor and oppressed people there must be matched here by struggle and resistance against ourselves… We Christians in this country must live with the suspicion of being oppressors… The challenges of love… cannot be satisfied merely by the ‘sacrament’ of money....”173

The greater specificity of particular situations and examples seen in this essay continues in several other essays dealing directly with a concrete historical situation of suffering. In 1984 Metz published “Facing the Jews: Christian Theology after Auschwitz,” and followed that in 1992 with “1492—Through the Eyes of a European Theologian.” Here he emphasizes the subjectless way that many of history’s horrors are remembered. Groups become nameless and faceless placeholders that cease to really be remembered in any way that holds the present accountable. Dangerous memories must always remain specific.

We must be on our guard against all subjectless terminology, but most of all in the case of the Jews. Judaism, as such, has no face and no eyes that can be remembered. Judaism can again and again be interpreted down and objectified by Christianity—interpreted down and objectified as an outdated precursor of the history of Christianity.... For the sake of Auschwitz, they must be seen—the destroyed faces, the burned eyes, of whom we can only tell, that we can only remember, but that cannot be reconstructed in systemic concepts.174

Metz insists that the Christian theologian needs to be personally, politically, and historically located. He calls this learning to say “I” when doing theology. No longer, in the face of the results of our theology at Auschwitz, can we hide behind “situationless

172 Ibid. 25-26.
173 Ibid.
and subjectless systems—as privileged locations of theological truths….‖

To demonstrate this need for a shift Metz explains here is own background, which was already related at the beginning of this chapter. It is precisely this “struggle for remembrance” that Metz credits with the birth of “the so-called political theology” which simply refuses to worship, pray, or formulate itself “with our backs to Auschwitz” and other horrible suffering in human history. Interestingly, Metz identifies in this essay some of the thinkers—all of them Jewish—who have influenced his understanding of remembrance that undergirds his theology.

I learned the significance of remembrance and narration, if I understand them at all, mainly from Jews, believing or unbelieving Jews, not only from G. Scholem, but also from W. Benjamin; not only from M. Buber, but also from E Bloch; not only from F. Rosenzweig, but also from E Fromm; not only from N. Sachs, but also from Fr. Kafka.

Remembrance is, for Metz, inextricably linked to Judaism and the memorative way Christians speak about God and Jesus is directly attributable to our shared past.

Remembering and telling are, therefore, not just for entertainment; they are basic forms of Christian language about God….I think in present-day theology, Christianity’s indispensable Jewish legacy, which has a thoroughly historical way of thinking [and remembering] is overshadowed by its Hellenistic Greek legacy, which is more inclined towards an ahistorical dualism and, therefore, constantly threatening to transform Christianity into gnosticism, in which history is without salvation and salvation outside history.

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175 Ibid.

176 Ibid. 41.

177 Ibid. 46.

178 ———, “Theology in the Struggle for History and Society,” in Faith and the Future: Essays on Theology, Solidarity, and Modernity, ed. Concilium Foundation (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1995 (1988)). 52-53. He goes on to attribute the dualistic split between “natural” and “supernatural” history in Christian thought to this overshadowing by Greek thought. He also identifies as a trait of Greek thought the notion of the constant return of the same, time without real end or change. For more on this see ———, “Time without Finale: The Background to the Debate On “Resurrection or Reincarnation”,” in Faith and the Future: Essays on Theology, Solidarity, and Modernity, ed. Concilium Foundation (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1995 (1993)). 81.
It is this abandonment of “natural” or “secular” history to its own devices that has resulted in the Marxist critique that Christianity—and all religion in fact—is an opiate because this present world’s destiny and conditions are secondary (when accounted for at all) to what is “supernatural.” One can see how such a focus could result in a type of forgetfulness in the present of past sufferings, since all will be put right in the next world anyway, unless one stipulates (as Metz does) that the end is not as certain as some Christians have supposed. Here the apocalyptic eschatology that began to emerge in Faith in History and Society becomes operative once more. Our hope for a radical interruption by God relies on the same dangerous memory that demands conversion and discipleship right now. Metz negates any separation between the “sacred” and the “secular” (this is true right from the start, even in Theology of the World) and, by so doing, evades the classic Marxist critique. But he is no Marxist either. Metz simultaneously takes issue with the Marxist tendency to look at history, and the personal guilt identified therein, and shift the blame for all suffering and evil onto structures or caricatures of political opponents.

Denial of guilt is an attack on freedom, because the dignity of freedom includes the capacity for guilt….where moral guilt is denied as an original phenomenon; that is, denounced as false consciousness, mechanisms arise to make excuses for the sufferings and contradictions in life. We get self-defensive strategies for allegedly guiltless individuals. The historical responsibility of the person in history is irrationally halved, and the horror and dismay projected one-sidedly onto the historical opponent.179

So a dangerous memory of history is not just any memory, but it must revolve around the memory of the suffering victims and an acknowledgement of guilt on the part of human

subjects.\footnote{Metz, "Postidealism." 44. “European theology must reflect upon itself within the horizon of a history of guilt. Without surrendering to neurotic accusation, this history of guilt may not in any way be repressed….Nourished by the discipleship of the poor, homeless and obedient Jesus, there is a political spirituality with its preferential option for the poor.”} This guilt must not, however, result in paralysis but in increased solidarity with the poor and oppressed now.\footnote{Johann-Baptist Metz, "1492-- through the Eyes of a European Theologian," in Faith and the Future: Essays on Theology, Solidarity, and Modernity, ed. Concilium Foundation (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1995 (1992)). 66-67. “Finally, I kept seeing the faces of the Indians, faces shaped by the dark shadows of what is called the mysticism of the Andes; in any event, I, the European, would call it a kind of mysticism of mourning. There is constitutional mourning in the Andes….Will this mourning prove capable of being combined with our Western civilization? Or will we simply develop the Indians out of their mourning?...With the inability to mourn, there ultimately develops an inability to allow oneself to be comforted and to understand or experience any comfort other than mere postponement.”} The denial or forgetfulness of our personal and cultural (i.e. Eurocentric or North American) guilt is actually as insidious as lulling people into a false sense that everything will magically be fixed without effort. Metz’s main message of repentance and his audience—western, industrialized, modern and post-modern, white, middle-class, Christian people—need to see the faces and eyes of the men, women, and children who are this moment being swept up under a tide of technological and economic development that attempts to erase the culture-specific memories of their past colonization and the mourning that still is a daily part of their lives.\footnote{Metz is not glorifying guilt either. In his analysis of the Augustinian treatment of theodicy, which absolved God of all responsibility in favor of blaming human guilt for everything, Metz believes that an overemphasis on guilt in the past actually has caused the modern/postmodern rejection of all guilt. The new innocence and reliance on myth over actual memory is the current backlash against over-emphasizing human fault alone. See Johann-Baptist; J. Matthew Ashley Metz, “Suffering Unto God,” Critical Inquiry 20, no. 4 (Summer 1994). 616-618. Again reiterated in Johann-Baptist Metz, Memoria Passionis: Una Evocacion Provocadora En Una Sociedad Pluralista, trans. Jose Manuel Lozano Gotor, Presencia Teologica (Santander, Espana: Sal Terrae, 2007 (2006)). 25-27. This is a translation into Spanish of Metz’s original work ———, Memoria Passionis: Ein Provozierendes Gedachtnis in Pluralistischer Gesellschaft (Freiburg, Germany: Herder, 1996). I will be working with the translated version throughout the remainder of this dissertation.} The development has no time to develop. It destroys the time of human beings, who seem to be crushed between
premodern conditions of life and rule and postmodern technology.”183 We need to recognize the error inherent in the spirit of domination that has for too long accompanied western colonization.184 We must, in short, respect the “otherness” of these people as traces of God, both for their sakes and ours.185

In short, this period demonstrates Metz’s engagement with very specific memories of suffering, in keeping with his claim that all dangerous memories need to be particular and public. These include mainly memories of the Shoah and memories of the conquest of Latin America, as well as the continuing oppression there. The question of culture and respecting the other as other emerge more strongly than before. Metz also gets more autobiographical as he reflects on and discloses his youth and the memories of his friends’ deaths. Finally, Metz becomes more detailed in his analysis of Christian redemption versus emancipation and the role of repentance and conversion should play in right praxis.

1.5 Post-Cold War Theology, Anamnestic Reason, and Memoria Passionis

While this period overlaps somewhat with the preceding one, Metz’s interlocutors shift noticeably with the fall of communism in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The essays that reflect this are mostly contained in A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity.

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183 Ibid. 70.

184 Ibid. 69.

1.5.1 The Rise of Nietzsche

First, one notes that Marx, who had been Metz’s principle challenger and dialogue partner to this point, moves into the background and Friedrich Nietzsche ascends to be Metz’s main interlocutor (much more will be said about this at the end of the second chapter). Memory faces a direct challenge from Nietzsche, who maintains that forgetting is preferable, more salutary, and characteristic of truly free and strong people. As the grandfather of postmodernism, Nietzsche also advocates myth and the abandonment of values or morals—which, according to him, are only societal impositions of a slave mentality anyway. Finally, Nietzsche announces the death of both God and the human subject—two things that are obviously vital for Metz’s theology.

Metz attempts to respond to Nietzsche and his postmodern disciples by challenging the benefits that he attributes to myth, especially the myth of the “eternal return of the same.” Time without end, with nothing new or disturbing ever emerging, is the true horror because the world is full of suffering and injustice. Metz’s response is his emphasis on the apocalyptic-eschatological. “There is a fear…that nothing comes to

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186 Schuster and Boschert-Kimmig, *Hope against Hope*. 13. “In the last ten years it has been particularly important for me to confront Nietzsche and the transformation of metaphysics into psychology and aesthetics that is connected with him.”


188 Ibid. 34.


an end anymore, that there is no end at all, that everything is sucked into the swell of a faceless evolution that finally rolls over everything from behind…and, like death, makes everything equi-valent.”\textsuperscript{191} In contrast, “For the apocalyptic, God is the one who has not yet fully appeared, the still outstanding mystery of time. God is not seen as that which transcends time, but as the end…its saving interruption. For in the view of the apocalyptic, time appears first and foremost as a time of suffering.”\textsuperscript{192} Memory keeps us on edge, aware that things can be other than they are. Forgetfulness leads to the acceptance of what should be fundamentally unacceptable.

1.5.2 Turn to Judaism and Debates over Anamnestic Reason

Another shift, which really begins with his essay on the impact of Auschwitz on contemporary Christian theology, is that Metz turns to Judaism as an intellectual as well as spiritual source for Christianity. This happens in conjunction with a third shift, a more explicit conversation with the German philosopher, Jürgen Habermas, on the relationship and origins of memory and reason. This is actually a continuation of Metz’s dialogue with the Frankfurt School, but this time the discussion has changed dramatically.\textsuperscript{193} Habermas wants to make more universal claims than any of his predecessors and he enters into discussion with Metz because he affirms that his philosophical theory of

\textsuperscript{191} Metz, "Postidealist." 51.

\textsuperscript{192} Ibid.52.

\textsuperscript{193} Martin Jay, The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923-1950 (Boston, MA: Little Brown & Co., 1973). 298. Jürgen Habermas took over as head of the Institute for Social Research after the first generation of scholars retired (specifically Max Horkheimer). Much more will be said about this at the start of the third chapter. As a contemporary of Metz, the two of them have had much more direct conversations than the original members of the school had with Metz.
communicative reason is a more adequate way of making choices that lead to moral
public praxis in the face of massive human suffering than Metz’s candidate, anamnestic
reason.

These two shifts are evident in his most recent works (1990s and 2000s). Metz
has begun to focus more and more on the biblical and Jewish legacy that is part of the
specifically Christian memory of suffering—the memoria passionis—while maintaining
his earlier formulations of dangerous memory. The question, already mentioned in the
essays above, about the Hellenization of Christianity, resulting in a lack of real
expectation for anything new and a loss of the eschatological urgency for the question of
the suffering victims of history, comes to the foreground now. Metz denies the
dichotomous characterization that attributes to the Greeks alone intellectual contributions
to Christianity: the Hebrew tradition, he contends, contributes anamnestic reason. This
is

the reason that indwells biblical traditions…resists forgetfulness, even the
forgetfulness of the forgotten….being attentive to God means hearing the silence
of those who have disappeared. It does not relegate everything that has vanished
to existential insignificance. Knowing remains at root a form of missing…aims at
a culture sensitive to what is missing.

194 Metz, "Theodicy." 64-65.

195 Johann-Baptist Metz, "Anamnestic Reason: A Theologian's Remarks on the Crisis in the
Geisteswissenschaften," in Cultural-Political Interventions in the Unfinished Project of the Enlightenment,
ed. Thomas McCarthy Axel Honneth, Claus Offe, and Albrecht Wellmer (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press,
1992). 190. See also Johann Baptist Metz, "The Church after Auschwitz," in A Passion for God: The

196 Metz, "Suffering Unto God." 615. Metz reiterates this again in ———, Memoria Passionis: Una
Evocacion Provocadora En Una Sociedad Pluralista. 24. “la base anamnética de la razón perceptora del
mundo no degrada todo lo desaparecido a elementos carentes de significado existencial. Para dicha base
anamnética, el saber sigue siendo una forma de añoranza. Tal saber rememorador sigue la pista al olvido
del olvido y, de modo análogo a lo que ocurre con la prohibición veterotestamentaria de las imágenes, tiene
como objectiva la creación de la añoranza.”
It seems that anamnestic reason—a term chosen as a result of his dialogue with Habermas and his theory of communicative reason—is a term by which Metz means reason or intellection that is constantly haunted by history and refuses to speak or formulate answers without considering the victims of past suffering—an awareness “of what is missing.” In the realm of politics and public discourse, which Habermas contends should be reserved for a consensus form of reason (communicative reason), Metz maintains the awareness of the victims, the dead, and the past will qualify public discourse in a way that prevents reason from becoming purely procedural. Anamnestic memory sets the agenda and provides a paradigm for what, negatively speaking, is unworthy of humanity. “Anamnestic reason, therefore, is not primarily led by an a priori of communication and agreement, but by an a priori of suffering. This…orients political discourse in times of uncertainty. It becomes the criterion of a liberal politics in those cases where the purely procedural point of view does not suffice for arriving at a political decision.”

This awareness of suffering and its universal authority is what Metz insists is being lost in modern and postmodern cultures. We skip to answers too easily when the focus ought to be on formulating questions about justice for “the other” in ways that


198 Metz, “Religion and Politics on Modernity's Ground.” 142. Communicative reason and action come about as a result of the “ideal speech situation,” in which what is reasonable becomes apparent as whatever all people would agree upon if they were to engage in a free and open dialogue with one another, free from domination or coercion. See chapter 3 for much more discussion.

199 Ibid.

200 Ibid. 143.

prevent them from being forgotten. Reason is impoverished to facts or technological processes while myths (which focus on happy endings and answers—associated with Nietzsche and some postmodern thinkers) replace the necessary disturbance and interruption elicited by real dangerous memories.

The answers in theology, in the strict sense, do not really have the form of the solution to a problem (just as God cannot simply be defined as the answer to our question). The answers that theology gives do not simply cause the questions that they answer to fall silent or vanish. Whoever, for example, hears the theological language about the resurrection of Christ in such a way that in it the cry of the crucified one becomes inaudible is not hearing theology but mythology, not the Gospel but rather a myth of the victor. Here lies the distance between theology and mythology. In myth the question is forgotten; thus it is more fit for therapy, for easing our anxiety, perhaps also more conducive for managing contingencies, than is Christian faith.202

To be “poor in spirit,” Metz says, is to refuse to be comforted by such myths, to hold up the disturbing questions to God without assuming the reply.203 This is a spirituality that has characterized the Jewish people throughout history, especially the prophets.204 It is also the foundation of the mysticism Metz calls “suffering unto God.”

It is encountered especially and above all in the prayers of Israel—in the Psalms, in Job, in Lamentations, and not least in many passages of the Prophets. This language of prayer is itself a language of suffering, a language of crisis, a language of doubt and of radical danger, a language of complaint and accusation, a language of crying out and, quite literally, of the grumbling of the children of

202 ———, "Suffering Unto God." 613-614. It is interesting to note the echo here to Metz’s own youthful trauma and how he dealt with it. Instead of going to psychologists or therapists with his experience, Metz brought his questions and painful memories to the church and God directly. He did not want to be soothed or “healed” prematurely through analysis or counseling. He wanted to sit with the protest and disturbing quality of the suffering and loss. ———, A Passion for God : The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity. 2.

203 Metz, "Suffering Unto God." “For in the face of the suffering it experience, this Israel remained, in its innermost essence, mythically and idealistically mute. It knew nothing of those riches in spirit with which it might console itself—by means of mythicization or idealization of its life structure, by some sort of compensatory thinking—or with which it might rise above its anxieties, the alienation of its exile, and the histories of suffering repeatedly breaking out in its midst. It was, and remains, “poor in spirit.”” Also see ———, Memoria Passionis: Una Evocacion Provocadora En Una Sociedad Pluralista. 22-23.

204 Metz, "Theodicy." 66.
Israel. The language of this God mysticism is not primarily one of consoling answers to experiences of suffering; rather, it is much more a language of passionate re-questioning that arises out of suffering, a re-questioning of God, full of highly charged expectation.\textsuperscript{205}

Theodicy itself, rather than being a defense of God in the face of suffering (thereby focusing on answers or explanations) is better understood, according to Metz, as a way of formulating the disturbing questions about present and past suffering to God, with an answer only coming at the eschaton.

Its work [theology’s] consists rather in radicalizing them [the disturbing questions] and formulating them as questions requiring clarification directed at God, as well as conceptually outlining the hope—structured by a temporal tension—that God will justify himself in regards to this history of suffering when God’s day comes. \textsuperscript{206}

It is this loss of memory, the separation of reason from remembrance, that has resulted in the apathy and technocracy Metz has for so long harangued in western culture. Forgetting the sufferings of the past removes the danger and inquietude of the present. Everything is normal and under our control. Even our image of God becomes a tame or safe God that is only loving, only joyful—a God of our own making—rather than a genuine remembrance of the biblical God of Jews and Christians.

The appeal to God is not directed at just whichever invented (postmodern) images of God one desires, none of which can tolerate in any way negativity or inconsolable pain, but only to the God depicted in the biblical traditions. Have we truly taken seriously the unavoidable and painful dialectic of this image of God? This is what I ask when I see how today’s preaching uses such pathetically positive metaphors about God, in which they only speak about the ‘love’ of God…. Life itself is the thing that puts before us the image of a dark and menacing God. And a mature faith…ought to let itself be confronted by it—even

\textsuperscript{205}———, “Suffering Unto God.” 620-621. This is again repeated almost verbatim in ———, \textit{Memoria Passionis: Una Evocacion Provocadora En Una Sociedad Pluralista}. 36-37.

if it is no more than with the groaning of creation. How narcissistic must a faith be if, in the end, at the sight of all the misfortune and inscrutable suffering that exists in creation...the only thing that it wants to know about is joy, but not the cries offered before the angry face of God!\textsuperscript{207}

So it is only the dangerous memories of suffering that hold the hope for real change, for interrupting the myth of tranquility that threatens our very humanity. And Metz insists that these memories need to have some public, political traction as well. But this is notoriously difficult to establish in a culture that not only increasing diverse, but also tenaciously attached to reason \textit{without} remembrance.\textsuperscript{208}

The necessary public claim that memory must have culminates in Metz’s articulation of how anamnestic reason ultimately has a universal claim—crossing cultures, languages, religions, and political structures. That universal validity is grounded in the universal authority of suffering, which is constantly before its open eyes. By remembering past suffering in making reasonable decisions or debating public policy, it becomes possible to discern human rights and which course of action is most moral, based on the horrors of the past.\textsuperscript{209}

Anamnestic reason acquires its enlightened character and universal legitimacy thanks to the fact that it is guided by a specific memory, in particular by the memory of suffering, by the \textit{memoria passionis}. But this is not like the memory of the self-referential suffering of one’s self (the root of all the conflicts!), but instead like the memory of the suffering other—a public remembrance of other

\textsuperscript{207} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{208} My translation of the German, Metz and Reikerstorfer, \textit{Memoria Passionis : Ein Provozierendes Gedächtnis in Pluralistischer Gesellschaft}. 217. Guided by the Spanish, \textit{———, Memoria Passionis : Ein Provozierendes Gedächtnis in Pluralistischer Gesellschaft}, Metz, \textit{Memoria Passionis: Una Evocacion Provocadora En Una Sociedad Pluralista}. 213. “When all is said and done, the European Enlightenment, in the figure of reason that it developed and that is dominant today, did not manage to avoid a deeply rooted prejudice: the prejudice against memory.”

people’s suffering….This a priori of suffering and its negative universality justifies… the claim to truth of such reason in the age of pluralism.\textsuperscript{210}

Here is the vital connection that Metz finally makes totally explicit. The memory of the suffering other has an authority before which the reason of forgetfulness cannot stand. Once the memoria passionis breaks through and interrupts our normalcy, it becomes clear that there is something in our very humanity that cries out against the atrocities and innocent suffering of the past and present and against forgetting they ever happened. We owe something to the victims of history and it starts by crafting a present, publically, that honors by contrast what they endured. It will never compensate or fix what the victims endured, but it is the least we can do this side of the eschaton.

1.5.3 Gleanings from this Current Stage

- Metz focuses more on the challenges posed by Nietzsche to memory and the subject: forgetting as health, eternal return of the same.

- Metz dialogues much more explicitly with Jürgen Habermas about anamnestic reason as memory of past suffering that is operative and authoritative for present public decision-making and action.

- Metz also affirms the intellectual, as well as spiritual, legacy of Israel to Christianity through its anamnestic reason as well as suffering unto God.

1.6 Conclusion

Metz’s theological use of memory emerged over many years of mining both the biblical and philosophical traditions surrounding modern Christianity. The next chapter will look more closely at who precisely helped mold Metz’s understanding of it, but it is clear at this point that memory first came to the forefront for Metz because of life experience. There was the encounter with unspeakable evil, loss, and lives ended before

their time. The seeds of memory, manifest as a mighty oak by the writing of Memoria Passionis, were planted in the cataclysmic interruption of losing his friends in the trenches of the Second World War. The notion of the mysticism of suffering unto God and even anamnestic reason both grew out of Metz’s own unwillingness to accept easy answers about what happened to his comrades. As his vision widened and he came to grapple with the reality of the Shoah and the history of suffering in Latin America particularly, Metz was able to see that his experience and crying out to God was connected to the biblical tradition of lamentation and inconsolability. While he found ways within his tradition to stand unfulfilled and question, Metz became acutely aware that many of his contemporaries were unwilling to be so disturbed. The forgetfulness in the culture around him forced him to formulate a political theology opposed to letting the past die.

Although there are many nuances to memory for Metz, the core concept of dangerous memory endures. There are no signs of revision in this concept, nor in the necessary public character it must have, throughout his entire corpus. Dangerous memory is always a subversive category for Metz and it always applies to memories of suffering as a way to resist the powerful and victorious. These memories are clearly demanding on the living from the start, but their universal authority becomes more apparent as Metz enters into discussion with Habermas over universal claims and paradigms for action. Furthermore, the focus on memory does become more biblical over time (i.e. tracing the Jewish and Christian roots of suffering unto God). The Jewish nature of anamnestic reason and memory in spirituality is at the heart of Metz’s theology of memory at the end of his writings in a manner that was not the case at the start.

The context in which memory appears, and the end to which it is put, also shifts somewhat over Metz’s career. Memory, in Theology of the World, appears in the context of tradition and the church. Its function was ecclesiological insofar as it explained the way in which communal observance of memories of important events gets passed down
through the church. In *Faith in History and Society* this role, while still present somewhat because Metz always maintains the need for an institutional, religious framework for preserving the dangerous memory of Jesus Christ, shifts to a soteriological one. Maintaining the subjectivity of a human person before God, especially where it is most endangered and forgotten—death being the most extreme threatening of identity—is how memory functions. The salvation that a Christian hopes for the departed other is grounded in the memory of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Keeping that memory firmly before us and allowing it to change our actions and being in the world results in the world moving closer to the coming of the Reign of God and a redeemed future, even for the dead.

The context for memory shifts yet again when Metz takes on Nietzsche as his main interlocutor and the myth of time without and ending. Forgetting aids and abets the myth of the “eternal return of the same” and memory acts as an antidote to it because it reminds people that things are not alright as they are. Things can and should be different. Memory functions here in an apocalyptic-eschatological manner because it maintains the threat that something totally new might break in at any moment. The function of memory as anamnestic reason is similar in his debates with Jürgen Habermas. Anamnestic reason resists proceduralism and communication or decision-making without a clear content or paradigm. The soteriological aspect of memory remains operative here though too because the authority that memories of suffering have is grounded in specific memories of people who still require justice and healing. The decisions made using anamnestic reason are those that affirm and further flourishing, wholeness, and salvation for those who are living, while keeping in mind the dead and their hopes.

What remains open for discussion is how Metz’s theology of memory originated. It obviously came to prominence for the first time in his writings that were deeply influenced by the Frankfurt School. To what extent does the concept originate in philosophy? How does Metz depart from that original notion in the Frankfurt scholars’
work and what becomes characteristically theological and Christian about it for him after he adopts it? This will be the focus of the next chapter and the discussion will spill over into the third when we consider how anamnestic reason—memory operative on reason—relates to philosophy now, as Habermas presents it.
CHAPTER 2

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF METZ’S THEOLOGY OF MEMORY

Johann Metz acknowledges many times throughout his work his indebtedness to several philosophers. As noted in the first chapter of this dissertation, at various times he has even enumerated lists of those interlocutors who have influenced the development and trajectory of his thought, especially regarding the topics of memory, narrative, and conceptions of time. The preponderance of these people have been Jewish—whether believing or not.211 The majority of these people are also members of, or are peripherally connected to, the Frankfurt School—a group of German philosophers in the 20th century who focused on the development of critical theory, especially as it emerged with Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud.212

The first section of this chapter will consider more closely who this group and its associates were and what exactly it meant by “critical theory,” as far as it is relevant to understanding Metz on memory. The subsequent sections will each focus on particular members of the group, provide a brief summary of the person’s thought, and then an analysis of how Metz interacted with it. These interactions can be grouped into three


categories. In some cases, Metz adopted a concept directly from a person’s philosophy into his theology, with little modification. More often, however, Metz adapted a compelling philosophical idea to work within his bigger framework of a political theology grounded in the universal authority of suffering—*memoria passionis*—with key Christian elements interacting with philosophical ones. Finally, Metz also reacts to some philosophical concepts by taking the exact opposite position than that advocated by the philosopher. This is most clearly the case with the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche who, while not a member of the Frankfurt School, will be considered at the end of this chapter as an emerging influence on Metz’s theology.

The overall goal of this chapter is to pinpoint which philosophical concepts appear in Metz’s work and how they have been changed or rejected by him as his theology of memory has developed. Not only will this provide a type of intellectual genealogy of one of the most influential theologies of memory, but it will also accentuate what is distinctively Catholic-Christian about Metz’s theology. Of course this is not an exhaustive examination of either all the thinkers who have influenced Metz, nor a comprehensive examination of the philosophies of the people who are considered. Furthermore, one important interlocutor, Jürgen Habermas, will not be considered until the third chapter due to the fact that he is a much later member of the Frankfurt School and has had an active discussion with Metz himself.

2.1 The Frankfurt School and Critical Theory

While there are definitely philosophical influences and interlocutors that are not affiliated with the group called The Frankfurt School, both interviews with Metz and his own citations throughout his writings suggest that this school of thought was the one he
was most familiar with personally and that, consequently, exerted the greatest influence on the topics and methods he chose to address in his theology. Given that all the original members were German, had lived through the interwar period in Germany, observed the rise and agenda of National Socialism, and witnessed its horrible culmination in the Shoah, it seems only reasonable that Metz would take their social and political analysis of the situation of Western Europe after Auschwitz very seriously (although he began appropriating their social analysis even before Auschwitz emerged as explicitly central for him).

2.1.1 Membership and Purpose

The title “Frankfurt School” was a purely practical one, originating from the fact that the main members of the group were all affiliated with the Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt, Germany founded in 1923. The institute was founded by Carl Grünberg but funded and created by a young Marxist named Felix Weil and it was the first institute focused on Marxist studies to be officially part of a state university in Germany. Although its main focus would be Marxism, the scholars from many various disciplines who joined the Institute were not official members of the Communist Party in general, and had little to no direct political involvement. They were united by a common respect for Marxist theory of social change as “a radically new kind of theory,” the knowledge from which fit neither purely empirical nor practical types


214 Ibid. 5.

215 Ibid. 11, 13-14. “Marxism would be the ruling principle of the Institute.” However, “the official intention of the founding members [was] to keep it free of any party affiliation.” There were some temporary members of the Institute or contributors to its publications who were openly connected to the Communist Party (e.g. Karl Wittfogel, Franz Borkenau, Julian Gumperz, Karl Korsch) but they did not last.
of knowledge.\textsuperscript{216} The caveat is that each felt there were certain weaknesses to Marx’s original theses and their subsequent implementation that must be identified and, through dialogue with other social sciences in particular, revised to more adequately address the current world situation. \textsuperscript{217} “One of the essential characteristics of Critical Theory from its inception had been a refusal to consider Marxism a closed body of received truths. As the concrete social reality changed, so too, Horkheimer and his colleagues argued, must the theoretical constructions generated to make sense of it.”\textsuperscript{218} This flexibility in thought and a distrust of claims to universal truths would serve the Institute well as its members would be forced to flee the University of Frankfurt with the Nazi rise to power in 1933.\textsuperscript{219} Eventually relocating to California and New York City in the United States, the whole membership of the Institute would never return to Germany, although the leadership (Horkheimer, Adorno) and official offices (the endowment and library) did return to Frankfurt after 1949.\textsuperscript{220}

Lists of who the early members were vary because some scholars choose to include people with more peripheral activity than others and because some people contributed to the work of the Institute without officially being members. The consensus, however, is that Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Walter

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\textsuperscript{216} Geuss, \textit{Idea of Critical Theory}. 1. It should also be noted that another common factor among the early members of the Institute was their Jewish heritage—although most protested mightily against counting this among their influences. Martin Jay, however, maintains that this commonality could not have completely been a non-issue. “If one seeks a common thread running through individual biographies of the inner circle, the one that immediately comes to mind is their birth into families of middle or upper-middle class Jews….What strikes the current observer is the intensity with which many of the Institut’s members denied, and in some cases still deny, any meaning to their Jewish identities….one cannot avoid a sense of their protesting too much.” Jay, \textit{Dialectical Imagination}. 31-34.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{217} Jay, \textit{Dialectical Imagination}. 26. This was especially true during the tenure of Max Horkheimer as head of the Institute in that he “stressed the synoptic, interdisciplinary nature of the Institut’s work.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{218} Ibid. 254.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{219} Ibid. 29.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{220} Ibid. 282.
\end{quote}
Benjamin (although he is commonly acknowledged to be a more peripheral member), were all definitely part of the lasting initial group of thinkers. These men brought with them a great diversity of knowledge in the fields of sociology, literature, philosophy, psychology, and even musicology.\textsuperscript{221} What united these scholars initially was a common belief in Marx’s historical materialism (although this would change): the notion that human history advances through different stages motivated by meeting people’s basic needs.\textsuperscript{222} Integral to this progress is dialectical advancement, derived from Hegel originally.\textsuperscript{223} The dialectic of historical materialism begins with an original situation (the given), then a crisis occurs which forces a confrontation between opposing ideas or factions, there is change in the \textit{status quo}, followed by a new synthesis of the once opposing forces that becomes, over time, the new “original situation” from which the process begins anew.\textsuperscript{224} The manner in which change would actually occur and the end to which all this change is working was not necessarily a matter of consensus. All of the Frankfurt members also advocated the advancement of the new type of theory developed by Marx (Freud is often included here as well) known as critical theory.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{221} Ibid. Chapter 1, “The Creation of the Institut für Socialforschung,” \textit{passim}.
\item \textsuperscript{222} Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, \textit{The German Ideology} (Moscow :: Progress Publishers, 1976). Part I-1. This definition is my summary of what this section seems to be affirming. Furthermore, there is clearly a shift in the agenda and direction that the Institute took. “In the meantime, the Institut began to direct most of its attention towards an effort to understand the disappearance of ‘negative,’ critical forces in the world. In effect, this meant a turning away from material (in the sense of economic) concerns…Instead, the Institut focused its energies on what traditional Marxists had relegated to a secondary position, the cultural superstructure of modern society…the structure and development of authority, and the emergence of mass culture.” Jay, \textit{Dialectical Imagination}. 84.
\item \textsuperscript{223} Jay, \textit{Dialectical Imagination}. 54.
\item \textsuperscript{224} Hegel never actually used these terms. An example of the process is given as described by Horkheimer: “Dialectics is not identical with development. Two antagonistic moments, the take-over of state control and the liberation from it, are contained together in the concept of social revolution.” Ibid. 157.
\end{itemize}
2.1.2 Critical Theory Defined

Members of the Frankfurt School realized—due in no small part to their observations about the rise of communism in Russia and the failure of the revolutions Marx predicted to come to pass in Western Europe—that Marx’s analysis was not infallible. More generally, one weakness that needs to be remedied in any philosophy was the claim to absolute ahistorical truth. Everything needs to be revisable and everything needs to be open to reinterpretation or correction as the actual historical situation progresses. So the dialectical process of progress itself is called into question to some extent by the Frankfurt School. History does not automatically happen according to a certain theory or trajectory. People and theories need to be flexible in order to effectively interact with this unpredictability.

One component of societies that can resist change and revision—thereby supporting the status quo—is called ideology. This is a very complex idea and can be used in several different senses. I will utilize a typology of three senses of ideology, as presented by Raymond Geuss. First, ideology can be used in an anthropological sense, which is more or less descriptive and not evaluative, and this describes a particular culture’s worldview—including beliefs and actions.

The second sense of ideology is decidedly negative. Ideology here means a delusion or a false sense of consciousness held by the members of a society and

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225 This chapter in no way claims to present an adequate, let alone exhaustive, definition or exploration of critical theory as a whole. This section, and the analysis to follow, focuses only on the aspects of critical theory that are most relevant to exploring Metz’s encounter with and appropriation of the Frankfurt School and its associates (Benjamin and Bloch). These include identification and critique of ideology, resistance to dominant system structures and narratives, and methods of awakening those in the system to their own exploitation by the system.

226 Geuss, Idea of Critical Theory. 4-11. “ideology in the first sense will just refer to one of the ‘parts’ into which a socio-cultural system of a human group can be divided for convenient study….typically it will include such things as beliefs the members of a group hold, the concepts they use, the attitudes and psychological dispositions they exhibit, their motives, desires, values, predilections, works of art, religious rituals, gestures etc. I will call ‘ideology’ in this broad sense…‘ideology in the purely descriptive sense.’
maintained by power structures. In order to liberate these people from the deleterious effects of these false beliefs, criticism is necessary to make them aware of the ideology to which they are enslaved. This sense of ideology arises with a “research program…initiated by the observation that agents in the society are deluded about themselves, their position, their society, or their interests. The aim of the project is to demonstrate to them that they are so deluded.” Traditional Marxism itself relies heavily on this sense of ideology in its critique of capitalism and the prescription of revolution as a way to overcome the superstructures that maintain false consciousness.

The third sense of ideology is positive, asserting that it serves constructive purposes in people’s lives. Ideologies in this sense (particularly religious ones) owe their persistence to their ability to meet some of these basic needs [i.e. a meaningful life, identity]. They do this by providing agents with approved models for actions, goals, ideals, and values, and by furnishing interpretations of such important existential features of human life as birth and death, suffering, evil etc. Ideology in this positive sense is also helpful in setting limits to people’s wants and the methods by which they may attain them. Oddly, the second and third senses of ideology are inextricably linked insofar as negative ideology only can persist and grow “by harnessing what are in themselves perfectly legitimate human aspirations…so as to create a situation in which agents can satisfy…needs only on the condition of accepting the repression the ideological world-view imposes.” Most of the work of the Frankfurt

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227 Ibid. 12.
228 Ibid.
229 Ibid. 22.
230 Ibid. 24-25.
231 Ibid. 25.
School focuses on distinguishing where negative ideology meets necessary social ideologies and exploring ways to separate the injurious from the healthy tendencies.

Critical Theory describes the approach to studying or interacting with a society so as to expose the false ideologies operating therein and liberate people. It is “a reflective theory which gives agents a kind of knowledge inherently productive of enlightenment and emancipation.”

The emphasis is on changing that which is under consideration and not just on observing (i.e. the goal is to change a society, not just describe how it works). There is inherently judgment involved with such an aim because the critical theorist him or herself finds something wrong with the status quo and, at least implicitly, must have another vision or set of standards that accentuates the need for change. There are many different types of critical theory, associated with disciplines as diverse as sociology and literary criticism. Not all of these types of criticism present a cogent alternative to the social elements they criticize, which makes them a tool of deconstruction without constructive contributions. This is why critical theory is often linked to Marxism or some other way of thinking that provides an alternative meta-system to the current one. This is certainly true of the Frankfurt School’s critical theory.

Geuss also provides a more in-depth schema identifying the characteristics of critical theory, as formulated by the Frankfurt School.

1. Critical theories have special standing as guides for human action in that:
   a. They are aimed at producing enlightenment in the agents who hold them, i.e. at enabling those agents to determine what their true interests are;
   b. They are inherently emancipatory, i.e. they free agents from a kind of coercion which is at least partly self-imposed, from self-frustration of conscious human action

Ibid. 2.
2. Critical theories have cognitive content, i.e. they are forms of knowledge.
3. Critical theories differ epistemologically in essential ways from theories in the natural sciences. Theories in natural science are ‘objectifying’; critical theories are ‘reflective.’

Marxism and psychoanalysis are two examples of critical theories, but the modifications that most of the members of the Frankfurt School make to Marxism keep them in the same category. One major impact of this turn to critical theory is that it introduces suspicion into every inquiry. Nothing is so sacred or perfect so as not to fall potentially vulnerable to some form of ideology critique. From a theological perspective, one can see how this has inspired the growth of various hermeneutics of suspicion.

2.1.3 Metz’s Encounter with Ernst Bloch

Metz’s encounter with the Frankfurt School was made possible by his earlier acquaintance with the revisionist Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch. Metz encountered Bloch during the period in which he was still heavily influenced by transcendental theology and metaphysics. Metz had not yet begun to emphasize the disruption of the eschatological in theology (as opposed to the incarnation and theological anthropology) or explore the primacy of the future in relationship to memory. What made the two scholars’ mutual influence possible is that Metz was open to “fundamental theology…risk[ing] being defined in terms that are cognitively foreign to it,” and

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233 Ibid. 1-2.

234 The Frankfurt School actually wanted to broaden the scope of orthodox Marxism, from considering only economic forces to considering also cultural forces that cannot be dismissed as exclusively a form of superstructure.
Bloch was not a traditional Marxist. These factors provided a bridge between theology and philosophy. Bloch’s emphasis on utopia and hope led him to have an openness (unusual for Marxists) to certain elements of religion. Certain strands of religion can concretize a dimension of human existence that is attentive to the power of utopia—although only those elements of religion that expressed rebellion against institutionalized religion and its penchant to put an oppressive God in the “space” of utopia.236

Mutual openness to discussion between disciplines caused Metz and Bloch to end up at the same conferences. Metz describes their first, pivotal, meeting like this:

In 1963 I received an invitation from the Academy in Weingarten to a meeting in which Ernst Bloch was participating. The theme was “The Future of Man.” At the time I did not have any particularly developed concept of the future, but I had written an essay entitled “The Future of Christianity in a Hominized World.” I packed up and went. The essay really did not have anything to do with Bloch’s ideas about the future, but Bloch clearly had the impression that here was a young theologian who talked a bit differently from the other theologians he had met… Only after I had become acquainted with him on this way did I begin to read some of his work.237

Over the next decade, the two men met at several conferences, mutually challenging one another from their own respective disciplines. Metz affirms that he:

“went after” Bloch. When it came to “God” I never gave any ground, but constantly asked him whether Utopia would not fall prey to an anonymous evolution, if there were no God before whom even the past is not fixed. And I have always objected to the way he talked about “transcending without transcendence,” responding that one can only do this because there are still some obstinate theologians (like myself) who are talking about “transcendence” as such.238

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237 Schuster and Boschert-Kimmig, _Hope against Hope_. 21.

238 Ibid. 22.
But Metz’s own thought—even his definition of theology itself—was altered by his encounter with Bloch. After it, Metz no longer bases his definition of theology on existential or anthropological grounds but on eschatology—the coming of the future, in which hope resides.

From Bloch Metz took the notion that what really distinguishes the time of human history from the time of cosmic process is a constitutive and radical openness to an undetermined future. The premise here is that time as a cosmic process—that is, the time that the natural sciences disclose and study—is thoroughly rule governed. The future is an extrapolation of what exists now, in accordance with invariant natural laws. There is no room for real human freedom here....History, on the other hand, is constituted by the coming into being of that which has not yet existed, the Noch-nicht-gewesene. From this vantage point, the uniquely human capacity...is the capacity to envision this Noch-nicht-gewesene and orient one’s activity by it.

From a cursory reading, one could almost (erroneously) conclude that Bloch and Metz were speaking about the same ideas. Both men are speaking of waiting for a future that is dramatically different from the present but with an eye on the past, hoping for the full liberation of humanity, and being both critical of ideology but not dismissing tradition tout court as negative or oppressive. But no matter how close to theology

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239 This is evinced first in his contribution to Bloch’s Festschrift, Johann Baptist Metz, “Gott Vor Uns Statt Eines Theologoschen Argument,” in Ernst Bloch Zu Ehren, ed. Siegfried Unseld (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1965). 300. I am indebted to and draw on J Matthew Ashley’s analysis and translation here. Ashley, “Introduction: The Path to Faith in History and Society.” 15.


241 Douglas Kellner, "Ernst Bloch, Utopia and Ideology Critique," Illuminations: the Critical Theory Website. www.uta.edu/huma/illuminations/ Accessed June 28, 2011. As far as time and future, Kellner summarizes Bloch: “Bloch urges us to grasp the three dimensions of human temporality: he offers us a dialectical analysis of the past which illuminates the present and can direct us to a better future. The past -- what has been -- contains both the sufferings, tragedies and failures of humanity -- what to avoid and to redeem -- and its unrealized hopes and potentials -- which could have been and can yet be. For Bloch, history is a repository of possibilities that are living options for future action, therefore what could have been can still be.... Above all, Bloch develops a philosophy of hope and the future, a dreaming forward, a projection of a vision of a future kingdom of freedom. It is his conviction that only when we project our future in the light of what is, what has been, and what could be can we engage in the creative practice that will produce a world in which we are at home and realize humanities deepest dreams.” As far as ideology: “For Bloch, ideology is ‘Janus-faced,’ two-sided: it contains errors, mystifications, and techniques of
Bloch gets, his definitions of the future and transcendence (without transcendence!) and the use of seemingly religious terms like “resurrection of fallen nature” and demonology are actually devoid of any reference to a specific deity. Unlike Metz, Bloch (and for that matter Benjamin or any of the other Frankfurt School thinkers) does not mean to implicate the God of the Jewish-Christian tradition. Any gestures towards transcendence or the divine are too vague or nebulous to be considered “theological”—understood as involving a specific notion of God, in this case that of the monotheistic Abrahamic religions. This becomes an important point when evaluating how Metz and his philosophical interlocutors differ.

2.1.4 Metz’s Encounter with the Frankfurt School

Most of the members of the early Frankfurt School were not really Metz’s contemporaries. While Metz’s early work was done under Karl Rahner—who has left a lasting impression—when Metz began to take part in public discussion groups with scholars from other disciplines than theology he came into contact with many of the Frankfurt School members on several occasions. Metz was asked about his acquaintance and association with these men in an interview, to which he responded:

As in all decisive moments for me, I first encountered them in conversations and discussion panels—I seldom came across these philosophical figures and positions in books. This has to do with the fact that I have always understood fundamental theology to be one that must risk being defined in terms that are cognitively foreign to it. This is for the sake of its own identity, so that it might

manipulation and domination, but it also contains a utopian residue or surplus that can be used for social critique and to advance progressive politics. In addition, to reconstructing and refocusing the theory and practice of ideology critique, Bloch also enables us to see ideology in many phenomena usually neglected by Marxist and other ideology critiques….In this view, ideology pervades the organization and details of everyday life.”

become clear about what it really is supposed to be doing: namely, giving an account to others of our hope.\textsuperscript{243}

Metz’s interest in the written work and thought of various members of the Frankfurt School was actually almost always sparked first by a personal encounter or conversation. Most of these significant meetings were held under the auspices of the Paulusgesellschaft that was established in 1956 to encourage the dialogue between Christianity and Marxism.\textsuperscript{244} It was in this context that Metz first met the philosopher Ernst Bloch who—although not a member of the Frankfurt School—played a pivotal role in Metz abandoning transcendental theology for a greater focus on political theology.

These discussions coincided with Metz began teaching at the University of Münster (1963) and one can see a marked shift in Metz’s theology as a result. “It coincided with his abandonment of the systematic, metaphysical approach of his first decade of theology, in search of a postmetaphysical, postexistentialist, postidealist theology.”\textsuperscript{245} The Frankfurt School, representing the “revisionary wing of Western Marxism” came to fascinate him and prompt new questions for Metz’s theology.

Through them he entered that stream of the Enlightenment which emphasized practical reason and \textit{praxis} over speculation and \textit{theoria}. Yet it should be noted that the Marxist thinkers who effected this change for him were precisely those who rejected a simplistic abandonment of all theory….Activism without thought, in their view, was exposed to the danger of being co-opted by instrumental reason, and thus compounding rather than solving the dilemma of modernity.\textsuperscript{246}

\textsuperscript{243} Schuster and Boschert-Kimmig, \textit{Hope against Hope}, 21.

\textsuperscript{244} Jean Ives Calvez, Ekkehard Starke, and Norman A. Hjelm, "Marxism and Christianity," in \textit{The Encyclopedia of Christianity}, ed. Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans 2003). 436. This society was named for Paul and the freedom he proclaimed for Christians to explore and engage in dialogue with people and systems outside Christianity.

This, as we have seen, is one of the major concerns that Metz has in formulating his “political theology”—that praxis and theory remain in a mutually critical dialogue with one another. Nonetheless, there have been (often ill-informed) critics of Metz who insist that he has too completely given up on the theory, drifting too close to Marxist ideology. The remainder of this chapter will evaluate just how closely Metz remains to the thought of the Frankfurt School, but it must be stated upfront that he did not accept their ideas 
entirely, but was inspired by key ideas to respond to their concerns from a theological perspective.

Besides this general shift in the style of thinking and presentation, Metz also derived from these thinkers many of the most crucial categories and concepts of his thinking—from the primacy of the future in the sixties, to “dangerous memories” in the seventies and eighties. Yet he was, if anything, more concerned than the Frankfurt School thinkers (and it was their hesitation on this point that attracted Metz to them) about the co-option of Marxism by instrumental reason. He rejects any materialist understanding of history; indeed, he was most attracted to Walter Benjamin precisely because of the latter’s critique of understandings of history as progress, whether derived from a belief in the omnipotence of technology or from the belief in the revolutionary potential of some particular class in history.247

With these general observations as to Metz’s involvement with the Frankfurt School scholars, it is now necessary to examine more closely his interaction with the thought of individual members of the group, beginning with the somewhat peripheral Walter Benjamin.

246 Ibid.

247 Ibid. 33.
2.2 Walter Benjamin

Born into a wealthy Jewish family in Berlin on July 15, 1892, Walter Benjamin was to become one of the most eclectic associates of the Frankfurt School—he never officially was hired by the Institute.\textsuperscript{248} He had a way of combining what, to others, would seem to be conflicting points of view or interests. He simultaneously was interested in Communism and Zionism, although he never fully committed to either.\textsuperscript{249} He maintained long-term friendships with Gershom Scholem—kabbala scholar and repatriated Israeli—Bertolt Brecht and Theodor Adorno “the polar opposites of contemporary Marxism.”\textsuperscript{250} His projects included literary criticism of Kafka and Proust, translations of Baudelaire, an analysis of the effects of technology on works of art, as well as meditations on politics and a philosophy of history. He traveled continually throughout his life—Capri, Russia, Paris, Denmark—finding within different cities the very origins of modernity and capitalism. “We should not see Benjamin’s plural areas of work in contradiction or opposition to each other, but rather in continuous dialogue with each other.”\textsuperscript{251} Truly he was a person who defied classification. For this reason, he was often misunderstood and his work was not fully appreciated in his lifetime. In fact, as Hannah Arendt observes in the introduction to Benjamin’s \textit{Illuminations}, “There were few who still knew his name when he chose death in those early fall days of 1940…” fleeing from the Gestapo.\textsuperscript{252}

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\textsuperscript{250} Caygill, \textit{Introducing Walter Benjamin}. 120.
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\textsuperscript{251} Ibid. 145.
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\textsuperscript{252} Arendt, "Introduction." 1, 17.
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2.2.1 Philosophy of Suffering or Death, Memory, and Narrative

The nature of Benjamin’s works means that assembling a systematic view of any particular topic from his perspective is difficult. There are snippets here and profound insights there, reflecting perhaps his own fascination with and collection of quotations.253 But his philosophical interests always ran towards the theological, as the story at the beginning of his “Theses on the Philosophy of History” demonstrates. Theology, for Benjamin, was now secretly controlling the seemingly philosophical debates surrounding historical materialism.254 Theology is not, however, “faith seeking understanding” for Benjamin. It is not the same thing as it will be for Metz. It is more minimalistic in Benjamin. “Theological” means including a transcendent element in one’s thought, accounting for more than the human or natural elements in one’s thinking and reasoning. The very fact that resistance to the victors of history is still a possibility at all for Benjamin, that “A historical materialist…regards it as his task to brush history against the grain,” means that there is something beyond the economic and tangible historical equation.255 He affirms that this transcendence does not ally itself with the powerful and is not synonymous with “progress” because resistance to these are still necessary. He uses terms like “messiah” and makes reference to Judaism and Torah, without, however, meaning anything more by them than that there is an opening, a place for rupture in history. There is more than humans can control or account for in history.

253 Ibid. 39. He maintains “that the destructive power of quotations was ‘the only one which still contains the hope that something from this period will survive—for no other reason than that it was torn out of it.’ In this form of ‘thought fragments,’ quotations have the double task of interrupting the flow of the presentation with ‘transcendent force’ (Schriften I, 142-43) and at the same time of concentrating within themselves that which is presented.”

254 Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in Illuminations, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1968). 253. He uses an analogy about an automaton who always wins a chess, thinks to a little hunchback hidden inside, controlling it like a puppet. “The puppet called ‘historical materialism’ is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is wizened and has to keep out of sight.”

255 Ibid. 256-257.
Another example of this influence of theology occurs when Benjamin develops his philosophy of language and translation. Benjamin maintains that true translation is only possible because there is a higher language into which all other subsidiary languages tap. The translator’s job is to connect to this higher language, not provide a faithful, literal word-by-word technical translation of a text.

Fidelity in the translation of individual works can almost never fully reproduce the meaning they have in the original….it is self-evident how greatly fidelity in reproducing the form impedes the rendering of sense. Thus no case for literalness can be based on a desire to retain the meaning….Fragments of a vessel which are to be glued together must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not be like one another. In the same way a translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel.256

Unlike other members of the Frankfurt School, Benjamin specifies that this language is “The Word of God”.257 As Jay observes, “Walter Benjamin had always been keenly interested in the theological dimensions of speech. At the root of his theory of language was the belief that the world was created by the Word of God. To Benjamin, ‘In the beginning was the Word’ meant that God’s act of creation consists in part of the bestowing of names.”258 Furthermore, Martin Jay directly connects Benjamin’s “quest for a pure language” and his “immersion in Jewish mysticism.”259 So perhaps Benjamin was so important in Metz’s thought precisely because he was more open to transcendent in his


257 Jay, Dialectical Imagination. 262. “Adorno and Horkheimer, although eschewing the consciously theological underpinnings of Benjamin’s theory of language, did accept the notion that ‘pure’ speech has been corrupted.”

258 Ibid. 261.

259 Ibid. 262.
work—although whether or not this meant the God of the Jewish and Christian traditions is still open.

One theme that runs throughout Benjamin’s short essays is the topic of memory. His penchant for collecting books ties to this directly. In unpacking his library of books, memories of people, places, and eras of his life flood back upon him. One suspects that this is the root cause of his collecting and the insistence that his library goes wherever he does.\textsuperscript{260} He introduces the very compelling notion of human memories’ relationship with God’s memory when he asserts:

One might, for example, speak of an unforgettable life or moment even if all men had forgotten it. If the nature of such a life or moment required that it be unforgotten, that predicate would not imply a falsehood but merely a claim not fulfilled by men, and probably also a reference to a realm in which it \textit{is} fulfilled: God’s remembrance.\textsuperscript{261}

And again God’s memory is mentioned in Benjamin’s tribute to Kafka:

It probably cannot be denied that “this mysterious center…derives from the Jewish religion.” “Memory plays a very mysterious role as piousness. It is not an ordinary, but…the most profound quality of Jehovah that he remembers, that he retains an infallible memory ‘to the third and fourth, even to the hundredth generation.’” The most sacred…act of the…ritual is the erasing of sins from the book of memory.\textsuperscript{262}

Even limiting the discussion of memory to human recollection, Benjamin, in his “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” distinguishes between types of memories. Not all human memories are equal, and he draws on the vocabulary introduced by Proust to highlight the difference. The first sort of memory he calls “the \textit{mémoire volontaire}, and it is its characteristic that the information which it gives about the past retains no trace of


\textsuperscript{261} Benjamin, "Task of the Translator." 70.

In contrast, the “mémoire involontaire... bears the marks of the situation which gave rise to it... contents of the individual past combine with material of the collective past.” The former type of memory contains a type of presence, something that “embeds it in the life of the storyteller in order to pass it on as experience to those listening,” while the latter provides information. Here Benjamin ties in the notion of the storyteller and narrative, which are important enough to him and sufficiently intertwined with memory to warrant two distinct essays of their own.

The notion of presence, or the “aura” of something original, comes up again in his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” The aura of something is akin to memory in some respects insofar as the aura reaches and endures through time and space. It also resembles memory in that the aura is being lost in the modern age of technology and mechanical reproduction. “Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.” Without this authenticity, the work loses its authority, much as a memory unconnected with the actual past might. “The presence of the original


264 Ibid. 159. Interestingly, in another essay, Benjamin asks more about this mémoire involontaire, wondering if it is not “much closer to forgetting than what is usually called memory? And is not the work of spontaneous recollection, in which remembrance is the woof and forgetting the warp, a counterpart to Penelope’s work rather than its likeness? For here day unravels what the night was woven. When we awake each morning, we hold in our hands, usually weakly and loosely, but a few fringes of the tapestry of lived life, as loomed for us by forgetting. However, with our purposeful activity and, even more, our purposive remembering each day unravels the web and the ornaments of forgetting.” ———, “The Image of Proust,” in Illuminations, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1968). 202. This does muddy the distinction a bit and makes it somewhat more difficult to decide which Benjamin favors.

265 Benjamin, “Motifs in Baudelaire.” 159.

is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity...[which is] outside technical...reproducibility....the original preserved all its authority; not so vis á vis technical reproduction." Art loses the inherent connection it has had with ritual and cult, especially in the form of film and photography, and this makes it easy to manipulate for political and ideological purposes. The one exception to this, interestingly, is the photographs taken for books of the dead. “The cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead, offers a last refuge for the cult value of the picture.” This foreshadows in two of Benjamin’s other works the vital importance he attaches to narratives and memories of the dead.

In “The Storyteller” Benjamin highlights the value of narrative as a way of continuing in the present and future a story that began in the past, but which still has something to offer. Experience, wisdom, and practical interest—but not information per se—are all part of the art of telling the story. “In every case the storyteller is a man who has counsel for his readers....[but] the communicability of experience is decreasing. In consequence we have no counsel either for ourselves or for others. After all, counsel is less an answer to a question [information] than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is just unfolding.” This proposal, contained as narrative, is a type of memory because it urges upon the present a responsibility to the past. Furthermore, there is a communal nature to oral storytelling not found in the written novel, for instance.

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267 Ibid. The urge for technical reproduction itself is really the desire to be closer to the work, to own or control it in some sense, even if that means violating uniqueness.

268 Ibid. 226.

But why is storytelling dwindling? One answer is that stories are not immediately and obviously useful, the way information communication is. A story does not really explain itself but demands a certain amount of effort from the listener. “The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new…it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself to it without losing any time. A story is different. It does not expend itself.” 271 The lack of effort proffered by the modern listener is also a product, according to Benjamin and Valéry, of the larger phenomenon of forgetting or denying eternity—and death as the chief reminder of eternity. 272 This is directly linked to the end of storytelling because “not only a man’s knowledge or wisdom, but above all his real life and this is the stuff that stories are made of—first assumes transmissible form at the moment of death…. Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death” (emphasis mine). 273

What kind of authority does death have? Death, as the ultimate conclusion to a person’s life and story, is both a universal and particular experience. Everyone dies, and yet death is experienced differently, depending on how one has lived. The authority that comes from death lies in the fact that it will come for everyone and that it prompts an

270 Ibid. 87. “The earliest symptom of a process whose end is the decline of storytelling is the rise of the novel at the beginning of modern times…it neither comes from oral tradition nor goes into it. This distinguishes it from storytelling in particular. The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale. The novelist has isolated himself. The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual…."

271 Ibid. 90.

272 Ibid. 93. “It is almost as if the decline of the idea of eternity coincided with the increasing aversion to sustained effort. The idea of eternity has ever had its strongest source in death. If this idea declines, so we reason, the face of death must have changed. It turns out that this change is identical with the one that has diminished the communicability of experience to the same extent as the art of storytelling has declined.”

273 Ibid. 94.
evaluation of one’s life. It provides a moment of self-judgment. At one’s final moment, one must ask if one led the life one hoped. Has one become the person one wanted to become? Death’s authority is one of reckoning. In telling a story, both the storyteller and the listener are able to learn what another did on his or her journey and evaluate how it directs his or her path—which will be called to a reckoning at the moment of death. All involved in hearing or telling a story are also reminded of their own deaths and begin to ask in the present the final questions of meaning. One’s own life story is altered by the narrative of another’s choice, in light of what that choice means before death. Another’s past, told in narrative, is present now insofar as it evokes the listener’s future death and the interim choices that influence what death will mean for him or her.

So memory, narrative, and death are all linked to one another. Memory, in the form of a story, is launched into the present and the future, to the time of the death of the listener. And it is precisely the participation in the death of another by one who listens to a story or even reads a novel that enables the story to continue in the life of the listener.

The novel is significant, therefore, not because it presents someone else’s fate to us, perhaps didactically, but because this stranger’s fate by virtue of the flame which consumes it yields us the warmth which we never draw from our own fate. What draws the reader to the novel is the hope of warming his shivering life with a death he reads about.\textsuperscript{274} The death of the other is actually more compelling than one’s own.

Perhaps it is this connection with the death of the “other,” of those who have sunk into the past, that allows Benjamin to assert that the past still has some claim on the present. In his “Theses on the Philosophy of History” he hints at some obligation to those who have passed in regards to redemption—theirs and ours.

\textsuperscript{274} Ibid. 101.
In other words, our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption. The same applies to our view of the past, which is the concern of history. The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply. Historical materialists are aware of that.\textsuperscript{275}

That still-outstanding quality of the past—a past waiting for us—is both a blessing and a curse. “Nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history. To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past—only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments,”\textsuperscript{276} although what exactly redemption means here is anything but clear. Hannah Arendt says of Benjamin that “collecting is the redemption of things which is to complement the redemption of man.”\textsuperscript{277} To remember something, either through story or physical collection, is to make it present again, give it new life. This is redemption. It seems that, for Benjamin, redemption is what we humans do for one another, in time and history, by making the past present again. The primary concern is no longer about usefulness but about being for one’s own sake.\textsuperscript{278} History becomes “citable” as present to the extent that human beings themselves are valued \textit{in se}, so the people of the past live once more in our redeeming recollection of them. But this same remembered history is full of horror, tragedy, and destruction, as Benjamin’s mediation on the painting \textit{Angelus Novus} illustrates.

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\textsuperscript{275} Benjamin, "Philosophy of History." 254.

\textsuperscript{276} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{277} Arendt, "Introduction." 42.

\textsuperscript{278} Ibid. “Collecting can…redeem the object as a thing since it now is no longer a means to an end but has its intrinsic worth.”
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His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. The storm is what we call progress.279

It is not the victors in the struggle who ought to ultimately make their claims on the future, but those endangered and lost in the past struggles who still have a stake in the outcome of history. It is the danger that links the past and the present.

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it “the way it really was” (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger….The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling class….Only the historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins.280

The fallen actually ought to have power for Benjamin insofar as they are still invested in the present. “They manifest themselves in this struggle as courage, humor, cunning and fortitude. They have retroactive force and will constantly call into question every victory, past and present, of the rulers.”281 They do this by keeping the wreckage of history ever before our eyes. For Benjamin, the task of one who is a historical materialist is to look at that wreckage for what it is, ‘he regards it as his task to brush history against the grain” and to reveal the struggle and horror behind the neat and tidy accounts.282 “For without

279 Benjamin, “Philosophy of History.” 257-258.
280 Ibid. 255.
281 Ibid.
282 Ibid. 256.
exception the cultural treasures he surveys have an origin which he cannot contemplate without horror…There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.”

But as we learned from “The Storyteller” the narrative stories so crucial to passing on the memories of the dead—especially those who suffered and are waiting for some form of redemption—are fading. Benjamin adds an additional cause to the ones already given for this, indicting the modern faith in irresistible, automatic, progress without limits and a concomitant notion of time without end. “The concept of the historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through homogenous empty time.”

It is all future oriented and the past atrophies. The only redemption is now, and it is constituted by wealth and advancement. “The savior of modern times is called work. The…improvement…of labor constitutes wealth which is now able to accomplish what no redeemer has ever been able to do….It recognizes only the progress in the mastery of nature…it already displays the technocratic features later encountered in Fascism.”

The only way to disrupt this complacent and oppressive notion of progress is to rupture time itself. Time is not endlessly the same. This potential Benjamin locates in the “revolutionary class at the moment of their action.” Here is the messianic potential of the present for the past. Each moment might be the moment when it all changes. Benjamin returns to his Jewish roots to describe this.

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283 Ibid.
284 Ibid. 261.
285 Ibid. 259.
286 Ibid. 261.
We know that the Jews were prohibited from investigating the future. The Torah and the prayers instruct them in remembrance, however. This stripped the future of its magic….This does not imply, however, that for the Jews the future turned into homogenous, empty time. For every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter.  

2.2.2 Metz’s Appropriation and Adaptation of Benjamin

Just from this brief description of some of Benjamin’s thought (I have included primarily facets that pertain most to the subject of this dissertation), it is clear why Metz will find his thought deeply compelling. Perhaps it was because he was such a marginal Marxist, and included theological notions like redemption and messianism, but Metz was inspired greatly by Benjamin when he turned towards political theology. In fact, it was Metz’s encounter with Benjamin’s writings and the thought of Ernst Bloch in the 1960s that facilitated his break with traditional metaphysics and opened him to the questions put forth by Marxism and the neglected vocabulary of the apocalyptic. A point by point consideration of the similarities and differences between Benjamin’s thought and Metz’s is therefore instructive in determining where the later diverges from the former.

First, Metz adopts memory and narrative as anthropological categories, both of which are explicitly discussed at length by Benjamin. Like Benjamin’s notion of memory, Metz associates his preferred type of memory with danger and the victims of history. The difference is that Metz’s notion of dangerous memory—which actually is inspired by Herbert Marcuse—has more to do with the threat posed by the remembered events and people themselves, while Benjamin’s danger associated with memory has more to do with the immediate threat posed by the rulers to the under classes now—so

287 Ibid. 264.

288 Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*. 201-203. “Moreover, Benjamin’s thinking was always more analogical than Horkheimer’s or Adorno’s, more concerned with the universal implicit in the particular.”

289 Ashley, *Interruptions*. xii.
menacing that even the dead will be impacted if these are victorious. So instead of memory being the product of a dangerous situation that a certain class is resisting presently, Metz’s dangerous memories are the source of instability and danger to the powerful. They provide, when borne and sustained by a remembering community (a.k.a. the church), the revolutionary disruption that Benjamin reserves for the uprising of the revolutionary proletariat.

Benjamin, utilizing Proust, distinguishes between two types of memory—volontaire and involontaire. Metz too distinguishes between memories that are safe and placating and those that are dangerous, but the two descriptions do not seem to correlate well. At best a loose similarity can be seen between voluntary memory in Benjamin and placating memories in Metz because both are devoid of a true connection to the past. There is no presence of the people or events called to mind in either case. The involuntary memory and dangerous memories, on the other hand, are filled with presence and both seem disturbing insofar as involuntary memories arise unbidden, surprising the one who remembers, and dangerous memories do the same by shaking people out of complacency and forgetfulness.

Both formulations of memory, however, do link the past and present through the presence and accountability of the living to the dead. There is a collective sense to both Benjamin’s memory and Metz’s. In the former, a whole class of people remembers and feels accountable to those who slaved and toiled in the past. In the later, the believing community (whether that be Christian or Jewish) itself is the transmitter of the memoria passionis. Neither man is speaking about the memories of just one person in isolation: these are communally recalled, yet specific and not generalized memories. Narrative becomes significant for both precisely for this reason. And neither group involved in present remembering is doing so primarily for themselves (i.e. the living) but out of concern and hope for those who are absent. So even Metz’s third pillar, solidarity, finds echoes in Benjamin’s discussion of sharing in the death of another through narrative.
Both Metz and Benjamin make the reality of death—especially untimely and horrific death—central. Death, especially suffering to the point of death, is what provides authority to the memories and narratives. Both scholars agree that death and suffering are universal realities that cause one to evaluate one’s. One ought to make decisions or reason in light of this final destination. Furthermore, Metz’s meditation on the denial of death in modern culture corresponds directly to what Benjamin states about death being hidden away in hospitals and sanatoriums now.\(^{290}\) This is a major loss for humanity in both men’s thought. Metz chooses to develop it in the direction of a lack of mourning and a total surrender to the exchange principle in economics. Benjamin focuses more directly on the loss of wisdom and insight into the meaning of life that happens when death is erased in the public milieu. But they both see the denial of death as something modernity seeks.

Both Benjamin and Metz conclude that the loss of memory, stories, and the authority of death and suffering are a product of increased technological and mechanical prioritization. Metz— influenced by other Frankfurt Scholars’ thought— focuses on and discusses the exchange principle far more than Benjamin does (although Benjamin no doubt would agree with Metz’s analysis), but both identify an expectation of unending, inevitable, progress as a source of the problem. Time without end becomes the vision of the future—time under control, filled with more of the same, the powerful unchallenged, the past unfulfilled. Metz, like Benjamin, turns to the language of redemption and the messianic as the source of a hoped for interruption and disruption of, what Nietzsche

\(^{290}\) Benjamin, “The Storyteller.” 93-94. “It has been observable for a number of centuries how in the general consciousness the thought of death has declined in omnipresence and vividness. In its last stages this process is accelerated. And in the course of the nineteenth century bourgeois society has, by means of hygienic and social, private and public institutions, realized a secondary effect which may have been its subconscious main purpose: to make it possible for people to avoid the sight of dying….There used to be no house, hardly a room, in which someone has not once died….Today people live in rooms that have never been touched by death, dry dwellers of eternity, and when their end approaches that are stowed away in sanatoria or hospitals by their heirs.”
would call, an “eternal return of the same,” or what Benjamin would term “empty
time.”  

Although there are many points of agreement in perspective and vocabulary
between Benjamin and Metz, there are some important differences that must be
acknowledged. First, Benjamin refers on several occasions to God’s memory, especially
as it compensates for human forgetting. Metz is unwilling to follow Benjamin down this
path. Here Metz shares more in common with some of the other members of the
Frankfurt School: he partakes of their negative, even apophatic tradition. Metz is willing
to speculate about human anthropology and make arguments for praxis based on theory
in mutually critical correlation, but he is not willing to speculate about the interior life or
workings of God. This is in perfect keeping with his spirituality of “suffering unto God”
and his unwilling to stop at easy answers. For him, answers are suspect. We need to sit
and agonize with the questions on this side of the eschaton. Presuming to know how God
operates is a form of taking control, trying to explain or even “tame” the divine. So
Metz’s discussion of memory stops at an anthropological construct. This actually will
become a major source of criticism for his theology of memory, to be discussed in the
subsequent chapters.

Second, Benjamin, as theological as he seems when compared with some of the
other members of the Frankfurt School, still embraces historical materialism to some
degree. Metz, however, never ground his thought in historical materialism. When
Benjamin speaks of redemption or even the action of a messiah, it is doubtful and unclear
if those notions have any religious import for him. As stated above, redemption seems to
be something that we humans primarily do for one another by remembering and
collecting. Furthermore, it is not clear whether he (like Adorno or even some of the
postmodern thinkers like Jacques Derrida) values just the possibility of something new

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coming suddenly or whether he actually expects someone or something to arrive.\textsuperscript{292}

Essentially, is the messianic just a placeholder for hope or is there some substance? Metz, as a Catholic Christian theologian, does actually expect at some unknown time and place the real rupture of time and history by God. So Benjamin and Metz both value the apocalyptic and the messianic, but Metz’s notions of these things are more concrete because he commits himself to a persistent engagement with the traditions of Judaism and Christianity. Metz’s references to God draw upon the God of scripture and remain faithful to a specific tradition. Benjamin remains elusive on who or what exactly he means by “God.” Is this the God of his estranged Jewish past? Or is this a placeholder? Or perhaps just the sign of some “transcendence” that is more than the human can control? Metz, however, treats Benjamin as if Benjamin thinks of redemption, especially of those who have died, as being a concept with actual content to be manifest at some point.\textsuperscript{293}

2.3 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer

While Benjamin is often considered a satellite member of the Frankfurt School, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno are the very center of the group. Each served as the director of the Institute of Social Research at different times; the former from January 1931 until 1958 and the later from 1958 until 1969.\textsuperscript{294} The two men met much earlier, however, in 1922, when both attended a seminar on Husserl taught by Hans Jay, \textit{Dialectical Imagination}. 278. Salvation comes across as an unattainable hope for them. “Where Adorno drew back, however, was from suggesting that salvation or redemption might be actually achieved. In other words, he denied the possibility of realizing the absolute without at the same time negating the reality of the finite and contingent. Thought, he paradoxically asserted, must comprehend this impossibility for the sake of what was in fact possible: ‘Against the challenge which emanates from this realization, the question of the reality or unreality of salvation itself is almost immaterial.’”

\textsuperscript{292} Metz, \textit{Faith in History and Society}. 109. Also 116-117. Metz here acknowledges the difference in meaning of certain words he uses and those same words used by Benjamin and the Frankfurt School.

\textsuperscript{294} Jay, \textit{Dialectical Imagination}. 25, 286-287.
Cornelius. They had much in common from the start. Both were born into wealthy, assimilated Jewish families. Adorno, born in Frankfurt in 1903, was the son of a wine merchant. Horkheimer was born in 1895 at Stuttgart to a wealthy Jewish manufacturing family. Both men were also attracted to the arts but branched out into other disciplines, notably psychology and philosophy. Thanks to his mother, a successful Italian singer, and her sister, who was an accomplished pianist, Adorno was attracted to music at an early age. Horkheimer was interested in literature and attempted writing several novels himself. This concern for art would carry through their work at the Institute, contributing, as Jay observes, to “one of the key elements in the Institut’s self-image…this sense of being the last outpost of a waning culture.” Although the two of them would “not write collaboratively until the 1940’s, there was a remarkable similarity in their views from the first.” Theirs was to become an intellectual partnership that would bear fruit for the rest of their lives, most notably in their joint work *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

One notices, however, two general progressions in their thought from their early years to their later scholarship. First, there is an increasing pessimism about the possibility for real change in history to happen at all. The horrors of the concentration  

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295 Ibid. 23.
296 Ibid. 22. Only Adorno’s father was Jewish—not his mother. He did drop the surname Wiesengrund and kept only his mother’s Italian surname when he moved to New York City during the Second World War. Jay sees this as an effort to distance himself from his Jewish roots—like most members of the Frankfurt School—claiming it exerted no influences on his thought or membership in the group.
297 Ibid. 6.
298 Ibid.
299 Ibid. 22.
300 Ibid. 40.
301 Ibid. 65.
camps and the manufactured mass culture that the two found in America during their exile from Germany during the war shook mightily in their estimation the possibility of revolution of any sort. The assumption that something has gone terribly wrong is the premise on which both Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics* and their joint *Dialectic of Enlightenment* are based. “History, all reinterpretations to the contrary notwithstanding, has failed to take the course predicted for it as a scientific necessity.” The two begin their discussion of the Enlightenment by stating “Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity.” Adorno echoes this in his introduction, “Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed. The summary judgment that it had merely interpreted the world, that resignation in the face of reality had crippled itself, becomes a defeatism of reason after the attempt to change the world miscarried.” Somehow the entertainment industry had managed to lull the once vaunted proletariat into accepting their lot in the oppressive system.

Second, towards the end of their work, the alienation and domination of nature (even human nature) by humans in a capitalist system became more and more prominent—even more than class conflict. As Jay observes:

302 Ibid. 253.


306 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. 113, 116. “Entertainment fosters the resignation which seeks to forget itself in entertainment.” “Amusement always means putting things out of mind, forgetting suffering, even when it is on display. At its root is powerlessness. It is indeed escape, but not, as it claims, escape from bad reality but from the last thought of resisting that reality.”
The clearest expression of this change was the Institut’s replacement of class conflict, that foundation stone of any truly Marxist theory, with a new motor of history. The focus was now on the larger conflict between man and nature both without and within, a conflict whose origins went back to before capitalism and whose continuation, indeed intensification, appeared likely after capitalism would end….It was in a sense the revenge of nature for the cruelty and exploitation that Western man had visited upon it for generations.\textsuperscript{307}

They also detect a correlation between the objectification of nature and the exploitation and objectification of people by other people—notably the poor, women, Jews, and the weak in general. Horkheimer especially explored this phenomenon:

Horkheimer directly related the Renaissance view of science and technology to political domination. The new conception of the natural world as a field for human manipulation and control, he argued, corresponded to a similar notion of man himself as an object of domination….later Enlightenment thinkers had assimilated man to nature in a manner that made man into an object, just as nature had been objectified in the new science. As a result, the assumption that nature repeated itself eternally was projected onto man, whose historical capacity for development, so closely bound to his subjectivity, was denied. For all its progressive intentions, this “scientific” view of man implied the eternal return of the present….The instrumental manipulation of nature by man led inevitably to the concomitant relationship among men.\textsuperscript{308}

This notion of time as eternal repetition erodes the impetus for change, thus contributing to the pessimistic outlook for real change observed as the first shift in their thought. Ultimately, without some transcendence, Adorno and Horkheimer are both stymied regarding how such complacency and time without end can be disrupted. They do, on several occasions, but in a limited fashion, call upon memory—that of suffering and that of our true repressed natures—in an attempt to break the cycle. This will be discussed more extensively below.

\textsuperscript{307} Jay, \textit{Dialectical Imagination}. 257.

\textsuperscript{308} Ibid. 257, 261.
2.3.1 Closed Systems, Critical Theory, and Negative Dialectics

Both Adorno and Horkheimer studied other philosophers extensively before focusing on Marxism and dialectical materialism. Adorno wrote his doctoral thesis on Kierkegaard while Horkheimer focused on Kant.\footnote{Ibid. 6, 24.} In their view Marx, however, offered the possibility of combining theory and action through praxis to actually transform the world. However, in light of the “ambiguous success of the Soviet Union” and an increasing sense by the 1930s that the proletarian revolution may not happen as predicted, Horkheimer and Adorno turned to Marx with the same critical eye they had turned towards other thinkers.\footnote{Ibid. 43.} Horkheimer and Adorno were more concerned with “the reexamination of the foundations of Marxism” and questioning its tenets, now passed on as received truths by orthodox Marxist thinkers, than justifying or bolstering any political claims.\footnote{Ibid. 20, 254.} Both of them rejected the basic premise that any one philosophical system of thought was capable of encompassing “truth” for all times and places.\footnote{Adorno, \textit{Negative Dialectics}. 34-37.} “Each period of time has its own truth…although there is none above time. What is true is whatever fosters social change in the direction of a rational society.”\footnote{Jay, \textit{Dialectical Imagination}. 63.} With this made clear, one can understand Jay’s claim that “[a]t the very heart of Critical Theory was an aversion to closed philosophical systems. To present it as such would therefore distort its essentially open-ended, probing, unfinished quality.”\footnote{Jay, \textit{Dialectical Imagination}. 63.}
The danger in embracing a closed system is that it causes proponents to oppose ideas, realities, or changes that contradict what they have already decided is the case. “The things philosophy has yet to judge are postulated before it begins. The system, the form of presenting a totality to which nothing remains extraneous, absolutizes the thought against each of its contents and evaporates the content in thoughts.” The need to explain everything or obliterate it as a threat to the status quo leaves no room for negativity: the uncertain, unknown, or unexplained. This limits the possibility for change. Unease with the negative gives rise to violence and domination. Freedom of thought as well as action is curtailed in the interest of maintaining cohesion. As Adorno observed, “The whole is the untruth” because there is no such thing as a whole without remainder. This is where Critical Theory and Negative Dialectics originate.

Critical Theory, which has already been discussed in detail above, was the method Adorno and Horkheimer devised by which closed systems with absolute claims to final truth could be called into question. Its purpose is to examine and critique other ways of thinking rather than proposing some constructive philosophy of its own. It never settles down or adopts an identity. It also refuses to enunciate an anthropology or describe definitively what makes a human, human. “Like its implicit reliance on a negative anthropology, Critical Theory had a basically insubstantial concept of reason and truth, rooted in social conditions and yet outside them…”

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314 Ibid. 41.
317 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*. 406. This unwillingness to rest is a type of hope, according to Adorno.
318 Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*. 76. “As always, they were reluctant to make positive speculations about human identity.”
This is in keeping with Negative Dialectics—a certain apophaticism about the positive vision or explanation of history and the world. It defies claims that reduce reality to a uniform totality or the absolute affirmative and progressive nature of the syntheses typically involved in Hegel’s idea of dialectics. Adorno affirms in the introduction of Negative Dialectics that “Negative Dialectics is a phrase that flouts tradition. As early as Plato, dialectics meant to achieve something positive by means of negation; the thought figure of a ‘negation of negation’ later became the succinct term. This book seeks to free dialectics from such affirmative traits…”

Negative Dialectics also affirms that it is not possible to completely meld two opposite entities into one homogenous whole without remainder. To do so is to perform some violation of one or both of the items originally involved. In this way, Negative Dialectics is also an “anti-system” which calls for all thought to reexamine itself and remain self-critical.

Horkheimer and Adorno turn this dialectical approach and their critical theory towards one of the key movements of modernity—the Enlightenment—in order to try and discern why, for all the scientific and technological progress, humans are slipping back into barbarism.

2.3.2 The Enlightenment and the Manipulation of Reason

The Enlightenment and the ascendancy of reason, scientific certainty, and a new free subject of history—free from myth and fear of unseen divine forces—have regressed, according to Horkheimer and Adorno. The free “subject” of the Enlightenment

319 Ibid. 63.

320 Adorno, Negative Dialectics. xix.

321 Ibid. 5. “The name dialectics says no more, to begin with, than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder….It indicates the untruth of identity, the fact that the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived.”

322 Ibid. xx, 365.

323 Horkheimer and Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment. xiv.
was not truly free, being enslaved to powerful economic interests and forces, beaten down by a morality that both tempted and denied true pleasure, and a mass culture manufactured to keep the majority of people in their unfree state. The reality that must be acknowledged is that reason actually has been used to bring this current state about and maintain it. Reason, rather than being a neutral force unto itself, actually can support any purpose whatsoever. This becomes apparent in several ways.

First, the Enlightenment notion of knowledge was synonymous with “systematic enquiry into nature. Knowledge obtained through such enquiry would not only be exempt from the influence of wealth and power but would establish man as the master of nature.” This assumption blinds one to the fact that this type of knowledge already exalts the human above nature while simultaneously reducing human nature to something that can be manipulated. “Technology is the essence of this knowledge. It aims to produce neither concepts nor images, not the joy of understanding, but method, exploitation of the labor of others, capital.” Hence, the “subject” of this enlightenment is the bourgeois subject really, excluding from its definition the interests and concerns of the poor or voiceless whose labor it is that is actually exploited.

But the belief that this sort of scientific knowledge is objective, universal, and beyond bias creates a hegemony of technical reason: “For enlightenment, anything which does not conform to the standard of calculability and utility must be viewed with suspicion.” This results in a fear of the unknown. “Nothing is allowed to remain outside [the system], since the mere idea of ‘outside’ is the real source of fear.” The

324 Ibid. 1.
325 Ibid. 2.
326 Ibid. 65. “The bourgeois in the successive forms of the slave-owner, the free entrepreneur, and the administrator is the logical subject of the enlightenment.”
327 Ibid. 3.
proclivity to calculability naturally results in assigning a value to everything so that, in a
cmathematical fashion, they can be controlled, compared, and exchanged. “Bourgeois
society is ruled by equivalence. It makes dissimilar things comparable by reducing them
to abstract quantities. For the Enlightenment, anything which cannot be resolved into
numbers, and ultimately one, is illusion.”329

Critical Theory and Negative Dialectics detect a serious problem in this
standardization, not the least of which is that it reduces many who should be subjects to
mere objects. “It amputates the incommensurable…human beings are forced into real
conformity.”330 People, like cogs in a machine, are interchangeable, identical, and
therefore expendable when the market demands it.331 Even worse, the reason behind the
system maintains that outcomes are entirely predictable—or at least they should be. The
supposedly neutral reason dictates that the way things are now is the best system, so
everything should remain the same in order to fend off past errors and ensure a safe
future. “For enlightenment is totalitarian as only a system can be. Its untruth [is]…in the
assumption that the trial is pre-judged. In the preemptive identification of the thoroughly
mathematized world with truth, enlightenment believes itself safe from the return of the
mythical.”332

Cracks begin to appear in the façade of the absolute reason of the Enlightenment
when actual historical conditions are taken into consideration, not just the ideals. One
example of barbarous actions that reason, in an earlier period, (and perhaps even today in
a different form!) justified was the offering of sacrifices of individuals on behalf of the

328 Ibid. 11.
329 Ibid. 4.
330 Ibid. 9.
331 Ibid. 29.
332 Ibid. 18.
This is also a form of exchange: one life for some benefit from a god or nature. It gives power to those who make the exchange.

The Enlightenment form of reason did not abolish sacrifice, unfortunately, as Adorno and Horkheimer demonstrate in their discussion of anti-Semitism and the Shoah. Some group must still be the scapegoat, the release valve for a society where so many people are reduced to objects and kept under tight control. Expectations fostered by the culture industry (unending progress, success accessible to all, the ability to become rich) in the masses, when frustrated, produce violence against the most vulnerable. Somehow they are the cause of the deprivation of the dream of the masses, not the capitalist system. “Bourgeois anti-Semitism has a specific economic purpose: to conceal domination in production.” To save the masses some group must pay. The Jews are convenient because they will not conform absolutely: “Their inflexible adherence to their own order of life has placed them in an insecure relationship to the prevailing one.” “For the fascists the Jews are not a minority but the antirace, the negative principle as such; on their extermination the world’s happiness depends.” Reason calls upon self-preservation (the self being the bourgeois subject) in order to justify these acts of barbarism. “Reason is the organ of calculation, of planning; it is neutral with regard to ends; its element is coordination….the established bourgeois order entirely functionalized reason. It became purposiveness without purpose, which for that very reason could be

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333 Ibid. 40.

334 Ibid. 140, 142. “Anti-Semitic behavior is unleashed in situations in which blinded people, deprived of subjectivity, are let loose as subjects….Anti-Semitism is a well-rehearsed pattern, indeed, a ritual of civilization, and the pogroms are the true ritual murders…. [This] lends a degree of truth to the explanation of the movement as a release valve. Rage is vented on those who are both conspicuous and unprotected.”

335 Ibid. 142.

336 Ibid. 138.

337 Ibid. 137.
harnessed to any end” [emphasis mine]. It is no coincidence, however, that the ends to which reason has been put coincide with the interests of the powerful since reason is not neutral, but is bound up with the exchange system.

2.3.3 The Culture Industry, Manufacturing Docility, and Memory

There are intimations throughout their work that the Enlightenment need not permanently be lost. Negative Dialectics, by being critical, is trying to awake the enlightenment to its own errors. In the Preface to The Dialectic of the Enlightenment Horkheimer and Adorno write “The critique of the enlightenment given in this section is intended to prepare a positive concept of enlightenment which liberates it from its entanglement in blind domination.” But no positive concept is ever enunciated as such. Even the possibility of the enlightenment revising itself is called into question by the apathy and mental vacancy that they observe among the majority of people. There is again that sense that the revolution has missed its chance insofar as entertainment and amusement have dulled the senses of those very people capable of resisting.

“Culture today is infecting everything with sameness. Film, radio, and magazines [doubtlessly TV too] form a system….The truth that they are nothing but business is used as an ideology to legitimize the trash they intentionally produce.” People have been convinced that what they are getting is, in fact, what they as consumers have wanted, but the truth is that their needs are dictated to them by the powerful. The great delusion of

338 Ibid. 69.

339 Ibid. 173. “To be reasonable…means to insist that there be equivalence between giving and taking. Such reason is modeled on exchange.”

340 Ibid. xviii.

341 Ibid. 94-95.

342 Ibid. 95.
enlightenment freedom as subjects is perpetuated by making people believe they have choices when they really are limited to the options presented to them by the mass culture industry. Despite how it may look sometimes, artists who are outside the mainstream or who refuse to conform to a style that is easily packaged and sold, are unable to break through the iron curtain of the industry. People’s choices are already limited. Eventually this leads to an impoverishment of creativity and the ability to imagine things other than as they are—both of which are crucial for bringing about real social change. And this is precisely the aim of the culture industry: to tame the dissatisfaction that makes people imagine alternatives.

The spectator must need no thoughts of his own….Donald Duck in the cartoons and the unfortunate victim in real life receive their beatings so that the spectators can accustom themselves to theirs….The culture industry does not sublimate: it suppresses….never releasing its grip on the consumer….not for a moment allowing him or her to suspect that resistance is possible….Individuals experience themselves through their needs only as eternal consumers, as the culture industry’s object….it also gives them to understand that they must make do with what is offered, whatever it may be….Entertainment fosters the resignation which seeks to forget itself in entertainment.

Forgetting is key for the utility of the culture industry to those in power. Only by forgetting suffering, injustice, poverty, and hope can the workers be kept in their places. “Everything is fine” is the official cultural line.

Amusement always means putting things out of mind, forgetting suffering, even when it is on display. At its root is powerlessness. It is indeed escape, but not, as it claims, escape from bad reality but from the last thought of resisting that reality….They [the consumers] are assured that they do not need to be in any way other than they are…they are given the hint that effort would not help them in any

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343 Ibid. 96-97. “The talents belong to the operation long before they are put on show….the advantages and disadvantages debated by enthusiasts serve only to perpetuate the appearance of competition and choice.”

344 Ibid. 100.

345 Ibid. 109-113.
case, because even bourgeois success no longer has any connection to the calculable effect of their own work.\textsuperscript{346}

Those who do remember are ostracized and marked for violence. The suffering and the victimized—much less the dead—do not conform to the system that perpetually holds out the possibility of progress. Horkheimer and Adorno reflect on the culture’s awareness of and relationship with the dead.

The disturbed relationship to the dead—who are forgotten and embalmed—is one of the symptoms of the sickness of experience today….Individuals are reduced to a mere succession of instantaneous presents, which leave behind no trace, or rather the trace of which they hate as something irrational, superfluous, utterly obsolete …What someone was and experienced earlier is annulled in face of what he is now, or of the purpose for which he can be used.\textsuperscript{347}

The exchange value of the person is all that matters, and the dead have no value, so their memory is discarded. Even worse, the feelings of sadness and loss when someone dies are hardly tolerated by society.

The fate which befalls all feelings, the ostracizing of what has no market value, is applied most harshly to something which cannot even contribute to a psychological restoration of labor power, mourning….Therefore mourning, more than all else, is disfigured, deliberately turned into the social formality….The dead are in truth subjected to what for the ancient Jews was the most grievous curse: To thee shall no thoughts be turned. The living vent on the dead their despair that they no longer give thought to themselves.\textsuperscript{348}

Not thinking about the dead also helps preserve the myth of the present that masks our own mortality. To remember the dead means being in solidarity with them and somehow, therefore, being responsible for them. “Only when the horror of annihilation is raised fully into consciousness are we placed in proper relationship to the dead: that of unity with them, since we, like them, are victims of the same conditions and of the same disappointed hope.”\textsuperscript{349}

\textsuperscript{346} Ibid. 116-117.

\textsuperscript{347} Ibid. 178-179.

\textsuperscript{348} Ibid.
This is the last thing the powerful and the shapers of the culture industry want because in those memories something from the past becomes present again, causing “to flash up a semblance of freedom that civilization has been unable to wholly extinguish ever since.” Furthermore, it is only subjects who can remember—never objects. “Freedom follows the subject’s urge to express itself. The need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth. For suffering is objectivity that weighs upon the subject; its most subjective experience.” Subjects are difficult to control and will inevitably question the way things are. That is why forgetting is mandated by mass culture. For this reason, Martin Jay asserts: “Memory, in fact, played a key role in the Frankfurt School’s understanding of the crisis of modern civilization….One of the greatest costs of progress, Horkheimer and Adorno wrote in one of their aphorisms, was the repression of the pain and suffering caused by the mastery of nature.”

2.3.4 Metz’s Incorporation of Adorno and Horkheimer

Metz’s turn away from metaphysics and towards a political theology in the 1960s can be linked with his encounter with the thought of Adorno and Horkheimer (as well as Bloch), in whom “he discovered kindred intellectual spirits…. [whose] consciously antisystematic style, fit Metz’s own developing style.” Unlike other Marxist thinkers,

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349 Ibid. 178.

350 Ibid. 61. This reflects Benjamin’s thought and vocabulary: “To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was’ (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.” Benjamin, “Philosophy of History.” 255.

351 So computerized, cyber-intelligence, does not really remember because it is also incapable of forgetting. Metz makes this point explicitly. Metz, Faith in History and Society. 181.

352 Adorno, Negative Dialectics. 18.

353 Jay, Dialectical Imagination. 267.

354 Ashley, Interruptions. 28.
they did not jettison theory or set up a false dichotomy between theory and praxis. Furthermore, their general approach through Critical Theory and Negative Dialectics appealed to Metz’s unwillingness to accept easy answers to the experiences and problems he noted as a theologian in modern western Europe. As his spirituality of Suffering Unto God indicates, it is the questioning and waiting for a response from God—not answers—that interest him. “A religion which does not simply serve up answers, but rather helps unasked questions find words—would that not be a religion which takes men and women seriously?” He, like them, was uneasy concluding that the final, true answer for all times had already been given. This is most notably evident for Metz in regards to the question(s) of theodicy/anthropodicy raised by the Second World War and the Shoah (which only become explicitly prominent for him in the 1980s).

Metz, who defends modernity and even attempts to show how it had come about thanks to Christianity, came to share the concerns of Horkheimer and Adorno with the Enlightenment by the time he wrote *Faith in History and Society*. First, he recognizes how reason has been reduced to mere technical rationality, in which everything is reproducible and replaceable. This type of reason is easily manipulated, yet Metz does not believe that all reason falls into this category. He distinguishes between two types of reason emerging from Enlightenment Europe. Type 1 Rationality is based on science and technology, leads to the domination of nature and people, and calls for assimilation. Type 2 Rationality, however, “is directed by a reason that wants to be effective and achieve itself as freedom…as justice…[and] has in view the subjective freedom and worth of all human beings.” This second sort is not acknowledged really by

355 Schuster and Boschert-Kimmig, *Hope against Hope*.5


357 Ibid. 73.
Horkheimer and Adorno, although one detects an openness in their critique for a rehabilitation of the Enlightenment. Unlike them, however, Metz does not seem to share their conviction in an “almost ontological defect in reason, one that causes it to collapse inevitably into instrumental reason.”\textsuperscript{358} Reason, of the second sort Metz identifies (which will become his anamnestic reason), is still crucial to freedom and the recognition of the subjectivity of all people.

Second, Metz acknowledges how humans are now dominated by the market and the exchange system, although he does not emphasize capitalism as the root evil to the same extent that a Marxist—even a revisionary one—would.\textsuperscript{359} Although the Enlightenment had as a goal the liberation of people, it has actually resulted in people being less free because their value to the system is now quantified. Metz connects this commoditization to the exploitation of nature and the reduction of people to mere objects. In this he is in agreement with Horkheimer and Adorno. He goes even further, however, by recognizing that there are people for whom subjectivity has never yet been an option at all: they have not “lost” their subjectivity so much as they were never recognized as subjects at all, according to standards of productivity. For Metz, these people are and remain subjects before God, even if other humans have not yet recognized their subjectivity. This recognition by humans comes from turning away from the abstract subject of history, which is actually only the bourgeois subject, and towards real, concrete situations of suffering and dehumanization. True subjectivity for all must be defended for those who are most in danger of losing or never achieving it. For Metz, the dead especially typify the subjectivity that is endangered by the exchange system because, as Horkheimer and Adorno point out, they have no exchange value.

\textsuperscript{358} Ashley, \textit{Interruptions}. 112.

\textsuperscript{359} See Metz, \textit{Faith in History and Society}. 24-25. He does indict capitalism to some extent, along with socialist systems. But he does not belabor this point continually.
Finally, Metz shares in Horkheimer and Adorno’s assessment that forgetting, especially forgetting the history of suffering and the dead, is one of the greatest threats to truly free civilization. Without delving deeply into the critique of the culture industry, Metz adopts their characterization of the brainwashing that has occurred in order to maintain the *status quo*. He focuses more on what he calls privatization, apathy, and the effects of pacifying memories which bathe “everything in the past in a mild, conciliatory light.”

Metz explicitly takes up the example of the prohibition on mourning that has developed in western societies that Horkheimer and Adorno use. “The love that mourns for the dead is that form of love…that cannot be taken up into a consumer society’s exploitation structures. In line with this, the community of feeling with the dead dwindles away…it is blocked, trivialized, and inevitably privatized.”

He also joins in attributing the only true authority to suffering. It produces an internal demand on those who experience or witness it to prevent such suffering in the future. The authority stems from one’s humanity. Suffering, or the memory of it, alone can disrupt the myth of progress.

Citing Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics*, Metz affirms the disruptive nature of suffering: “The slightest trace of meaningless suffering in the world as we experience it gives the lie to this whole affirmative ontology and the whole of teleology, and reveals them to be modernity’s mythology.”

But Metz can only go so far with Horkheimer and Adorno. Where they are totally unwilling to acknowledge any concrete anthropology and, in fact, proclaim the death of...
the subject itself, Metz holds tenaciously to subjectivity as an integral part of the
Christian hope for redemption.

Metz found himself sympathetic, perhaps grudgingly at first, to some of these
critiques, particularly those leveled by the founders of the Frankfurt School, Max
Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno. He took over their critique of the
Enlightenment and of modernity under the rubric of the “dialectic of
enlightenment” and, like them, became increasingly wary of any
conceptualization of a “transcendental subject” that could be formulated and
utilized above or behind the backs of the terrifying ruptures in history,
paradigmatically represented by the Holocaust. He began to feel uneasy about the
possible presence of such an abstract, ahistorical subject in Rahner’s work. Yet,
for all of this, Metz resolutely refused to join postmodernists in proclaiming an
end to the subject. Metz remained convinced that at the heart of Christian faith, in
Western civilization, was an understanding of persons as subjects, as beings
endowed with the dignity and responsibility of becoming themselves….However
much he recognized a dialectic of Enlightenment, he remained a passionate
defender of the Enlightenment’s essential rightness….the turn to the subject is
still central to understanding Metz’s entire theological career…

This difference in Metz is clearly theological and demonstrates how he diverges from his
philosophical interlocutors. Subjectivity itself is tied up with relationship with God for
him, as evinced in scripture.

The histories of faith found in the Old and New Testaments are not added on to a
humanity that has already been constituted as subjects, superimposed as some sort
of superstructure or ceremonial accessory. Rather, they are histories of the
dramatic constitution of human beings as subjects—precisely through their
relationship to God….Religion is not an add-on; rather, it participates in the
building up of one’s being a subject….To put it in more dramatic terms: the
struggle for God and the struggle for all persons being free to be subjects go not in
inverse proportion but in direct proportion.

The pessimism and resignation that the reader, as well as Metz himself, detects in the
writings of Horkheimer and Adorno can be attributed to this correlation. If they have

364 Ashley, Interruptions. 43-44.

365 Metz, Faith in History and Society. 70-71.

366 Ibid. 263. Note 42 on pages 74-78. “With Adorno it appears that the struggle for the subject has
already been lost: he sees the disintegration of the bourgeois subject, cannot acknowledge the socialist one
as a successor, and will not grant the authenticity of the religious subject. Thus, the character of the thought
in Dialectic of Enlightenment is with him essentially marked by resignation.”
given up on the subject, then (in Metz’s understanding) they have excluded God as well. This leaves them in a bind. While their analysis of history and the current state of society may be very accurate, they are ultimately painted into a corner because there is no way out. If all are blinded, if all are taken in by the culture industry and exchange system, then where will the disruption that will change the future come from? Without something coming in from outside the system it is difficult to see how they can credibly hope for change. Metz shares this concern for all Marxist inspired thought in general. Belief in a God of the living and the dead, for example “puts critical questions to that historical-dialectical materialism: Where in it can one find the grounds for the historical struggle for universal justice and for the existence of all persons as subjects?...the understanding of history as a dialectical history of freedom will not be able to escape the undertow of evolutionistic thinking.”  

Hence it is possible, as Horkheimer and Adorno fear, that the time for revolution or the flowering of philosophy’s goal of freedom have passed. The moment has gone. Metz need never worry that such is the case because the moment of change could come any time with people inspired by God.

This leads to another vital theological distinction in Metz’s work: he hopes for redemption and not emancipation. Emancipation is what Metz sees as the ultimate goal of Marxist thought. It is a freedom that is taken by the subject him or herself, often through violence. The Enlightenment’s original aim, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, was emancipation of people from fear and superstition. Reason and science,

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367 Ibid. 82.

368 Ibid. 116. “It is this universal human emancipation that Marxism so forcefully counterposes to every gratuitously given, liberated, or redeemed freedom, whose mere appearance of freedom keeps man and women from winning their real freedom.”

369 Ibid. 115. “For it is only when paternalistic bestowal recedes into the background in the event of emancipation, and autonomy comes into the foreground—which is to say the understanding of emancipation as the self-liberation of human groups and classes in the modern history of revolution and enlightenment—that those contrasts and tensions enter into the relationship of emancipation and redemption....”
as purely human tools and methods, could therefore bring about emancipation—at least in theory. Part of the emancipatory process, however, was freeing people from the shackles of tradition. This naturally includes religion for Marxist thinkers. And with the end of religion also must come the end of guilt. Horkheimer and Adorno go to great lengths in *Dialectic* to denounce the punitive morality they see at work still in modern technical societies. Guilt serves no constructive purpose but to control people.

Metz, however, rejects emancipation in favor of redemption. Redemption acknowledges that freedom is not something that one can take one’s self, but that there must necessarily be some larger force at work (i.e. God) that makes possible what otherwise would not be. Redemption is necessary because guilt is a genuine reality. Furthermore, to present any person as guiltless takes away his or her true freedom as a subject because the dignity of subjectivity requires that one can make a mistake, sin, and accept responsibility for the consequences. Guilt also brings about dangerous memories because it forces reflection on how each person has contributed to the suffering in history. To believe one’s self to be without guilt is to risk repeating the horrors of the past.

Unlike Marxism, post-idealist theology stresses that this guilt is not an assumed but an authentic phenomenon in the historical process of personal lives. It cannot be regarded as an expression of pure alienation, although theology and its preaching of guilt and sin have all too often been alienating and oppressive. Denial of this guilt is an attack on freedom, because the dignity of freedom includes the capacity for guilt. Moreover, acceptance of guilt before God does not prevent human beings from having full responsibility for their own history. On the contrary: where moral guilt is denied as an original phenomenon; that is, denounced as false consciousness, mechanisms arise to make excuses for the sufferings and contradictions in life. We get self-defense strategies for allegedly

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370 Ibid. 117. Metz strenuously objects to any equivocation or the equating of the two. “There is no theological foothold to be found in this dialectic of history of emancipation!...It is simply not the case that emancipation is nothing but redemption’s immanence, and redemption emancipation’s transcendence, as a reconciling formula that has since become well known would have it.”

371 Ibid. 116. “It became clear that revolutionary histories can degenerate into new histories of violence and oppression; new histories of suffering arise within emancipatory societies.”
guiltless individuals. The historical responsibility of the person in history is irrationally halved, and the horror and dismay projected one-sidedly onto the historical opponent….If and insofar as Marxist praxis of class struggle is mistaken about the abyss of human guilt and, thus, implicitly denies human moral dignity, it cannot be taken as a fundamental principle in the historical process of salvation. If and insofar as Marxist historical and social analysis is based on this premise, it cannot be accepted by theology uncritically as it stands.372

Here Metz draws a clear line between his theology and many modern philosophies. Matt Ashley explains how this distinction sets him apart from the Frankfurt School, but also gives a new center to the dialectic of the enlightenment.

Hence, the relevant dialectic for Metz is not the one between subject and object or reason and nature, but the dialectic between emancipation, and redemption, which acknowledges the enduring responsibility of the subject for the suffering of others….In Metz’s narrative, the decline of the enlightenment begins when modernity tries to resolve the dialectic of redemption and emancipation by absorbing redemption into emancipation.373

Part of the absorption process was eliminating guilt.374 But because of guilt, something outside the human subject is necessary for true freedom and justice, as well as the subjectivity of all, to be recognized.375 Redemption for Christians obviously comes through the life, passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus.376 Only by keeping this

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373 Ashley, Interruptions. 112-113.

374 Ibid. 115. “Horkheimer and Adorno traced the dialectic of enlightenment, with all its barbarous consequences, to the attempt to close or transcend the dialectic of reason and nature by means of idealism, positivism, or instrumental reason. Metz traces it to the attempt to formulate an understanding of the subject that needs no redemption, needs no release from the guilt that falls to it due to the meaningless suffering that occurs in history. No coherent and humane concept of the subject can be achieved in this way.”

375 Metz, Faith in History and Society. 120. “A history of emancipation without a history of redemption thus reveals itself to be an abstract history of success, and abstract history of the victors—a halved history of freedom, so to speak, giving homo emancipator as the subject of history a perfect mechanism for justifying and exculpating himself.”

376 Ibid. 124. “With its message of redemption Christianity is not offering up some meaning, however washed out, for the unexpiated suffering of the past; rather, it is telling a particular history of freedom: a freedom based on the redeeming liberation by God in the Cross of Jesus. It is no accident that this history
dangerous memory *par excellence* in mind, along with the knowledge of our own guilt, can the struggle for justice and subjecthood be sustained in the face of a history of death and suffering. Such a concrete memory, which gestures towards an eschatological future with actual content and expectation, can guarantee that every moment is the one in which the messiah might arrive with hope for the living and the dead.

2.4 Herbert Marcuse

Like many of the other Frankfurt scholars, Herbert Marcuse was born to an affluent assimilated Jewish family living in Berlin in 1898. After receiving his doctorate in 1923, he studied with Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl—both of whom influenced his thought greatly. From very early in his life Marcuse was also oriented towards Marxism—although his participation in party politics was minimal—which probably contributed to his moving away from the thought of Heidegger and towards participation in the Institute for Social Research. He worked closely with both Adorno and Horkheimer, ending up in America as an exile like them during World War II. Interestingly, Marcuse played a very practical role in resisting fascism as he worked for the American government in the 1940s. “Marcuse was faithful to the observation that the unity of theory and practice was only a utopian hope. In light of the alternatives, aiding the war effort against Hitler while maintaining the purity of one’s theoretical commitment can scarcely be called a dishonorable compromise.” After the war, Marcuse chose to remain in the United States, teaching at several universities and

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*of liberation includes the *descensus ad inferos*…this ‘being with (of the crucified) with the dead’ indicates the original liberative dynamism of the history of redemption….”


becoming one of the inspirations for the “New Left” that would come fully to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s.\(^{381}\) This role somewhat separated him from the Institute, although he perhaps more than any other Institute scholar was able to introduce Critical Theory to the English-speaking world because he wrote in English and was most sensitive to the American capitalist context in his critique of what he came to term “one-dimensional” society.\(^ {382}\)

2.4.1 One-Dimensional Society and Disruptive Memories

In many significant respects Marcuse’s work during his years with the Frankfurt School was in agreement with the project of Adorno and Horkheimer, enunciated in the *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*.\(^ {383}\) Where he differed from them was usually a result of his greater sympathy with Marx and the desire to adapt Marx’s actual writings to the current milieu.\(^ {384}\) Also, Marcuse was more willing to enunciate an actual anthropology than either of the other two, and Marcuse found labor to be ontologically definitive of people’s essence.\(^ {385}\) But there were many more similarities than differences.

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\(^ {381}\) Ibid. 284. He taught at Columbia and Brandeis, did research at Harvard, and ended up at the University of California, San Diego in 1965, at which time “he was on the verge of becoming an internationally celebrated mentor of the nascent New Left.”

\(^ {382}\) Ibid. 78, 287-288.

\(^ {383}\) Ibid. 217. “In short, all the celebrated pessimism of Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man* was anticipated in the essay on the culture industry in *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*. The only hint of negation preserved in mass culture Horkheimer and Adorno allowed was in corporeal rather than intellectual art….”

\(^ {384}\) Ibid. 79. “In certain respects, however, Marcuse did reveal a degree of independence from Horkheimer’s influence. The difference in their attitude towards the centrality of labor meant that Marcuse hesitated to implicate Marx in his critique of instrumental rationality, in the way that Horkheimer, Adorno, and more recent members of the Frankfurt School were to do. He was also kinder to Marx’s successors than they were.”

\(^ {385}\) Ibid. 75. “At one point in his argument, he [Marcuse] claimed that Marx had sought the unity of man and nature—the very goal that Adorno and Horkheimer were later to emphasize in opposition to Marx…. This seeming contradiction is perhaps explained by Marcuse’s agreement with Marx that labor (Arbeit) was man’s means of realizing his essence. Labor, Marcuse contended, was man’s nature; it was an ontological category….”
Marcuse, like Adorno and Horkheimer, critiqued the denial of genuine pleasure in much of western society, as engineered by the culture industry, because of the “restriction of happiness to consumption and leisure to the exclusion of productive labor.” He also noted the co-optation of the proletariat, especially in technologically advanced societies (like the United States), and the lack of opposition that the exploited working class posed under these circumstances. The lack of criticism, and even the ability to imagine an alternative to the present state of things, evinces not only a powerful propaganda machine in the form of the mass media, but a deeper and more insidious indoctrination of the workers themselves.

The workers, according to Marcuse, believe that the current technological system is the best and most rational system possible because they detect a higher standard of living as a result of it. “Under the conditions of a rising standard of living, non-conformity with the system itself appears to be socially useless, and the more so when it entails tangible economic and political disadvantages and threatens the smooth operation of the whole.” This higher standard of living, however, is marked by rampant consumerism and embracing as needs those things that the social system has selected for us. “We may distinguish both true and false needs. ‘False’ are those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression: the

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386 Ibid. 58-59.

387 Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, Second ed. (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1991 (1964)). 30-31. “In some of the technically most advanced establishments, the workers even show a vested interest in the establishment….The new technological work-world thus enforces a weakening of the negative position of the working class: the latter no longer appears to be the living contradiction to the established society.”

388 Ibid.49, 84. “There is no reason to insist on self-determination if the administered life is the comfortable and even the ‘good’ life. This is the rational and material ground for the unification of opposites, for one-dimensional political behavior. On this ground, the transcending political forces within society are arrested, and qualitative change appears possible only as a change from without.” This Marcuse calls “The Happy Consciousness.”

389 Ibid. 2.
needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice.” Buzz words like “freedom,” “democracy,” and “choice” are used constantly, but they only mask the actual “unfreedom” that exists under a system that predetermines people’s wants and needs by selecting what is available in the first place. Individuals have abdicated their freedom of making real choices between a wide array of possibilities by assuming that the system in place is making the best, albeit limited, options available already. The result: domination. But instead of one person or class clearly dominating another, the “system” itself instigates domination now.

The disappearance of imagination and the ability to envision things being other than they actually already are leads to the lack of criticism and the rise of what Marcuse calls an “affirmative society.” “The more rational, productive, technical, and total the repressive administration of society becomes, the more unimaginable the means and ways by which the administered individuals might break their servitude and seize their own liberation.” Instead of there being a constant dialectical pull between two or more options, opinions, or arguments (a two or multi-dimensional society), the negative, critical element is prematurely reconciled to support the status quo.

Today’s novel feature is the flattening out of the antagonism between culture and social reality through the obliteration of the oppositional, alien, and transcendent elements in the higher culture by virtue of which it constituted another dimension of reality. This liquidation of two-dimensional culture takes place not through the denial and rejection of the “cultural values,” but through their wholesale incorporation into the established order, through their reproduction and display on a massive scale.

390 Ibid. 4-5.

391 Ibid. 144. “However, the society which projects and undertakes the technological transformation of nature alters the base of domination by gradually replacing personal dependence…with the dependence on the ‘objective order of things.’”

392 Ibid. 6-7.

393 Ibid. 57. This notion reminds the writer of Benjamin’s Essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” Something of a work’s aura, its soul, which provides its critical edge,
This is one-dimensional society, which gives rise to the “one-dimensional” person. There is no more critical thinking, no more imagining outside the given boundaries, and no hope for a future that is different than the present.\textsuperscript{394} “Thus, I would propose interpreting ‘one-dimensional’ as conforming to existing thought and behavior and lacking a critical dimension of potentialities that transcend the existing society.”\textsuperscript{395}

Worst of all, reason has been used to bring this about and sustain it. Marcuse, like Horkheimer and Adorno, agrees that reason has been reduced to technical rationality in modern society. “A comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom prevails in advanced industrial civilization, a token of technical progress.”\textsuperscript{396}

We live and die rationally and productively. We know that destruction is the price of progress as death is the price of life, that renunciation and toil are the prerequisites for gratification and joy, that business must go on, and that the alternatives are Utopian. This ideology belongs to the established societal apparatus; it is the requisite for its continuous functioning and part of its rationality.\textsuperscript{397}

Everything is now quantified or reduced to the measureable so that people or machines can take action. Everything must be operationalized, objectified, and then used. Technological reason claims neutrality when, in fact, it is anything but because the exploitation of nature by humans, and human exploitation of other people, are part of the process created by it. “Technology as such cannot be isolated from the use to which it is put; the technological society is a system of domination which operates already in the

\textsuperscript{394} Ibid. 50. “And if the individuals are pre-conditioned so that the satisfying goods also include thoughts, feelings, aspirations, why should they wish to think, feel, and imagine for themselves?”


\textsuperscript{396} Marcuse, \textit{One-Dimensional Man}. 1.

\textsuperscript{397} Ibid. 145.
concept and construction of techniques.”\textsuperscript{398} The most efficient system—the one that provides the greatest return (at least for the people in power) or the highest standard of living (for a privileged few living in industrialized countries)—is the one that takes no account of the domination of the natural world or people necessary to sustain it. Questions of morality or justice are not the concerns of technical rationality.\textsuperscript{399}

The union of growing productivity and growing destruction; the brinkmanship of annihilation; the surrender of thought, hope, and fear to the decisions of the powers that be; the preservation of misery in the face of unprecedented wealth constitute the most impartial indictment…its sweeping rationality, which propels efficiency and growth, is itself irrational. The fact that a vast majority of the population accepts, and is made to accept, this society does not render it less irrational and less reprehensible.\textsuperscript{400}

The assumption that the current state of things is the most rational situation leads to passivity and a future devoid of new possibilities. There is no way to end the domination when people no longer even register that there is something wrong. And here is where Marcuse (and the other members of the Frankfurt School) run into a problem: where is the potential for change? If we are all infected by the system, then who can step outside it to criticize and lead a revolution?\textsuperscript{401} What is left in a technically rational society that is disturbing enough to shake people out of their one-dimensionality?

Marcuse believes that art and literature once served this disruptive function, although they have now been deprived of their power by over-exposure and co-optation. “Prior to the advent of this cultural reconciliation, literature and art were essentially alienation, sustaining and protecting the contradiction—the unhappy consciousness of the

\textsuperscript{398} Ibid. xlviii.

\textsuperscript{399} Ibid. 146, 148.

\textsuperscript{400} Ibid. xlv.

\textsuperscript{401} Ibid. 250-251. “Thus the question once again must be faced: how can the administered individuals—who have made their mutilation into their own liberties and satisfactions, and thus reproduce it on an enlarged scale—liberate themselves from themselves as well as from their masters? How is it even thinkable that the vicious circle be broken?”
divided world, the defeated possibilities, the hopes unfulfilled, and the promises betrayed.”

They provided a glimpse of what might be were things otherwise—at least holding the place for possibilities other than what is now the case. “Whether ritualized or not, art contains the rationality of negation. In its advanced positions, it is the Great Refusal—the protest against that which is.”

And again, Marcuse maintains that:

Creating and moving in a medium which presents the absent, the poetic language is a language of cognition—but a cognition that subverts the positive. In its cognitive function, poetry performs the great task of *thought*: *le travail qui fait vivre en nous ce qui n’existe pas.* Naming the “things that are absent” is breaking the spell of the things that are; moreover, it is the ingresson of a different order of things into the established one….

But this influence has waned; “if they once stood in contradiction to the status quo, this contradiction is now flattened out.”

Disturbingly, this co-optation of art and literature has spilled over into the actual forgetting of history. The lost second dimension of society and people is the historical one.

Thus the “other” dimension of thought appeared to be *historical* dimension—the potentiality as historical possibility, its realization as historical event. The suppression of this dimension in the societal universe of operational rationality is a *suppression of history*….It is suppression of the society’s own past—and of its future, inasmuch as this future invokes the qualitative change, the negation of the present.

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402 Ibid. 61.
403 Ibid. 63.
404 Ibid. 67-68.
405 Ibid. 64.
406 Ibid. 97.
This especially means forgetting the horrors of human history—the times when progress and reason have failed. In its place are the “official” memories of what happened. “Then the old historical concepts are invalidated by up-to-date operational redefinitions. The redefinitions are falsifications which, imposed by the powers that be and the powers of fact, serve to transform falsehood into truth.”

Why go to all the trouble to suppress the real truth of history? Marcuse here touches on the vital insight that memories can be dangerous and threaten the status quo from inside. Here is one of the few remaining options for change to happen from within the administered system. A visitation from the past, memories make present again people and things that disturb the present.

Remembrance of the past may give rise to dangerous insights, and the established society seems to be apprehensive of the subversive contents of memory. Remembrance is a mode of dissociation from the given facts, a mode of “mediation” which breaks, for short moments, the omnipresent power of the given facts. Memory recalls the terror and the hope that passed. Both come to life again, but whereas in reality, the former recurs in ever new forms, the latter remains hope. And in the personal events which reappear in the individual memory, the fears and aspirations of mankind assert themselves—the universal in the particular.

They do this, according to Marcuse, by resurrecting the individual who has been lost because it causes thoughts and actions not sanctioned by the system. “Recognition and relation to the past as present counteracts the functionalization of thought by and in the established reality. It militates against the closing of the universe of discourse and behavior; it renders possible the development of concepts which de-stabilize and transcend the closed universe.”

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407 Ibid. 97-98. “A universe of discourse in which the categories of freedom have become interchangeable and even identical with their opposites…is repulsing and forgetting the historical reality—the horror of fascism; the idea of socialism; the preconditions of democracy; the content of freedom.”

408 Ibid. 98.

409 Ibid. 98-99. Metz actually quotes this exact passage in Metz, Faith in History and Society. 177.
Memories dangerous enough to really disturb technical rationality are almost by definition not found at the center, but on the peripheries of the society. Marcuse’s real hope for any change lies with the alienated, oppressed, and unincorporated. He believes that real change requires an “essentially new historical Subject.”

The totalitarian tendencies of the one-dimensional society render the traditional ways and means of protest ineffective—perhaps even dangerous because they preserve the illusion of popular sovereignty….However, underneath the conservative popular base is the substratum of the outcast and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colors, the unemployed and the unemployable. They exist outside the democratic process; their life is the most immediate and the most real need for ending intolerable conditions and institutions….Their opposition hits the system from without and is therefore not deflected by the system; it is an elementary force which violates the rules of the game and, in doing so, reveals it as a rigged game. When they get together and go out into the streets, without arms, without protection, in order to ask for the most primitive civil rights, they know they face dogs, stones, bombs, jail, concentration camps, even death. Their force is behind every political demonstration for the victims of law and order.

Marcuse does not delve more deeply into what the new Subject might be like or what might be gained (if anything) for the “victims” through protest. It is about these crucial points that Metz will elaborate as he develops his theology of memory and suffering unto God.

2.4.2 Metz’s Use of Marcuse

Metz’s notion of dangerous memory, as first enunciated in Faith in History and Society, clearly is influenced heavily by Marcuse’s description of memory included in the previous section. Metz combines Marcuse’s insight that memory disturbs the current state

410 Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man. 99-100. “The mediation of the past with the present discovers the factors which made the facts, which determined the way of life, which established the masters and the servants; it projects the limits and the alternatives.”

411 Ibid. 252.

412 Ibid. 256-257.
of things with Benjamin’s emphasis on specific memories of suffering victims from history.\textsuperscript{413} Death, however, does not play as prominent a role in Marcuse’s brief references to memory as it does for Benjamin and, ultimately, for Metz. Marcuse also does not get into distinctions between memories that are dangerous and memories that pacify and assist the current system—at least not explicitly. The rest of Marcuse’s writing seems to indicate that, if pressed, he would maintain that most memories that people, firmly co-opted by the system, have are “safe” and not disruptive.

The dangerous memories Marcuse talks about seem to be exclusively those of the marginalized. Their memories are not part of the mainstream and contain experiences that are disturbing, including some connection with the victimization of others who do not fit into the system. They know to expect “dogs, stones, bombs, jail, concentration camps, even death,” because they remember what has happened to other people before them. Metz, on the other hand, does not explicitly confine his dangerous memories to one class or segment of people. Anyone could potentially have or become the bearer of the dangerous memory of Christ’s passion and be transformed (e.g. Oscar Romero). One does get the feeling, however, that the people most open to the memoria passionis, as well as individual memories of suffering and untimely death, are somewhat out of step with the mainstream already. The fact that these people can originate from most anywhere or any social class is a testament to the Christian belief that the Holy Spirit moves wherever it wishes and calls people from the most unlikely of places. Change from within the system, for Metz, is inspired by cooperation with the dead and God, who disturb the system from the outside. Such outside involvement does not appear to play a role in Marcuse’s more secular, Marxist vision of social change.

Both Marcuse’s and Metz’s dangerous memories have future content though. What is remembered in the present matters for the future for both. Metz accentuates this

\textsuperscript{413} Metz, \textit{Faith in History and Society}. 177-178.
similarity when he cites Marcuse in conjunction with the statement that, “They [dangerous memories] are memories that one has to take into account, memories that have a future content, so to speak.”414 One wonders, however, if that future content is not very different, depending on if one is using dangerous memory in a philosophical rather than theological approach.415 Marcuse’s “future” remains firmly in history—although the imagination he lauds and promotes has deeply eschatological overtones. There is no sense that the future holds anything for the past victims per se, only the hope for something different than the present for those living now. Metz and Benjamin, however, intend their ideas of memory to have an impact on the dead. Although neither delve into the details of what this means, it is clear that one component of the future involves the end or transformation of history at the eschaton, not just the events that transpire in time (although these are vitally important too). The dead still have an unfinished future.

Marcuse’s writings reflect, more than any other Frankfurt School scholars’ perhaps, the actual content of Marx’s original thoughts and writings. In grappling with Marx as a principle interlocutor in modernity, Metz’s interpretation is influenced by the readings of the Frankfurt School. It is clear, however, that most of what Metz appropriates for his own work on memory pertains less to the traces of Marxism in their writings than other elements derived from their own social critiques (i.e. the culture industry, the rise of technical reason) and their depiction of memory as one of the last bastions of resistance against the decline of culture and humanity.

Much of this sensitivity in Benjamin, and even in Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse, is linked more closely with the thinker’s roots in Judaism (even if he is not

414 Ibid. 105. He cites Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man. 98-99.

415 Metz, Faith in History and Society. 116-117. Metz notes how certain terms, which appear the same when used by the Frankfurt School and in his work, are actually very different in meaning and content when one really looks at them. Seemingly theological terms turn out not to have any theological content when used philosophically.
conscious of it) than Marxism. Much of their critique of Marxism actually reflects more the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche. In his most recent writings, Metz believes he has had to address Marxism less and the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche more. In an interview in early 1990s, Metz addresses his shift:

In the last ten years it has been particularly important for me to confront Friedrich Nietzsche and the transformation of metaphysics into psychology and aesthetics that is connected with him. For our central European intellectual culture it could probably be said that “Marx is dead; Nietzsche lives.” Yet I am of the opinion that we cannot simply ignore Marx, not even after the collapse of the communist systems. I would like to underscore this because I saw relatively early, in the early seventies, that Nietzsche was emerging once again from the shadow of Marx…. 

The political shift in Europe and Nietzsche’s affinity with current postmodern thinkers clearly contribute to Metz’s shift. Nietzsche is also very consistent in his thinking—linking the demise of God in modern culture with that of the Enlightenment subject—which gives Metz a clear platform from which to respond. For these reasons, it is important to now turn from Marxism and the Frankfurt School as Metz’s interlocutors and delve more deeply into how the thought of Nietzsche on the subjects of memory and forgetting have impacted how and why Metz has expounded his theology of memory in the manner he has.

2.5 Nietzsche

While Metz incorporated and positively embraced a good deal of what he found in the thought of the Frankfurt Scholars, albeit with some theological modification and qualification, the same cannot be said for the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche. Much of the manner in which Metz has spoken and written of dangerous memory is written with an

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416 Although it is vital to acknowledge (as Metz does) that Marx too was of Jewish descent and therefore also influenced by the Jewish notion of time and history. Schuster and Boschert-Kimmig, Hope against Hope. 13.

417 Ibid.
eye towards Nietzsche’s unabashed endorsement of forgetfulness as a sign of health and flourishing.\textsuperscript{418} Furthermore, the recognition of the human subject, which Metz desperately wants to preserve as one of the great contributions of the Enlightenment, is endangered by Nietzsche’s thought on forgetting and by his assertion that “God is dead.”\textsuperscript{419} Without God, Metz realizes (as many of the Frankfurt Scholars also did) that the human subject—both those who are subjects already and those people, past and present, for whom subjectivity is still being pursued—also perishes. Memory is the vital link that Metz maintains must be preserved in order to save humanity and the subjectivity of all—both the living and the dead.

2.5.1 Forgetfulness and the Death of God (and Humanity)

According to Nietzsche, the morality that has dominated the western world for centuries is the product of the Judeo-Christian faith tradition because of the inversion it has created of the weak and the strong. Before Judaism and Christianity, to be good meant one was strong, taking what one wanted with impunity, and treating lesser, weaker people according to their stations.\textsuperscript{420} These weak people who were humble, meek, and non-violent or unable to determine fully their own futures were considered “bad.”\textsuperscript{421} War and violence between people of equal rank was commendable and the naturally aggressive urges of people were satisfied openly, without regret.\textsuperscript{422} To be powerful and


\textsuperscript{419} Metz, \textit{Faith in History and Society}. 98. Horkheimer and Adorno would concur with this assertion.

\textsuperscript{420} Nietzsche, \textit{On the Genealogy of Morals}. 25-26. “the judgment ‘good’ did not originate with those to whom ‘goodness’ was shown! Rather it was ‘the good’ themselves, that is to say, the noble, powerful, high-stationed and high-minded, who felt and established themselves and their actions as good, that is, of the first rank, in contradistinction to all the low, low-minded, common, and plebian.”

\textsuperscript{421} Ibid. 28.

\textsuperscript{422} Ibid. 33, 70.
the master of others and one’s self was the greatest good. The pagan gods of Greece and Rome reflect this perspective and the behaviors of the “good,” strong and powerful.\textsuperscript{423}

Nietzsche blames the rise of Judaism and Christianity for the guilt that people, especially those who are powerful and strong, now feel today. As religions of the weak or servant classes, Judaism and Christianity commended those who were weak, promising them an eternal reward and a reversal of their station with that of the strong in the next life. Those who mistreated or neglected the weak were considered “evil” now, and those who were meek and humble were the “good.”\textsuperscript{424} This reversal leads to what he calls \textit{ressentiment}: the weak’s self-affirmation that relies on demonizing the strong. But guilt then became an epidemic. Those who were once strong and powerful now felt guilty for their strength and curtailed the behaviors that once brought them happiness and fulfilled their basic need for cruelty and violence.\textsuperscript{425} These needs still expressed themselves, however, becoming the secret impetus for self-deprivation and self-inflicted punishment.\textsuperscript{426}

The few people who could have been powerful and free now live in constant unhappiness because they are not free to be the strong, violent, powerful people they were meant to be.\textsuperscript{427} Morality is essentially the rules produced by the weak to limit the strong. The God of Judaism and Christianity bolsters both the claims of morality and the

\textsuperscript{423} Ibid. 93-94.

\textsuperscript{424} Ibid. 34. “It was the Jews who, with awe-inspiring consistency, dared to invert the aristocratic value-equation (good=noble=powerful=beautiful=happy=beloved by God) and to hang on to this inversion with their teeth, the teeth of the most abysmal hatred (the hatred of impotence), saying ‘the wretched alone are good; the poor, impotent, lowly alone are good; the suffering, deprived, sick, ugly alone are pious, alone are blessed by God—and you, the powerful and noble, are on the contrary evil, the cruel, the lustful, the insatiable, the godless to all eternity; and you shall be in all eternity the unblessed, accursed, damned!’”

\textsuperscript{425} Ibid. 42.

\textsuperscript{426} Ibid. 84-85. “the old instincts had not suddenly ceased to make their usual demands! Only it was hardly or rarely possible to humor them: as a rule they had to seek new and, as it were, subterranean gratification. All instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly \textit{turn inward}….”

\textsuperscript{427} Ibid. 66-67.
promise of eternal happiness for those who obey it now—and damnation to those who do not—because that God is the ultimate debt collector. God is the one to whom each person is infinitely indebted and must therefore obey whatever rules God (or God’s representatives) establish.\textsuperscript{428} Asceticism is the culmination of this “bad consciousness” turned inward: hurting one’s self as penance for being strong and powerful.

Forgetting the past is advantageous in Nietzsche’s philosophy because of what he maintains should be the state of greatest happiness for people. True happiness for him means that a person fully lives as who he or she is, without the constraints of morality or guilt, in the present.

Forgetting is no mere \textit{vis inertiae} as the superficial imagine; it is rather an active and in the strictest sense positive faculty of repression….To close the doors and windows of consciousness for a time; to remain undisturbed by the noise and struggle of our underworld of utility organs working with and against one another; a little quietness, a little \textit{tabula rasa} of the consciousness, to make room for new things…that is the purpose of active forgetfulness, which is like a doorkeeper, a preserver of psychic order, repose, and etiquette: so that it will be immediately obvious how there could be no happiness, no cheerfulness, no hope, no pride, no \textit{present}, without forgetfulness. The man in whom this apparatus of repression is damaged and ceases to function properly may be compared…with a dyspeptic—he cannot “have done” with anything.\textsuperscript{429}

Forgetting is only opposed by the faculty of human memory, which is called upon when one makes a promise to another.

Now this animal which needs to be forgetful, in which forgetting represents a force, a form of \textit{robust} health, has bred in itself an opposing faculty, a memory, with the aid of which forgetfulness is abrogated in certain cases—namely in those cases where promises are made….an active \textit{desire} not to rid oneself, a desire for the continuance of something desired once, a real \textit{memory of the will}….This precisely is the long story of how \textit{responsibility} originated.\textsuperscript{430}

\textsuperscript{428} Ibid. 90-91.

\textsuperscript{429} Ibid. 57-58. Metz also quotes a passage from Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Use and Abuse of History for Life," in \textit{Thoughts out of Season} (1873). Section 1. “The person who cannot set himself down on the crest of the moment, forgetting everything from the past, who is not capable of standing on a single point, like a goddess of victory, without dizziness or fear, will never know what happiness is. Even worse, he will never do anything to make other people happy….Forgetting belongs to all action.”
Memory is a problem for Nietzsche, not only because he thinks it prevents one from moving forward in life, but because he affirms that things are only remembered when they leave a painful mark upon a person’s psyche and/or body. Memory becomes a device and excuse for torture—either of one’s self or another.

How can one create a memory for the human animal?...If something is to stay in the memory it must be burned in: only that which never ceases to hurt stays in the memory—this is a main clause of the oldest (unhappily also the most enduring) psychology on earth. One might even say that wherever on earth solemnity, seriousness, mystery, and gloomy coloring still distinguish the life of man and a people, something of the terror that formerly attended all promises, pledges, and vows on earth is still effective: the past, the longest, deepest and sternest past, breathes upon us and rises up in us whenever we become “serious.” Man could never do without blood, torture, and sacrifices when he felt the need to create a memory for himself...pain is the most powerful aid to mnemonics.\footnote{Memory makes life unbearable and painful, so one should forget in order to feel better and live fully.}

Part of the guilt that people now feel comes from the sense that they have been unable to fulfill certain promises that they (as the present generation) made to people from their past.\footnote{Even though those people are no longer present (and so they would be the very weakest and least powerful non-subjects for Nietzsche), they compel people now to act in ways that may not be in their own best interest (i.e. promoting strength and power for an individual). People are distinguished from other beasts, for Nietzsche, by the ability to voluntarily make promises and fulfill what one intends.\footnote{The strong}}

\footnote{\textit{Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals.} 58.}

\footnote{Ibid. 60-61.}

\footnote{Ibid. 88-89, 90. “the living generation always recognized a juridical duty toward earlier generations….one has to pay them back with sacrifices and accomplishments: one thus recognizes a debt that constantly grows greater….“}

\footnote{Ibid. 57.}
always have the ability fulfill their promises because they control their futures. The weak, however, do not have that sort of control. The inability (because one is weak or has curtailed one’s power due to morality) or the desire not to fulfill whatever promises or responsibilities connect the present with the past are what cause feelings of immense guilt and unhappiness.

Once again, the weak control the strong. Judaism and Christianity, both of which are historical religions that constantly remember their founding events and figures, promote this allegiance and sense of responsibility to the past without approving of whatever means necessary to fulfill promises. For Nietzsche, forgetting the past instead of remembering is advantageous, therefore, because one is free to live entirely in the present, unfettered by the past. So these faiths of remembrance are again to blame for the human unhappiness of those who would otherwise be strong. In order to live fully and with greatest happiness such faith must be abandoned.

Nietzsche advocates a reversal of *ressentiment*. The first step to recognizing and embracing happiness is to liberate the strong and powerful by sloughing off the Judeo-Christian morality. And with this rejection of morality also comes the rejection of its God. Insofar as modern people have left morality behind, God is dead because God no longer serves its purpose. “Indeed, the prospect cannot be dismissed that the complete and definitive victory of atheism might free mankind of this whole feeling of guilty

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434 Ibid. 59-60.
435 Ibid. 90.
436 Ibid. 96.
People now set their own rules and realize that the powerful and strong need answer to no one but each other. God is superfluous because it was only a human construct and reflection from the start. The human subject, as it has been known in western thought to this point, ceases to exist as well because it too is a symptom of a wider sickness. “To Nietzsche, positing the existence of a rational and ethical subject constitutes an attempt to ethically determine, define, and confine these depths [of people]. The self is thus an illusion, a Christian deception born of ressentiment, which truncates and cripples human beings, rather than fulfilling them.” The notion of time also shifts. Instead of a somewhat linear progression of history, time is now cyclical and entails the “eternal return of the same.” There is no God and no reversal of fortunes to reward the weak and punish the powerful: no eschaton or the eruption of something new. Justice and concern for the weak are simply created by current morality. With morality’s demise, the other two are no longer compelling.

437 Ibid. 91.

438 Schuster and Boschert-Kimmig, Hope against Hope. 36-37. “the God who is not to be adapted to us is eliminated—as if there could only be a God who fits our images of self-realization or a God that fits our clerical fantasies….For him [Nietzsche] the death of God entailed the death of the human person as well, or, in any case, that human person which we have come to understand heretofore and in modernity’s golden age. This is the person presupposed by the Enlightenment, and endowed by the Enlightenment with a capacity for truth and with moral imperatives.”

439 Ashley, Interruptions. 42.

440 Friedrich Nietzsche, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra,” in The Portable Nietzsche, ed. Walter Kaufmann, Viking Portable Library (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1982 (1954)). 332. “...O Zarathustra, who you are and must become behold you are the teacher of the eternal recurrence – that is your destiny! That you as the first must teach this doctrine – how could this great destiny not be your greatest danger and sickness too? Behold, we know what you teach: that all things recur eternally, and we ourselves too; and that we have already existed an eternal number of times, and all things with us. You teach that there is a great year of becoming, a monster of a great year; which must, like an hourglass, turn over again and again so that it may run down and run out again; and all these years are alike in what is greatest as in what is smallest; and we ourselves are alike in every great year, in what is greatest as in what is smallest.”

441 Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals. 76.
2.5.2 Metz’s Reaction and Response to Nietzsche

Metz clearly disagrees with much in Nietzsche’s assessment of humanity and subjectivity, the function of memory, and God. First, Metz firmly believes in the subject (it is not just an illusion) and in the subjectivity of all people, defended where that subjectivity is most in danger.442 This is primarily the subjectivity of the weak and the poor—those that are barely recognized as human in life—as well as those who have died. The victors and powerful of history are not to be commended because of all the suffering, death, and forgetfulness they have brought throughout history. The ability of their victims, especially those who died before their time, to be recognized as subjects is curtailed. Nietzsche’s philosophy functions as a legitimation of the way things are in modernity and bourgeoisie society inasmuch as he wants to commend the powerful who are already in control. The strong are meant to dominate the weak.

Metz, conversely, is firmly rooted in the Christian biblical tradition, as well as the notions of justice associated with it—which Nietzsche rejects. He fundamentally opposes Nietzsche’s condemnation and dismissal of both the Christian faith and guilt as maladaptive. At their intellectual roots, Nietzsche and Metz define genuine happiness and the goals of humanity differently. That is where the conflict lies.

Friedrich Nietzsche tried to write the epitaph for Christianity: “All the possibilities of Christian life, the most intense and the most relaxed, the most harmless and thoughtless, and the most reflected upon have been thoroughly tried; it is time to invent something new…” And he linked his “new way of living” to the triumph of cultural amnesia, which increasingly molds our “postmodern” landscape and in which tradition oriented religions and worldviews are ever more threatened with disappearance….The archetype of happiness would thus be the amnesia of the victor; its precondition, the merciless forgetting of the victims.

442 Metz, Faith in History and Society. 211. Solidarity is what makes the endangered subjectivity a concern for us all. “In its mystical-political dual structure solidarity emerges as a category of the salvation of the subject at those points where it is being threatened: by being forgotten, by oppression, by death.”
This is indeed totally contrary to the biblical mindset of covenant and the anamnestic solidarity demanded by this covenant. It is completely opposed to the significance of “memoria”, especially of the memoria passionis which is woven into the Christian understanding of peace and happiness. The vision of God of the biblical traditions stands opposed to the attempt to fix the happiness of the human family at the price of its amnesia.443

Here Metz joins Benjamin in the assertion that forgetting is the most inhuman thing one can do. To forget others and their suffering ensures that every person living now will someday be forgotten as well. A loss of hope for others means a concomitant loss of hope for one’s self too. Forgetting in order to protect one’s self, to continue functioning, or to be “happy” in the present is not, therefore, free of consequences.

People believe they can finally protect themselves only with the weapon of forgetting, with the shield of amnesia against the histories of suffering and evil deeds which continue to pour in…but even this forgetting is not without consequences…they do not remain untouched. The wound has not closed….Do not the orgies of rape and violence in our time acquire something like the normative power of the factual? Do they not—behind the shield of amnesia—corrode the ‘basic trust of civilisation’ those moral and cultural reserves in which the humanity of human beings is rooted? 444

So forgetting leads to a repetition of atrocities, violence, and the degradation of humanity. We come to consider inhumanity normal and become monsters ourselves. Memory then becomes only a technical way of storing information—free of judgment, morality, or claims of justice—like a computer.445

Nietzsche’s characterization of memory—like his idea of forgetting—is also faulty and limited according to Metz. Memory need not only be a source of pain and


444 Metz, "Memory of Other's Suffering." 187.

445 Ibid. 188.
continued hurting, as Nietzsche claimed. There is a critical power to memory that can change things to end suffering. It can provide hope and motivate action, while forgetting does not always enable action—as Nietzsche claims—because it can also pacify.

Nietzsche overlooked the critical power of the memory of suffering in the same measure that he underestimated the soothing character and “submissiveness” of forgetting, he dismissed as “masochistic” the formula for understanding history’s continuity in the sense of a “remembered history of suffering,” as this was offered by saying “only something which continues to hurt stays in the memory.”

Perhaps Metz develops and dwells so much on the critical and “dangerous” elements of memory precisely because Nietzsche neglects them so much.

Since memory is not just a tool to further pain and increase guilt for Metz, then neither is God merely the culmination of a long history of unpaid and unpayable debts to tribal ancestors, as Nietzsche concludes. God is not a psychological projection of humans for Metz. God is always more than what humans can envision. “Since the God of whom theologies speak never simply ‘fits in,’ theology must always remain critical regarding any attempt to transform everything metaphysical into psychology.” It is this conviction that contributes to Metz’s apophaticism and hesitancy to project human emotions (e.g. suffering) onto God: it comes too close to Nietzsche’s accusations.

Nietzsche’s endorsement of forgetting presents the first real challenge to Metz’s use of memory. In the next chapter, several other objections to anamnestic reason and memory will be examined, as well as the rebuttals and possible responses offered by

446 ———, *Faith in History and Society*. 175.
448 Schuster and Boschert-Kimmig, *Hope against Hope*. 36.
Metz to those critiques. It is clear though that Metz had Nietzsche’s thought clearly in mind when developing his own theology of memory.

2.6 Conclusions

It is evident that the appearance of memory in both philosophical and theological thought is no mere coincidence. The question that is raised by tracing the influence of the early Frankfurt School thinkers on Metz in regards to memory is whether memory in philosophy is really a distinct concept to begin with or whether it is not still a theological concept that remains active in philosophy, even after the disciplines diverged. This question will persist into the next chapter in which we will consider Metz’s ongoing conversation with Jürgen Habermas. The fact is, however, that Benjamin, Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse were all secular Jews, so one may speculate that their thought is still influenced on some level by a religious tradition in which memory is a vital component. Metz’s theology of memory, in this case, would simply resonate with the chords in the Frankfurt scholars’ philosophies of memory that remain connected to the religious tradition, especially as it pertains to the suffering and to the dead. This is supported by the fact that Benjamin, who remains the least dialectical and Marxist in his thought and the most theological (i.e. he is open to something transcendent, which may be God-like) is perhaps the one whose philosophy of memory Metz adopted most, and with less modification, than any of the other members’.

The uses to which memory is put by these philosophies and Metz’s theology, however, remain distinct. Memory remains more a general concept in philosophy with less nuance (e.g. no clear distinction made similar to Metz’s dangerous versus pacifying memories). Memory, explored philosophically as in Marcuse, does provide an example of something that resists co-optation by the dominant political and economic systems (i.e. the exchange system), but only Benjamin focuses explicitly on memories of suffering as
authoritative and with an outstanding future still to be decided, even for the dead. He too is the only one of the four philosophers for whom explicit reflections on memory make up a significant part of his writing (at least when assessed by the number of pages dedicated to it). Metz, on the other hand, ties his notion of memory to a very specific memory of suffering—that of Christ—and a specific community of people (the Christian church) as bearers of that memory. Memory, explored theologically, therefore, is more concrete and more directly correlated with a specific praxis than philosophical memory, which remains a form of resistance but does not necessarily manifest itself in a particular way of acting. Furthermore, memory increasingly comes to dominate Metz’s writings and remains an explicit topic of reflection in almost all his works. It is central and not peripheral or merely an illustration of a point being made, as memory becomes in the writings of Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse.

What then does Metz take away from the philosophical treatment of memory? From Benjamin Metz gains the inextricable link between memory and narrative; the communal yet specific nature of memories told through narrative; the primary association of memory with danger, suffering, victims, and an outstanding future for the dead; and the accountability of the living to the dead, sustained by memory. Memory, for both Benjamin and Metz, is disturbing and filled with the presence of the past. From Horkheimer and Adorno’s analysis, Metz embraces the systemic analysis of memory of the dead as a type of resistance to the exchange system and the culture industry. The political implications of memory either to pacify or resist the status quo (e.g. mourning) are the lasting contributions of these two scholars to Metz’s theology of memory. Lastly, Marcuse provides Metz with the actual definition of dangerous memory and (along with Benjamin) emphasizes how present memory matters for the future. Metz remains distinct, however, precisely because he considers memory in a theological way—that is, in light of the history of the God of the Bible with God’s people (Israel and the later Christian community). This history is marked by suffering and death, resistance and lamentation to
God, as well as God’s silences and responses to the people. It is Metz’s firm grounding in the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus that sets him apart from his philosophical primogenitors.

Quite apart from the Frankfurt School, Nietzsche is in his own category as far as his relationship with Metz’s theology of memory. His advocacy of forgetting instead of memory provides the challenge to which Metz rises in expanding on the types and functions of memory. Metz is not, however, able to absolutely refute or dispel all the concerns about the possible negative aspects of memory (i.e. the possible psychologically pathological aspects of human memory). The next chapter considers other criticisms of memory and Metz’s theological use of it, as well as Metz’s potential responses to them.
CHAPTER 3

CRITICISM, CONCERNS, AND QUALIFICATIONS OF MEMORY
AND METZ’S USE OF IT

In the previous chapter the philosophical genealogy of Metz’s theology of memory was explored, especially its inspiration in the philosophical thought of the founding members of the Frankfurt School. The final intellectual influence considered, however, was more or less a negative one—found in the works of Nietzsche. Unlike the Frankfurt scholars, Nietzsche assails memory as deleterious to healthy thriving in life and to happiness. Much of what Metz formulates is in opposition to Nietzsche’s arguments, yet Nietzsche is not alone in criticizing memory. This chapter will explore only a few of the recent philosophical and theological voices in opposition to the ascendency of memory—or at least the voices who seriously want to stipulate additional conditions on the function of memory in theology. Jürgen Habermas, a contemporary Frankfurt scholar and active dialogue partner with Metz, proposes communicative reason as a more adequate concept and framework for discussing and preserving justice for victims than Metz’s anamnestic reason. Miroslav Volf, a noted Christian theologian, attempts to nuance and place additional conditions on the use of human memory and challenges the notion that memory of horrendous wrongs must be maintained “eternally” in order to serve the demands of justice. Finally, Edward Schillebeeckx, the acclaimed Roman
Catholic theologian, challenges the purely anthropological function of memory in Metz. Instead, he wants to go further and help ground the authority and reliability of human memory—especially the Christian memory of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection—in God’s own memory.

3.1 Jürgen Habermas and Anamnestic Reason in Philosophy

As the first generation of Frankfurt Scholars retired from academic research, Jürgen Habermas took over the Institute’s leadership in 1964. It was clear from the start that he both shares much of the agenda and characteristics of his predecessors and departs from them in important ways. Like them, Habermas is interested in engaging the Marxist and Weberian theories of history and economics, as well as exploring the social implications of late capitalism, materialism, and alienation. Revolution—especially of a violent sort—however, is ruled out by him. The overwhelming power of “the better argument” is how he proposes to advance the common good and emancipation. He remains a critical theorist, however, insofar as: he works from within a revisionist Marxist framework; critiques the current social situation produced by capitalism; and disputes the claim made by technical rationality that it is neutral and value-free because of its relationship to science. According to Thomas McCarthy, he engages in ideology critique, especially of positivism, which

argued that the application of the scientific method of study of social phenomena required the rigorous avoidance of normative considerations. Value judgments did


not admit of truth or falsity; they were not rationally (scientifically) decidable. But positivism is value-neutral in appearance only. The scientific-technological rationality that it privileges reflects a particular interest, a particular relation to life... Habermas’ argument then is that positivism conceals a commitment to technological rationality behind a façade of value-freedom.451

Like the earlier Frankfurt scholars, Habermas too is “concerned to overcome the empiricist split between ‘is’ and ‘ought’ and the separation of theory from practice that followed from it.”452 But even more than the early Frankfurt School, Habermas focuses on linguistics and communication as the social phenomenon capable of doing this. In particular, his project revolves around the possibility of communication in the public sphere, determining what is rational based on public argumentation, and ascertaining the appropriate social action that should proceed from those conclusions. Politics—especially democracy453—both in theory and practice, are at the heart of his philosophy of social interaction.

While the early Frankfurt scholars’ assessment of modernity and the Enlightenment might best be described as pessimistic, Habermas has a decidedly more optimistic view of it. He, like Metz, does not want to write off modernity in favor of some “post-modern” project.454 Modernity has not yet given all it has to contribute. It can be redeemed. Agreeing again to some degree with Metz, Habermas does not believe that all reason and rationality have been reduced to technological rationality.455 There is more

451 McCarthy, Habermas. 4-8.

452 Ibid. 272-273.


455 McCarthy, Habermas. 7, 21. “A particular form of reason, the scientific, is ascribed exclusive rights in the domain of theory....Habermas is in general agreement on the need for a critique of instrumental reason to restore the philosophical dimension to critical theory....But he feels that the earlier attempts of the Frankfurt school often verged on a romantic rejection of science and technology as such.” 21.
than one type of rationality. Although the technological sort has monopolized reason in some ways, it is not the only sort.

The real problem, Habermas argues, is not technical reason as such but its universalization, the forfeiture of a more comprehensive concept of reason in favor of the exclusive validity of scientific and technological thought, the reduction of *praxis* to *techne*…. The proper response, then, lies not in a radical break with technical reason but in properly locating it within a comprehensive theory of rationality.\(^{456}\)

It is interesting how much Metz and Habermas do share: concern for redeeming modernity and the Enlightenment; the conviction that not all reason is technological; a concern for social justice and action as well as theory; focus on the public and political nature of morality in opposition to the pure privatization of such things. Habermas recognizes these similarities at the start of his article *Israel or Athens: Where Does Anamnestic Reason Belong?* when he writes,

> The thought of Johannes Baptist Metz fascinates me—not least because I recognize common purposes at work, albeit across a certain distance. The fact that similar problems should arise both for the theologian and for someone who adopts the philosophical position of methodological atheism is less surprising than the parallels between the answers.\(^{457}\)

The alternative proposed by Habermas to the hegemony of technical rationality is a greater focus on what he terms communicative rationality. This type of rationality is concerned not just with matters of production, but with questions of interaction, the good, justice, and social transformation.\(^{458}\) There is still hope for systemic change within the workings of this type of reason because it is inherently concerned with questions of morality and human dignity (i.e. that everyone has a chance to enter into dialogue).

\(^{456}\) Ibid. 22.

\(^{457}\) Habermas, "Israel or Athens?." 129.

\(^{458}\) Tracy, "Public Realm." 30.
Habermas’ project focuses on describing this type of reason and elucidating the conditions necessary for it to be exercised.

Because he focuses on linguistics, Habermas is not concerned with the question of “the subject”—whether it be alive or dead.\(^{459}\) For him, the question of the subject came to a dead end in the work of the early Frankfurt scholars, especially his mentor Adorno.\(^{460}\) He wants to try and move beyond this by focusing on how identity is inherently intersubjective because it is formed and known only through the interchange of ideas that happens during communication between a speaker and a listener. “Since personal identity can be achieved only on the basis of mutual recognition, individuation can be comprehended only as a process of socialization. The moral subject, the subject of praxis, is inconceivable in abstraction from communicative relations with others.” \(^{461}\) So the “turn to the subject” of modernity—which is so important for Metz—is modified for Habermas’ recovery of modernity insofar as he does not recognize a “subject” that exists outside social construction. Metz’s subject is something more basic—a given of sorts—that is grounded ultimately in God (i.e. we are all subjects before God). Habermas is not concerned with defining what it means to be a subject explicitly, but tacitly acknowledges the subject as that which becomes known through mutual communication.

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\(^{459}\) McCarthy, Habermas. 274. “Habermas’s conception of a universal pragmatics rests on the contention that not only phonetic, syntactic, and semantic features of sentences but also certain pragmatic features of utterances—that is, not only language but speech, not only linguistic competence but ‘communicative competence’—admit of rational reconstruction in universal terms.”

\(^{460}\) Tracy, "Public Realm." 28. This is where Habermas pursues a different path than his predecessors. “On the philosophical side, the temptation of most modern philosophy has been to defend rationality from the viewpoint of a philosophy of consciousness. From Descartes through Kant and Husserl to most forms of contemporary transcendental philosophy, this ‘turn to the subject’ has been the great hope of modern reason. But here…the turn to the subject’s consciousness does not suffice. No philosophy of consciousness seems able to account for the interactive, dialogical character of our actual uses of reason in linguistic, communicative exchange.” See also, James Matthew Ashley, Interruptions : Mysticism, Politics, and Theology in the Work of Johann Baptist Metz, Studies in Spirituality and Theology 4 (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998).43.

\(^{461}\) McCarthy, Habermas. 35.
One also detects a departure in Habermas’ treatment of universal claims from the general approach of the early Frankfurt School. Adorno and Horkheimer in particular were very wary of making claims to absolutes, certainties, or universals. Habermas is less concerned with this because he is concerned with the practical, with situations and needs as they actually exist. He is not trying to work out a totalizing system or theory. He is interested in the concrete conditions for and content of universal claims that are made in speech acts that directly impact how people live with one another.\footnote{Ibid. 282-283. “Habermas’ particular concern is with the theory of social action: for this third aspect of communication (the establishment of interpersonal relations) is central. Thus his own work in universal pragmatics has been focused on a development of the theory of speech acts….Habermas’s analysis takes the form of an investigation of the necessary conditions for the success of a speech act.”} When someone says something, he or she is making a claim to truth that any listener can potentially challenge.\footnote{There are in fact four “validity claims” that Habermas identifies as being inherent in a speech act—one of which is a claim to truth. “Confining ourselves now to consensual speech actions, Habermas’s central thesis is that they rest on a background consensus formed from the reciprocal raising and mutual recognition of four different types of validity claims: the claims that the speaker’s utterances are comprehensible and that their propositional contents (or existential presuppositions) are true, and the claims that the speaker is truthful or veracious in uttering them and that it is right or appropriate for him to be doing so.” Ibid. 288. See also Tracy, “Public Realm.” 30.} The speaker’s claims, until proven otherwise, are public and universal. Furthermore, communicative rationality, which comes out of argumentation between people in a public approximation of the “ideal speech situation,” aims to make statements that are universal.\footnote{Raymond Geuss, The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas & the Frankfurt School, Modern European Philosophy (New York, NY: Cambridge University press, 1981 (1999)). 65. “To be a human agent, he [Habermas] argues, is to participate at least potentially in a speech community….But no agent can be even potentially a member of a speech community who cannot recognize the difference between true and false statements in some general way….But what it means for a statement to be true is that it would be the one on which all agents would agree if they were to discuss all of human experience in absolutely free and uncoerced circumstances for an infinite period of time….Habermas uses the term ‘ideal speech situation’ to refer to a situation of absolutely uncoerced and unlimited discussion between completely free and equal human agents.”} As McCarthy puts it:

Discourse is that “peculiarly unreal” form of communication in which the participants subject themselves to the “unforced force of the better argument,” with the aim of coming to an agreement about the validity or invalidity of problematic claims. The supposition that attaches to such an agreement is that it
represents a “rational consensus,” that is, that it is the result not of the peculiarities of the participants or of their situation but simply of their subjecting themselves to the weight of evidence and the force of argument. The agreement is regarded as valid not merely “for us” (the actual participants) but as “objectively” valid, valid for all rational subjects (as potential participants). In this sense discourse is, as Habermas puts it, “the condition for the unconditioned.”

The point of argumentation is to find precisely what is binding, needed, and desired by everyone. “Thus each party must bring into the discussion his or her conceptions of the good and preferable life in order to find out with other parties what they all might desire.” So Habermas is more comfortable with universals—although they are of a peculiar sort, which are always open to revision, should the consensus change over time—than the early Frankfurt School and he also resists the confinement of universal moral claims to the private sphere only. Metz echoes this concern with de-privatizing claims of justice and morality, as well as the action that accompanies them.

On a personal level, Habermas also differs from his antecedents. While most of the early Frankfurt Scholars were from upper-middle class, secularized Jewish families in Germany before the Second World War, Habermas was from a traditional German middle-class Protestant family, with some Nazi sympathizers. While it might be observed that all of the Frankfurt scholars operate from a “methodological atheism” in their explicit philosophical thought, Habermas’ early religious influences differed from the other members of the school. Metz notes in an interview that he thinks this accounts for the increased tension between his theology—which resonated a good deal with the early Frankfurt scholars’ thought—and Habermas’ philosophy.

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465 McCarthy, Habermas. 292.


468 Habermas, "Israel or Athens?. “129. See also ———, "Transcendence ". 227, 233.
With all the respect I have for the great significance of his philosophical work, I miss something in Habermas that was very important to me in Benjamin, in Adorno, and even in Horkheimer: the sting of a kind of negative metaphysics….Great figures in philosophy—think for example of the later Bloch—are somewhat suspect of ending up too close to the theologians. Not so with Habermas. In this regard there has been no mutual reception but all kinds of questions and disagreements….I will risk this conjecture here: perhaps what makes Habermas appear less theological than Benjamin and the early Frankfurt School, but also in my view more of an idealist, is the Jewish background, which is missing or only dimly illuminated in him.469

Habermas, however, takes some issue with this criticism insofar as he believes Metz overemphasizes the exclusively Jewish heritage of anamnestic memory, as well as its importance in general.

3.1.1 Memory from Israel or Athens?

Metz asserts that philosophy, with its origins in Greek thought, lacks the key contributions of Judaism—and by way of it, Christianity—which are memory and anamnestic reason. Where Christianity has exclusively focused on reason as it was described in the Greek tradition, it has seriously neglected “the rational content of the tradition of Israel.”470 Habermas observes, summarizing Metz’s argument . . .

But it [Metz’s defense of the heritage of Israel in Christianity] also implies that, in pushing aside its Jewish origins, a Hellenized Christianity has cut itself off from the sources of anamnestic reason. It has itself become one expression of an idealistic form of reason, unburdened by fate and incapable of recollection and historical remembrance. Those who regard Christianity from an ‘Augustinian’ perspective as a synthesis of intellect and belief, one in which the intellect comes from Athens and the belief from Israel, ‘halve’ the spirit of Christianity. In opposition to this division of labour between philosophical reason and religious belief, Metz insists on the rational content of the tradition of Israel; he regards the force of historical remembrance as an element of reason.471


470 Habermas, “Israel or Athens?” 131.

471 Ibid.
So, according to Metz, Israel contributes both faith and reason, in the form of anamnestic reason, while the Greek tradition, typified by Athens, supplies only the reason for technical, practical, and deductive forms of thought.

From this standpoint the philosophy whose roots lie in Greece appears as the guardian of ratio, of the powers of understanding which only become reason through their fusion with the memoria which dates back to Moses and his prophetic revelation. This is why a theology which returns from its Hellenistic alienation to retrieve its origins can claim the last word against philosophy: ‘it returns to the indissoluble connection between ratio and memoria (in late modern terms: the grounding of communicative reason in anamnestic reason)’.\(^\text{472}\)

In Metz’s analysis, memory for the Greeks is more about a return of what has always been (eternal return), involving perfect forms or perhaps a transmigration of the soul.\(^\text{473}\) But it is not theological anamnestic memory because Israel’s memory, which makes present again past events, is oriented to a future that is distinct from what has been. And the difference is grounded in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The horizon of Israel’s (and, by extension, Christianity’s) memory is the future, from which God comes to meet it.

Habermas’ main criticisms of Metz are that (1) he oversimplifies the diversity of philosophy, (2) underestimates the impact that Judaism and Christianity had upon it, and (3) claims a grounding role for anamnestic reason that is contestable. First, Habermas charges that Metz treats all philosophy as if it were Platonic philosophy. He neglects the many counter-traditions that actually oppose Platonism.

The picture of the philosophical tradition [painted by Metz] is flattened out too. For this tradition cannot be subsumed under the category of Platonism. In the course of its history it has absorbed essential elements of the Judeo-Christian heritage, it has been shaken to its very roots by the legacy of Israel. Admittedly,

\(^{472}\) Ibid.

from Augustine via Thomas to Hegel, philosophical idealism has produced syntheses which transform the God whom Job encountered into a philosophical concept of God. But the history of philosophy is not just the history of Platonism, but also of protests against it.\textsuperscript{474}

Some of these protesting traditions Habermas identifies: “nominalism and empiricism, individualism and existentialism, negativism and historical materialism.”\textsuperscript{475} There is more to philosophy than Athens.

Second, Habermas notes that Metz only considers the Hellenization of Christianity while neglecting the religious infusion and mixture that has taken place within the philosophical traditions as well. Both disciplines have a dual identity. As such, there is a Judeo-Christian strain running throughout western philosophy.\textsuperscript{476} Just as theology has tried to identify and, to some extent, excise the non-biblical, non-Jewish, or non-Christian elements from it, so too philosophy has tried to purge itself of theology (e.g. Nietzsche). But neither has been entirely successful. The result, Habermas claims, is that memory or anamnestic reason is just as much a part of the philosophical traditions as it is the theological ones.\textsuperscript{477} Metz overstates the exclusivity of anamnestic reason’s origins in some sort of a “pure” form of Judaism (i.e. that there is a clear tradition that existed in this vein before the encounter with Hellenism). Habermas just does not ever

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{474} Habermas, "Israel or Athens?." 131.
\textsuperscript{475} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{476} Ibid. 133. “The tension between the spirit of Athens and the legacy of Israel has been worked through with no less an impact in philosophy than in theology.” See also ———, “Transcendence “. 232. “Hegel’s philosophy is the result of that great experiment, crucially defining European intellectual history, which sought to produce a synthesis between the faith of Israel and the Greek spirit—a synthesis that, on the one side, lead to the Hellenization of Christianity and, on the other, to the ambiguous Christianization of Greek metaphysics.”

\textsuperscript{477} Habermas, “Transcendence “. He compares explicitly here what Metz does to what Adorno does. He claims the two follow “the same impulse: to save intuitions that have not been exhausted in philosophy. Here it is the experience of an equality that does not level out difference and of a togetherness that individualizes. It is the experience of a closeness across distance to an other acknowledged in his or her difference. It is the experience of…a future-oriented justice that is in solidarity with the unreconciled suffering of past generations…If, however, this anti-Platonic turn takes place on both sides, [theology and philosophy] then it cannot be the postmetaphysical kind of reference to religious discourse that today separates philosophy from a theology open to conversation.” 232-233.
\end{flushright}
see evidence of such a clear split. Conversely, Metz also underestimates the role that anamnestic reason can or does play already in philosophy.

Anamnesis and story-telling can also provide reasons, and so drive philosophical discourse forward, even though they cannot be decisive for it. Although profane reason must remain skeptical about the mystical causality of a recollection inspired by the history of salvation, although it cannot simply accept the general promise of restitution, philosophers need not leave what Metz calls ‘anamnestic reason’ entirely to the theologians.478

Philosophy, so claims Habermas, already uses this memory as a way to acknowledge suffering, the demands for liberation, and the need for something new that breaks with the oppression of the past. These are most forcefully manifest in “counter-traditions of philosophical thought which have insisted on the positivity and obstinacy of the negative…. [which] transforms the experience of the negativity of the present into the driving force of dialectical reflection….intended to break the power of the past over what is to come….‖479 The claims of morality, justice, and life worthy of humanity are not lost on philosophy, thanks to memory. “We can no longer recognize a life unworthy of human beings, and experience the loss this involves. Philosophy, too, pits the force of anamnesis against a historicist forgetting of forgetting.”480 There is a practical side to philosophy, which results from memory that can supply the workable grounds for action— much like in theology.

But Habermas concedes that philosophy cannot provide all the comforts or the solutions religion can.

Such a philosophy, which takes up the thought of community in the notion of a communicative, historically situated reason, cannot offer assurances. It stands under the sign of a transcendence from within, and has to content itself with the

478 ———, “Israel or Athens?.”
479 Ibid. 134.
480 Ibid.
reasoned resolve of a skeptical but non-defeatist ‘resistance to the idols and demons of a world which holds humanity in contempt.’

This is not exclusively negative though—especially if those religious promises no longer elicit belief, as Habermas has insinuated. Habermas commends philosophy to theology and religion because it is capable of being persuasive and operational in both modern western cultures and the rest of the world. The offer of salvation and an appeal to a transcendent deity are not as helpful in dialogue with other cultures and religions, especially after their tainted association with colonialism and domination. Philosophy, especially linguistics, provides a common forum and nonthreatening vocabulary for discussion and the hope of setting political and practical norms for a better world. The new “polycentric” world Church can borrow from philosophy the political vocabulary to help it communicate better. It must also take as a model the communicative reason that allows people to respectfully challenge one another in the pursuit of common practical ends.

Another kind of hermeneutic self-reflection is required of Catholic Christianity as a whole in its relation to other religions….in the case of the dialogical contest between religious and metaphysical world views, a common conception of the good which could play the same role as this shared legal and moral basis is lacking. This means that this contest has to be played out with a reflexive awareness that all concerned move in the same universe of discourse, and respect each other as collaborative participants in the search for ethical-existential truth. To make this possible a culture of recognition is required which takes its principles from the secularized world of moral and rational-legal universalism. In

481 Ibid. 135.

482 Metz, Faith in History and Society. Metz seems to understand Habermas’ thinking in this way. “Then there is the notion of the almost unnoticeable atrophy of religious consciousness in general, the progressive disintegration in broad sectors of the population of religious ways of securing one’s identity….This is how Jürgen Habermas has put it in various statements in recent years, without, of course it being possible to bring these remarks (which are sporadically present anyway) together into a general thematization of this judgment.” 145, 269n5.

483 Metz does not deny that religion and theology have collaborated with forces of oppression in the past. He believes there needs to be serious conversion in the church, but memory, not the substitution of supposedly neutral political terminology, will help bring about this change. See Johann-Baptist Metz, “1492-- through the Eyes of a European Theologian,” in Faith and the Future: Essays on Theology, Solidarity, and Modernity, ed. Concilium Foundation (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1995 (1992)).
this domain, therefore, it is the philosophical spirit of political enlightenment which lends theology the concepts with which to make sense of moves towards a polycentric world Church.\textsuperscript{484}

To claim then that anamnestic reason somehow is prior to and grounds communicative reason is not accurate—at least not in the modern world, for Habermas. Metz maintains that the authority or rationality of any discussion and consensus depends on explicit acknowledgement of the foundational memories that are the heart of them—\textit{memoria passionis}. Content, not form, is prior. Habermas, however, is more interested in the validity of the process by which universal claims are established. Content, in the form of personal memories of suffering and death, will inevitably conflict. The focus needs to be on the process by which everyone is heard, preventing the conflicting memories from leading to domination or intimidation of any members in the discussion.

If anything, according to Habermas, communicative reason is now necessary for theology or religion to take part in the wider world’s dialogue. Anamnestic reason cannot achieve its practical ends without the use of communicative reason because the inevitable conflict of content (memories) will lead to violence if not subject to agreed upon procedures. Ultimately, however, Habermas does not seem concerned so much with prioritizing communicative over anamnestic reason as much as maintaining that both are the products of the mixture of Greek and Judeo-Christian thought. It is both Israel and Athens, not either/or.

\textsuperscript{484} Habermas, "Israel or Athens?." 137.
3.1.2 Metz’s (possible) Responses to Habermas

There are two issues involved in speculating about or crafting Metz’s response to Habermas’ objections to anamnestic reason. First, are Habermas’ criticisms valid? Second, if one concedes Habermas’ points, does it matter at all to Metz’s larger argument about anamnestic memory? This section will explore both.

3.1.2.1 Validity of Objections and Metz’s Defense

It can be said provisionally that some of Habermas’ objections are valid. Especially in his earlier works (i.e. *Faith in History and Society*), Metz does treat the philosophical traditions regarding memory as almost exclusively Platonic, but with a nod towards Aristotle. He does not engage in an overly nuanced treatment of different schools’ thought on memory. Nor does he even delve deeply into the Platonic conception of memory. But he does acknowledge that both traditions—the Greek and Judeo-Christian—have some notion of memory, although they are different.

It is possible to thematize memory in a twofold respect as a fundamental concept. It [philosophy] can do so insofar as, on the one hand, what the word “memory” expresses is precisely the mediating connection between reason and history, and on the other, since fundamental features of both Greek philosophy and the Judeo-Christian intellectual tradition are articulated under the category of memory. The connection that I have in mind here, between the platonic doctrine of anamnesis in grounding rational knowledge in pre-conscious truth and the Judeo-Christian stress on history and freedom, needs to be presented in such a way that both find in the concept of memory the categorical form of their specifically modern mediation: the mediation between a priori truths of reason and the history of freedom.

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486 Ibid. 170.
However, his complex and nuanced dialogue with the work of the early Frankfurt School clearly indicates that he does not believe that all philosophy is platonic. Metz constantly is confronting Marx and Nietzsche in his theology, so obviously he is aware of the negative thrust and critique of “counter-traditions” within philosophy too. He is aware of these, even if he does not discuss them explicitly—as Habermas would like.

Simply because Habermas lists some counter-traditions as part of the critique does not mean that he successfully demonstrates that these are any less guilty of excluding anamnestic reason than Platonic thought was. And even if one or more of the non-platonic traditions are more amenable to anamnestic reason it is not clear that the term means the same thing to Habermas or them that it means to Metz. Habermas, in speaking of Metz’s notion of memory, links it to the very theological—that is, referencing or relying on a transcendent element that could be divine—definition offered by Walter Benjamin. “He [Metz] understands the force of recollection…above all in Benjamin’s sense as the mystical force of a retroactive reconciliation. Remembrance preserves from decay things we regard as indispensable, and yet, which are now in extreme danger.”

With this definition of remembrance clearly proffered,—he does not discuss anamnestic reason as such—Habermas declares in the next sentence that philosophy cannot use memory in this sense. “This religious conception of ‘salvation’ certainly transcends the horizon of what philosophy can make plausible under the conditions of postmetaphysical [i.e. not looking for an overarching explanation of being or existence

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487 Habermas, "Israel or Athens?.” 132.
outside concrete human production] thinking.” Anamnestic reason rooted in the biblical experience of God, however, does indeed point to something radically “other” than the human self or anything encountered in creation, while still maintaining that God is absolutely near to creation. God, encountered in scripture, is not one more thing alongside the created order—as the Greek deities were—but neither is God free of responsibility or concern for creation. Greek thought actually endangered this last revelation by separating conceptually “the God of salvation from the Creator God of the Old Testament, freeing Him of responsibility for the barbarity of a sinful humankind. God Himself was not to be drawn into His creation, shot through, as it was, with suffering.” Metz rejects just such a move on the part of Greek thought infiltrating Christian faith and theology. Although theological anamnestic reason may have “disrupted from within a reason oriented towards the cosmos” in Greek thought, it was not preserved intact after functioning in this manner. Suffering was relegated behind concern for guilt. Memory’s most important function was lost.

Philosophies often seem to take theological concepts and redefine them in a way that is still useful for philosophy, but which is missing the central core that the concept had in the beginning. Metz observes this himself in discussing the difference between emancipation and redemption. There may be a shared vocabulary, but they mean different things.

The distinctions that have been developed in the dialectic of emancipation…are in no way theological differentiations….This is also true of the theological concepts

488 Ibid.
489 Ibid. 133.
490 Ibid.
that are to be found in this dialectic, such as “redemption” in Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, “resurrection of fallen nature” in Ernst Bloch, Herbert Marcuse, and Jürgen Habermas…There is no theological foothold to be found in this dialectic of the history of emancipation!…One would be fundamentally misunderstanding the negative-critical dimension of this dialectic of emancipation if one were to think that all that was necessary was to “complement it” with a Christian doctrine of redemption.491

Habermas admits this to some extent too. “Admittedly, from Augustine via Thomas to Hegel, philosophical idealism has produced syntheses which transform the God whom Job encountered into a philosophical concept of God.”492 And again, when he writes: “The idea of a covenant which promises justice to the people of God, and to everyone who belongs to this people, a justice which extends through and beyond a history of suffering, has been taken up in the idea of a community tied by a special bond.”493

But this is fundamentally different: a “special bond” is not the same thing as God theologically. It is a different notion when used philosophically, just as philosophical terms or notions that are used by theologians are foundationally altered. For all Metz’s similarities with some of the early Frankfurt School, his thought is different from theirs because it incorporates God—and not just an “idea” of God or an empty messianic expectation. This makes a big difference, as Habermas demonstrates through a revealing reflection by Jens Glebe-Möller on the work of Helmut Peukert.

Taking up a reflection of Peukert’s, he [Glebe-Möller] explains this as follows: “If we desire to hold on to solidarity with everyone else in the communicative fellowship, even the dead…then we must claim a reality that can reach beyond the here and now, or that can connect our selves beyond our own death with those

491 Metz, *Faith in History and Society*. 117.

492 Habermas, “Israel or Athens?.” 131.

493 Ibid. 132.
who went innocently to their destruction before us. And it is this reality that the
Christian tradition calls God” (110). But in contrast to Peukert, Glebe-Möl
er insist [sic] on an atheistic version of this idea in that he poses the question: “But
are we not then back at the point where only faith in a divine deliverance can
rescue us—where, with Peukert, we have to reintroduce the thought of God? I
continue to be convinced that we are today unable to think that thought. This
means that the guilt remains in effect. Instead of resigning ourselves to it,
however, we must make the consciousness of guilt something positive, something
that spurs us to fight against the conditions that have produced guilt. That can
happen when we hold fast to our solidarity with all who have suffered and died,
now and before. This solidarity or fellowship contains within itself a “messianic”
power that transforms any passive consciousness of guilt into an active struggle
against conditions for guilt—just as it was when Jesus, who two thousand years
ago, forgave sinners and set people free to continue that struggle. But can we be
in solidarity? In the last analysis, we can be nothing else, for solidarity—the ideal
communicative fellowship—is presupposed in everything we say and do!”
(112).

Is human action as a result of guilt—solidarity produced my mutual guilty action—really
the same as being united in solidarity through a belief in the God of the living and the
dead? Metz would say no. There is no real hope for the dead from actions that come from
guilt. Consequently, the living have no hope for themselves eventually, as Metz
effectively argues in Faith in History and Society. Solidarity is not just a linguistic trope
to get us to act. Although the action agreed up might coincidentally match for decisions
based on communicative reason and anamnestic reason some, or even most, of the time,
the basis for the decision cannot be revealed by considering the process alone.
Messianism was not meant to be simply a literary metaphor for exclusively human-
gineered emancipation. We hope for more for the dead than just a better outcome of
humanity’s evolution.

494  ———, “Transcendence ”. 235-236. He is actually himself citing another work here, to which the
parenthetical page number refer, Jens Glebe-Moller, A Political Dogmatic (Philadelphia,PA: Fortress,
1987).
The separation between the philosophical and theological meaning behind shared terms perhaps accounts for why Metz chooses to stay on the theological side of the discussion about how Israel and Athens influenced one another. It is clear that memory, as anamnestic in a theological sense (as in Metz’s notion of theology, which presumes the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus), is present in scripture, as well as in the Jewish and Christian traditions and practices. So Metz chooses to focus on them as the primary source for his theology because he knows their meaning. Consequently, on the charge that Metz does not acknowledge the influence that Israel had on Athens, but only discusses how Greek thought infiltrated and Hellenized Christianity, Metz is guilty. While certainly not unaware of Hegel and Nietzsche, and their respective attempts to incorporate or exclude theology from philosophy, Metz prioritizes the theological origins of memory and solidarity because they in no way attempt to exclude God from them.

Finally, while Metz’s claim for the grounding role of anamnestic reason is contestable, it is not clear that Habermas is successful in challenging it. Habermas, while referring to memory, is not using it in the same sense that Metz intends it. If anything, Metz is guilty of being too vague about exactly what he means by anamnestic reason in contradistinction to Habermas. Metz needs to be more explicit about the fact that God cannot be excluded from his notion of anamnestic reason, even if this makes his thought less universal in its appeal. Atheists may not be able to grasp or incorporate anamnestic reason because it requires the grounding of God to give it traction. There cannot, however, be a rational communicative discussion, in which all parties are represented and able to express themselves, which does not allow for sufficient particularity that one participant can be distinguished from another. Belief in God is one such marker.
Furthermore, in order to dialogue with a wider community, the help of communicative reason may be necessary to supply political terms or concepts that transcend religion. But the great strength of communicative reason is in the terms it provides and the opportunity for dialogue. The agenda for such dialogue is set by something beyond language itself, however. Metz turns this into an actual critique of Habermas. “Of course, as far as a theory of democracy goes, his [Habermas’] theory leads in my view to the so-called discourse concept, and consequently to the ‘dark shadow of proceduralism.’”

There are experiences and encounters with people which inspire, not only the words we use, but also the ideas we discuss (e.g. the good, the humane) in an open forum. Anamnestic reason takes these into account and explicitly contributes our responsibility to past people and experiences to our dialogical reason. Without the continued presence of that which has past, there would be nothing to discuss.

“But what if past memories of suffering conflict? How are these to be adjudicated?” Habermas might ask. This is a compelling concern, but Metz might answer it is a risk that must be taken so as not to reduce the product of “rational” decision-making to the inhumane and irrational.

The three criticisms that Habermas makes are all valid, to a point. Metz does indeed treat philosophy in less than an exhaustive manner where memory is involved—whether that be through reducing all philosophy to a form of Platonism or not exploring how memory is used in counter-traditions. Metz also does not focus on the mutual

495 Johann Baptist Metz, "Religion and Politics on Modernity's Ground,” in A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, (1995)1998). 142. By “proceduralism” Metz means the concern with form over content, too much focus on how something is done or achieved and not enough attention to the content of what is being achieved or the correctness of the choice made through a proper procedure.
infiltration of religion and philosophy (Israel and Athens). The validity of Habermas’ third point is perhaps the only one that does not withstand scrutiny. He is correct in claiming to be able to contest the large role given to anamnestic reason, but the foundational nature of Metz’s notion of it is not successfully refuted by Habermas.

3.1.2.2 Importance of Objections

How devastating are Habermas’ criticisms of Metz’s treatment of anamnestic reason? If we concede entirely (which we actually do not!) that Metz does not treat the diverse counter-traditions to Platonism or explore the religious undercurrent in western philosophy, does it matter? The answer is no. Metz’s overall project, as it concerns memory, is not significantly crippled in any way. I will identify three reasons for this.

First, there is no reason to believe from what Habermas presents that there is a philosophical school that adequately deals with anamnestic reason better than Platonism—although one can contend that the onus for proving there is no such tradition lies with Metz, not Habermas. It is always better to address more ways of thinking and the diversity of a tradition than not, but not to do so does not automatically invalidate one’s conclusions. There is a positive need on Habermas’ part to demonstrate how Metz’s omission undermines Metz’s understanding of anamnestic reason as grounded in the Judeo-Christian tradition. He needs to provide at least one competent counter-example to Metz’s characterization of philosophy.

Second, if anamnestic reason has a foothold in philosophy, then Habermas already concedes that it is the result of the mixture of Judeo-Christian thought with that of the Greeks. This does not seem to invalidate the assertion that anamnestic reason
originated and flourishes through the connection with the biblical traditions. Of course, “traditions” is plural precisely because there was diversity and the encounter with Hellenistic culture happened before the canon was really begun. But those biblical traditions, from which anamnestic reason originates, did filter Hellenistic culture through themselves and provided the criteria by which certain elements would or would not be incorporated into the Jewish (and later Christian) cultures. The distinction between a Creator God and creation—who nonetheless has an intimate relationship with creation—is one notable example of something that a pervasive Hellenism could not dislodge. And this happens to be central to understanding biblical notions of memory. As the discussion of nomenclature in the last section indicates, philosophy admittedly was influenced by theology and religion but it did not maintain continuity with what it received. The ideas and terms that Greek philosophy came to adopt did not mean the same things as they did in theology, just as those same terms and ideas were altered by the mutual influence that Greek thought had upon Christianity. Metz is advocating for a return to the source of anamnestic reason as it came from the biblical traditions because that is how he is using it—immersed in reference to God and redemption grounded in God’s promises. Any understanding of anamnestic reason that omits God or hope for the dead is really something other than what Metz means.

Third—and the objection that could pose a problem for Metz—is the charge that anamnestic reason cannot operate in a multicultural plurality of settings without communicative reason’s guidance because of the historical baggage of religious intolerance and the necessary particularity of religions. Dialogue with people outside the Judeo-Christian tradition might not relate well to the language used by anamnestic
reason. This would be serious because Metz concludes that the only universal thing he is aware of is the claim of suffering made by the dead and our responsibility to them.\textsuperscript{496} These claims are given power through their presence being represented in decisions influenced by reason with the past in mind (hence the title anamnestic reason). But the original criticism is predicated on theologians and Catholic religious leaders not having a vocabulary acceptable to open dialogue with all other people in conditions without domination. Is it necessary for Catholic leaders and theologians to limit their world of discourse to political and secular terms in order to have a non-coercive conversation about the good and morality?

While it seems that Habermas does assume an affirmative response to this query in “Israel or Athens: Where Does Anamnestic Reason Belong?,” in some of his more recent work, and notably as a result of his conversations with Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), Habermas has conceded that religious language has been underestimated.\textsuperscript{497} There is more potential in it for communicative reason and action than he ascribed to it before.

\textsuperscript{496} Schuster and Boschert-Kimmig, \textit{Hope against Hope}. 24. “For me memories are not just the objects of a testing discourse, but rather the ground of discourse, without which they would collapse into a vacuum.... I know of really only one absolutely universal category: it is the memoria passionis. And I know of only one authority which cannot be revoked by any Enlightenment or emancipation: the authority of those who suffer.” See also Johann Baptist Metz, “Theology and the University,” in \textit{A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity} (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995) 1998. 134. “I am thinking of the universalism of responsibility, in the face of the much-bemoaned moral bankruptcy of Europe, in the face of exaggerated individualization and the diffusion of our lifeworlds, which appear no longer to be structured by any binding remembrance. The traditions to which theology is accountable know a universal responsibility born of the memory of suffering. This memoria passionis becomes the basis of a universal morality by the fact that it always takes into account the suffering of others, the suffering of strangers. Furthermore, speaking quite biblically, considers even the suffering of enemies and does not forget about their suffering in assessing its own history of suffering.”

\textsuperscript{497} Joseph Ratzinger and Jurgen Habermas, \textit{The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion} (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2006). 23. “I shall suggest that we should understand cultural and societal secularization as a double learning process that compels both the traditions of the Enlightenment
Today the ecclesial communities are in competition with other communities of interpretation that are rooted in secular traditions. Even viewed from outside, it could turn out that monotheistic traditions have at their disposal a language whose semantic potential is not yet exhausted [unabgegoltenen], that shows itself to be superior in its power to disclose the world and form identity, in its capability for renewal, its differentiation, and its range.498

Anamnestic reason has a larger audience than just those who share explicitly in the Judeo-Christian tradition—although that remains its origin. The suffering and premature death of the innocent that is the main content of anamnestic reason is not confined to any one religious tradition or vocabulary type.

The Enlightenment promotes discourse and consensus, but—in its abstract, totalizing critique of traditions—underestimates the intelligible and critical power of memory….Anamnestic reason, therefore, is not primarily led by an a priori of communication and agreement, but by an a priori of suffering. This a priori of suffering orients political discourse in times of uncertainty. It becomes the criterion of a liberal politics in those cases where the purely procedural point of view does not suffice for arriving at a political decision….499

The memoria passionis (which becomes interchangeable with “dangerous memory”), while grounded in Christ’s passion for Metz, is an experience that all people share and implicates us all in responsibility to the dead. So dialogue about it can be had on a universal level, even if the experiences present in that dialogue are very particular—and not necessarily couched in Christian terms. Even more important, for Metz’s argument in favor of the founding nature of anamnestic reason for communicative reason, terms cannot provide the agenda or grounds for peace the way experiences of suffering can and do—as in the case of human rights.500

and the religious doctrines to reflect on their own respective limits.” Habermas and Ratzinger both agree that secular reason and the religions need to be informed by one another and recognize their limitations too.

498 Habermas, "Transcendence ". 229.

499 Metz, "Religion and Politics on Modernity's Ground." 142-143.

500 Ibid. 145.
3.1.3 Metz’s Critique of Habermas

The use of the term “reason” by both Metz and Habermas (anamnestic and communicative, respectively) in naming their approaches indicates that both are appealing to something that has a claim to mature, logical, decision-making. The Enlightenment tradition—of which both men are proponents to some degree—maintains the importance of organizing and acting rationally. Whatever is most “rational” is most compelling. Of course, what is rational is debatable. This was precisely Adorno and Horkheimer’s point. Instrumental reason and the technological domination of claims to rationality have resulted in vast suffering and inhumanity—really, irrationality. In response, communicative reason claims authority as “the reasonable thing” by virtue of correct procedure. Suffering or irrationality can be avoided by going through the proper evaluative steps. Anamnestic reason claims this same authority from a more internal compulsion of one’s humanity—the authority of suffering itself. To forget suffering is irrational. To make decisions that forget the specific memoria passionises that motivate and compel the interlocutors in making decisions collectively is not rational. Procedures that move us towards an “ideal speech situation” where all are free to share are not enough to ensure that specific memories of suffering will not be forgotten, according to Metz. Memory needs to hold a pride of place before proper discussion protocol.

Memory does not actually play a significant role at all in the philosophy of Jürgen Habermas. Any part that it might play can best be characterized as general (i.e. that the past includes suffering, oppression, and distortions without giving the names and detailed stories of any one person). The ideal speech situation, if it could exist, and the concerns that people bring to their dialogue and argumentation therein, are shaped by history. So

501 Ashley, Interruptions. 195. “Even a thinker as sympathetic to religion and Christianity as Jürgen Habermas has little room in his impressive and sweeping social theory for the disclosive and transformative power of narrative and memory.” This is something Metz thinks characterizes the Enlightenment, and its defenders, like Habermas, in general. “The Enlightenment has never overcome a deeply rooted prejudice in the model of reason that it developed: the prejudice against memory.” Metz, “Religion and Politics on Modernity’s Ground.” 142.
the present cannot help but be shaped by the past and our current decisions formed by the legacy of the past. But here there is no mention of any specific historical event or identities of the lost (e.g., he would speak of the Shoah and not Auschwitz). Nor is there any real hope offered for the dead. It is not anamnestic reason in Metz’s sense because it is too general. This is one of Metz’s main criticisms of Habermas’ theory.

Because of critical-theory’s emphasis on ideology-critique, the constitutive power of the past for the present can in the last analysis only be mediated to reason by means of some psychological or sociological theory of development, which no longer draws on the power of the specific events that are remembered themselves. This is Metz’s critique of Habermas. Thus, while both traditions recognize the past as somehow constitutive for the present, in Metz’s view neither is able to offer a concept of memory in which persons recognize in their history, in the specific events they remember out of it, their own struggle to become subjects—and in this recognition are empowered and compelled to continue the struggle. 502

For Metz, memories need to be specific in order to have any power to influence the present or provide hope for the specific participants who were victimized. And the memory par excellence for Metz is that of Auschwitz.

Since Metz and Habermas are roughly the same age, the two men were deeply impacted by the Second World War, the Shoah (Auschwitz), and a Germany faced with its role in both.503 Metz admits and embraces this origin of his theology, choosing to focus on the Auschwitz as pivotal. Everything he writes is done with a view to it. Habermas, on the other hand, never mentions it in any of his longer, more central writings. Metz questions this and cites it as grounds to doubt the claim made by

502 Ashley, Interruptions. 150.

503 On a biographical level, Habermas admits this, although his more important works do not explicitly reflect it. “Habermas was not among those who had the ‘gift’ of late birth…. Born in 1929, Habermas was recruited to the Hitler Youth in 1944 and sent with his youth cohort to help man the antiaircraft artillery of the western wall defenses…. Two important studies of Habermas’s intellectual biography both emphasize the centrality of 1945 as a marker of Habermas’s generational identity…. ‘What really determined my political life was 1945,’ wrote Habermas…. He describes himself as transfixed by a radio broadcast of the Nuremberg trials in 1945-6, from which he first learned of the Holocaust and its atrocities. Thus 1945 has been called Habermas’s ‘existentially motivated philosophical birthday.’” Matthew G. Specter, Habermas: An Intellectual Biography (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010). 5-6.
Habermas, that communicative reason has taken into itself the best parts of anamnestic reason.

‘Israel or Athens: Where does Anamnestic Reason Belong?’: this is the title of a text with which German social philosopher Jürgen Habermas tried to prove to me that the anamnestic spirit of the biblical concept of time has long since been taken up by the concept of reasoning in European philosophy. In this way, it would seem that at least with the defenses of professional European philosophy, the dangers of cultural amnesia can be resisted. But then why does, e.g., the catastrophe of Auschwitz appear in Habermas’s work only in his ‘Small political Writings’—and there, as is well known, it does appear in both a decisive and influential way—but not, not even with one word, in his great philosophical writings on communicative reason? Does not communicative theory also heal all wounds? But how is it possible then to speak in a generalisable [sic] way of what remains as evil (Unheil), of what cannot be healed, of what should not be allowed to disappear behind the shield of cultural amnesia, of what cannot be contained within seamless normality?504

Perhaps it is the nature of Habermas’ discipline that accounts for this. Perhaps anamnestic reason is not entirely at home with philosophy.

Metz’s second criticism of Habermas builds upon his concern that communicative reason allows no room for the negative, unresolved, and unhealable. Metz is concerned that there is too much optimism. It assumes a consensus, an arrival or end product, which does not seem to be justified, but a form of idealism.

For example, in what is his a priori notion of the ideal communicative community grounded, on what quasi-idealist confidence in reconciliation? Is it anything other than an anticipated reconciliation and “sublation” [Aufhebung] of the negative? And is this typically German idealism? Here I sense in him too little patience as a thinker with negativity, non-identity, the ban of images and negative theology, if I may put it this way. With his critique of the theological roots of the “Dialectic of the Enlightenment” has not Habermas perhaps been too harsh and traded in that position for a disguised idealism?505


505 Schuster and Boschert-Kimmig, Hope against Hope. 24-25.
Anamnestic reason is more at home with negativity and disruption because the memories of suffering and the dead do not always lead to consensus or answers. There is more allowance in it for disruption, interruption, and the dissonant impact that memories of suffering often cause. As Habermas might contend, one cannot go so far down the path of negativity and critique that there is no room left for hope or change in the future. This is the problem that Horkheimer and Adorno eventually confronted in their project. But Metz maintains the tension better than they because he holds onto the positive aspects of tradition and culture, while still being sufficiently unsettled with the *status quo*.

Almost as a pair to this concern is the third criticism that Metz makes of Habermas. Although Habermas does not want to focus on subjectivity *in se*, he assumes a good deal about those who are involved in discussion in the ideal speech situation. At the very least, Habermas assumes that a subject understands and/or is able to use language to communicate in the first place. This definition of the subject calls into question the participation of the mentally and physically handicapped or even the illiterate, who cannot communicate. He also assumes that a subject is one who is “rational” (e.g. that one will be able to recognize and agree to the “better argument” when it is presented). This may be assuming too much and comes perilously close to mimicking the economic exchange system, in which transactions only take place among (rational) equals.

In connection with a subtle logic of evolution, it may very well be that standing in the background of the approaches I have in mind here is that Hegelian idealism which presumes the rationality of the subject in a transcendental way and which, whenever it senses the inequality of the one with which it is coming into contact, compensates for this reflexively and revalues it: a transcendental simulation of the equal status of the partner! In the final analysis this idealism seems to be implicit both to the Habermasian “universal pragmatics” and to Apel’s “communicative community,” because of the way that both of them presuppose a “reciprocal recognition” on the part of the subjects envisaged in their universal rules. All of the relationships that are developed in these and similar theories of communicative action—including both the postulated unrestricted communication
community as well as the universal solidarity they have in mind—tend to have the character of an exchange relationship.\textsuperscript{506}

Monotheistic religion actually is the only thing, for Metz, that can ground subjectivity in a way that ultimately does not come down just to an exchange between equals. The suffering of the other, remembered in anamnestic reason, alone guarantees the subject presupposed in political theory and praxis, which claims to be religion and tradition-free.

Is it only embittered cultural pessimism, if I have the impression that the cultural conditions produced by advanced societies turn out to be little more than the logic of the market or of exchange? And that consequently an allegedly presuppositionless, purely formal rationality is in actual fact guided by a (hidden) a priori of the market, wherein the market rewards dispositions that make one ready to negotiate? Here it seems to me that the traditionally rooted a priori of suffering is still more promising—even and precisely for modernity’s politics. Prior to every relationship of exchange and competition, it entails the metapolitical guarantee of a turn to the other. And it traces its origins, at least, to those traditions I have here described as pathic monotheism.\textsuperscript{507}

Metz clearly rejects Habermas’ conclusion that communicative reason either grounds or has subsumed the best parts of anamnestic reason. Although communicative reason may be a good minimum condition for modern life together, it is simply not enough. Only anamnestic reason does justice to the subjecehood of all people—not just the rational—and continues to recognize the outstanding subjectivity of the dead (who cannot possibly participate in an exchange system anymore). This is what he means by a “turn to the other”—a concern primarily with the needs and subjectivity of those who are different enough from one’s self that their perspectives or subjectivity may be forgotten.

And this is what is at the heart of “pathic monotheism,” which Metz defines as

A monotheism that has a side sensitive to suffering, a monotheism constitutionally broken by the theodicy question, a question that can as little be answered as it can be forgotten. It is a monotheism for which history is not simply the history of the victors, but above all a history of suffering: a monotheism that is historically condensed in the biblical \textit{memoria passionis} and can be universalized.

\textsuperscript{506} Metz, \textit{Faith in History and Society}. 211.

\textsuperscript{507} ———, "Religion and Politics on Modernity's Ground." 149.
only through the remembrance of someone else’s suffering, the suffering of the others—up to and including even the suffering of one’s enemies.508

Metz also makes clear that there is something missing in Habermas’ theories that is necessary to ground the ideal situations of which he speaks, preventing them from becoming only procedure-oriented. Anamnestic reason, because it has its roots in the Judeo-Christian worldview and understanding of history, can still appeal to God as the guarantor of something beyond emancipation in the present moment when pushed far enough. As Metz writes, “This God is for me the only reliable foundation for that universal solidarity and justice for which human beings hunger and thirst—not only today, as it were by decree of the Zeitgeist, but also throughout all of human history.” 509 But this reliance is an appeal that comes in the form of a question to God in the face of great injustice and suffering. God is not a deus ex machina or a form of wish fulfillment for Metz. 510 Anamnestic reason, precisely because it remembers, cannot be satisfied with easy answers. It is “the cognitive dimension of a mystical suffering unto God.” 511

Habermas might conclude that he does not need a guarantor of anything beyond the current consensus to make his communicative reason compelling. But for many of his interlocutors in the consensus-building discussion, faith is valuable and the vocabulary must be taken into account for there to be a meaningful discussion that meets his specifications of an ideal speech situation. In his later work, especially through

508 Ibid. 144.


510 ———, "Theology as Theodicy?," in A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, (1990) 1998). 68. “Was Israel, for example, happy with its God? Was Jesus happy with his Father? Does religion make one happy? Does it make one mature? Does it give one identity? home, security, peace with one-self? Does it soothe anxieties? Does it answer questions? Does it fulfill our wishes, at least the most ardent? I do not think so….In my opinion, this is where all the critics of religion from Feuerbach to Freud have been mistaken. Poverty of spirit, the root of all consolation, is not without a mystical uneasiness of questioning, not even in Christianity.”


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discussions with Joseph Ratzinger, Habermas has become more open to this fact and acknowledges that religious langue has been underestimated.

3.2 Miroslav Volf and “Non-Remembrance” as Divine Gift

From a Christian theological perspective there are also voices that criticize, or at least qualify, the use of memory in the discipline. Miroslav Volf is a Christian theologian whose project mainly concerns forgiveness and the role that memory of horrendous wrongs plays in discerning a Christian’s stance towards the offenders. His own religious affiliation has included both the Evangelical Church in Croatia and the Episcopalian Church in the United States.\footnote{512 Miroslav Volf, Personal Description, last modified June 2004, accessed December 14, 2010, http://www.yale.edu/divinity/faculty/Fac.MVolf.shtml}

He studied with Jürgen Moltmann at the University of Tübingen while earning his PhD in theology\footnote{513 Miroslav Volf, Curriculum Vitae, accessed December 14, 2010, http://www.yale.edu/divinity/cv/MVOLF.pdf}—an intellectual influence that is discernible in the theology of the memory of Jesus’ crucifixion that Volf puts forth. Volf, currently at the Yale Center for Faith and Culture, deals with both systematic theology and ethics.\footnote{514 Volf, Personal Description, http://www.yale.edu/divinity/faculty/Fac.MVolf.shtml} His work, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*, is the most relevant of his numerous publications for understanding his stance towards memory and will be the principle text considered in this section.

Like Metz, Volf’s work is deeply and obviously personal. He brings a particular experience of his own suffering to bear when considering both forgiveness and the influence that his memory plays in how he remembers what happened. His story begins in 1983 when he, as a native Croatian, was forced into one year compulsory military service under the then-communist regime.\footnote{515 Although he himself was a Christian}
theologian (the son of an evangelical pastor), married to an American theologian, and an avowed advocate of non-violence, no exception was made.\textsuperscript{516} What these circumstances did elicit, however, was suspicion on the part of his commanding officers and an unit-wide effort to trap Volf into speaking about religion—a topic that was not allowed—or against communism and the military. His fellow officers taped conversations specifically directed towards the forbidden topics and provided incriminating evidence against Volf to the commander, whom Volf calls “Captain G.” throughout his work.\textsuperscript{517} With shreds of circumstantial evident against him, the commander frequently had Volf brought in for “discussions.” These meetings actually were intense questionings in which Volf was both verbally and psychologically abused.\textsuperscript{518} Worst of all, it seemed to Volf that the commander was enjoying the threats and humiliation he was inflicting.

Ultimately, there was not enough evidence to support any charges against Volf. After his year of service he was released and returned to his wife and the completion of his PhD. This in no way erased, however, the mental torture that Captain G. had inflicted upon him.

Yet even afterward my mind was enslaved by the abuse I had suffered. It was as though Captain G. had moved into the very household of my mind, ensconced himself right in the middle of its living room, and I had to live with him. I wanted him to get out of my mind on the spot and without a trace. But there was no way to keep him away, no way to forget him.\textsuperscript{519}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{515} Miroslav Volf, \textit{The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World} (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2006). 3.
\item \textsuperscript{516} Ibid. 4.
\item \textsuperscript{517} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{518} Ibid. 6. “My interrogations might be categorized as a mid-level form of abuse—greater than an insult or blow, but mild compared to the torture and suffering many others have undergone at the hands of tormentors, especially those schooled in Red Army methods.”
\item \textsuperscript{519} Ibid. 7.
\end{itemize}
From that moment Volf struggled with the questions of how he, as a Christian, should remember the man who hurt him and how it is possible not only to forgive Captain G., but actually be reconciled with him—in this life or the next.

To triumph fully, evil needs two victories, not one. The first victory happens when an evil deed is perpetrated: the second victory, when evil is returned. After the first victory, evil would die if the second victory did not infuse it with new life....How, then, should I relate to Captain G. in my imagination now that his wrongdoing was repeating itself only in my memory? How should I remember him and what he had done to me?...How should the one who loves remember the wrongdoer and the wrongdoing?...There memory must be guided by the vow to be benevolent and beneficent, even to the wrongdoer....I will argue that it is important not merely to remember, but to remember rightly. 520

3.2.1 Forgiveness Requires Forgetting...Eventually

Volf is candid about the fact that the idea of forgiving was, and sometimes even still is, repulsive to him. He admits he would rather respond towards his tormenters in the same manner that they treated him.521 But his Christianity dissuades him from this. It seems that the main ways in which his faith influences him are by: 1) directing his thoughts towards his own failings and yet the forgiveness given freely to him by God522; 2) providing him with a model of how to forgive and what it might look like, inspired by God’s grace;523 3) giving him an eschatological horizon in which to envision the process of forgiveness;524 4) furnishing a community of other people who can support him in his

520 Ibid. 9-10.

521 Ibid. 8.

522 Ibid. 122. “First, when a victim remembers a suffered wrong at the foot of the cross, he does not remember it as a righteous person but as a person who has been embraced by God, his own unrighteousness notwithstanding.” Also, 142.

523 Ibid. 123. “Second, as seen through the lens of the Passion memory, any wrongdoing committed against me is, in a significant sense, already atoned for....It may seem that such remembrance takes wrongdoing too lightly. But the ‘lightness’ is only apparent. The terrible weight of the wrongdoing has, in fact, to be borne by God; because it was, I can—indeed, in some sense I must—treat it ‘lightly’.”

524 Ibid.
efforts to forgive. But before he delves into any of these things, Volf must provide some account of memory in the modern milieu, taking into account the massive sufferings from the last century (e.g. the Shoah), psychological perspectives on memory, and the (principally) philosophical voices in favor of forgetting—namely Nietzsche and Søren Kierkegaard.

Volf does not encounter modern western culture as a culture of forgetfulness, but one in which the call to memory is swift and constant—even if the quality of that memory is not specified.

The summons to remember, directed at victims and the wider populace alike, has in recent decades become almost ubiquitous in Western culture. When I first encountered this injunction after my ordeal in 1984, I took it to be superfluous to my own interior life. I remembered all too well—I didn’t need anyone to prod me to do so. I deemed the injunction to remember perilously one-sided, however, if it was simply urging me to make public what happened to me in secret—which seemed to be the main intent of the injunction’s proponents.

To support this assertion, Volf, throughout the work, respectfully cites Elie Wiesel as the modern prophet of remembrance, who urges everyone to never forget the horrors witnessed and perpetrated on the Jews under Nazi Germany. Volf also gives the example of the destruction of the World Trade Towers, and the instant attempt to memorialize the event, as an example of the speed at which the call to memory happens today.

Although the exhortations to memory may be everywhere, it often is unconcerned with ascertaining truthfulness or being fair to the evildoers. Many people are not even

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525 Ibid. 126. “because it is so difficult for the wronged person to be ‘a Christ’ to her neighbors by remembering rightly, it is vitally important to belong to a community that can, through its own practices, support her in remembering suffered wrongs through the lens of the Exodus and Passion.”

526 Ibid. 11.

527 Ibid. 40. Volf does nuance his depiction of the “memory boom” today by saying it is mostly an outward appearance to compensate for an interior loss of memory. “We demand immediate memorials as outward symbols because the hold of memory on our inner lives is so tenuous. And then, because we have tangible, observable memorials, we feel absolved of the obligation to remember on our own; we feel free, in good conscience, to immerse ourselves in the blur of the present. Thus does the memory boom try to compensate for an actual memory bust.”
concerned with these things. As a Christian, however, Volf maintains that one needs to be concerned with truthfulness in order to not commit the equally grave sin of “bearing false witness” by making what the perpetrator did worse than it really was.\textsuperscript{528} “My soul was at stake in the way I remembered Captain G.”\textsuperscript{529}

Remembering rightly, therefore, has several components. First, one must try to be as faithful as possible to the events remembered. This means no intentional distortion of the facts remembered or lying.\textsuperscript{530} Second, one must question and be aware of the fallibility of one’s own memory.

There were so many ways in which I could remember wrongly….I could remember masochistically…by remembering only those things from the incident that make me displeased with myself. Or I could remember sadistically, guided by a vindictive desire to repay evil for evil….Knowing how faulty memories generally are, and being aware of victims’ proclivities and blind spots, I could not fully trust even myself….Did he in fact do to me what I remember his having done? If my wounded psyche passed on to my memory injuries that he did not inflict, or exaggerated those he did, I would be wronging him, irrespective of the fact that it was he who in the past had overwhelmingly wronged me.\textsuperscript{531}

And in regards to the memory of victims in general, Volf maintains:

Scholars who study memory unanimously agree: Memories are notoriously unreliable. There is no reason to think any differently of the memories of victims. Though they often do remember correctly, the pain of their undeniable suffering and understandable rage can easily distort their memories.\textsuperscript{532}

But how could one ever remember truthfully then? Volf appeals to God as the guarantor of ultimate truthfulness in anything, including our limited memories: “Truth is a

\textsuperscript{528} Ibid. 62-63. It is important to note that Volf understands this commandment, not just as a prohibition against lying, but as a positive responsibility—as formulated by Luther—in which one must not just not speak in a manner that harms someone else, but speak in a manner that “benefits everyone, reconciles the discordant, excuses and defends the maligned.”

\textsuperscript{529} Ibid. 17.

\textsuperscript{530} Ibid. 15.

\textsuperscript{531} Ibid. 13-14.

\textsuperscript{532} Ibid. 30.
transcendental category and is underwritten by an all-knowing God.”\textsuperscript{533} But we participate in the truth only provisionally now.

Looking beyond earthly limitations of memory, we can hope for more than piecing together scraps of recollection. Over the centuries Christians have believed that the day is coming on which our past, marred by wrongdoing, will be bathed in the warm light of God’s truthful grace. I am referring to what has been traditionally called the Day of Judgment. True, the Judge will be the just God, whose knowledge knows no limits and whose memory is as complete as it is unfailing. All wrong-doing will be remembered in its full import and condemned for what it is….Christ the Judge, who bore the sin of the world, will enable us truthfully to remember our past, as well as the past of those whose lives were intertwined with ours on account of wrongdoing. In the here and now, we can only provisionally discharge our obligation to remember truthfully. Our attempts are a fallible way of participating in God’s truth-telling about our lives at the end of history, yet an indispensable one as well.\textsuperscript{534}

Third, remembering correctly demands that one condemn the wrong suffered—but in the correct way. This is more troublesome than it seems at first because Volf maintains that, “We condemn most properly in the act of forgiving, in the act of separating the doer from the deed. That is how God in Christ condemned all wrongdoing. That is how I ought to condemn Captain G.’s wrongdoing.”\textsuperscript{535} Here it becomes obvious that Volf is speaking to a primarily, if not exclusively, Christian audience. Without sharing his convictions about God’s action in Christ, one would not necessarily follow the rest of his argument about remembering rightly.

Furthermore, remembering rightly means that one always keeps in mind one’s own history of sin and wrongdoing, as well as the free forgiveness given in Christ to all. One is not superior to the evildoer. “So to remember Captain G.’s abuse rightly, must I not remember it as the act of a self-confessed wrongdoer rather than that of a self-styled

\textsuperscript{533} Ibid. 50.

\textsuperscript{534} Ibid. 61-62.

\textsuperscript{535} Ibid. 15.
Lastly—and again this assumes heavily that one is Christian—one frames one’s remembering in light of the eschaton and setting right of all things. “If one died for the salvation of all, should we not hope for the salvation of all?...Will we be reconciled in the New Jerusalem? Or must I at least hope that we will be? If so, my memory of wrongdoing will be framed by the memory and hope of reconciliation between wrongdoers and the wronged.”

Despite how it may seem at times, Volf is not against remembering, even though the title of the book might make one wonder. But he frequently says he is not opposed to memory, when done correctly. “So from the start, the central question for me was not whether to remember. I most assuredly would remember and most incontestably should remember.” And towards the end of the work he clarifies: “I am not arguing against memory and for amnesia. Memory is so fundamental to our being human that we would not be able to function without it.” But these clear affirmations of memory are muddied and less clear when considered with his last point for remembering correctly. Could one remember a wrong while at the same time being fully reconciled with the evildoer? Ultimately, Volf says no.

3.2.1.1 Wounded Memory, Healing Forgetfulness

Volf’s argument that the memory of evil should not endure forever begins by considering the nature of something that is remembered. He concurs on some level with

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536 Ibid.
537 Ibid. 16.
538 Ibid. 11.
539 Ibid. 147.
Nietzsche, that only things that continue to hurt remain in one’s memory. “To remember suffering endured is to keep one’s wounds open.”

But is memory such an unambiguous good? How strong is the link between memory and well-being? Isn’t the memory of wrongs suffered itself suffused with pain and suffering? Hasn’t it sometimes pushed those who remember to inflict pain and suffering on others?...the question [is] whether such memory is in some significant way “saving” in the sense of contributing to our well-being and that of our neighbors....Salvation lies in memory, suggests Elie Wiesel, borrowing religious vocabulary for urgent everyday concerns. Is it obvious, however, that we should associate the memory of wrongs with salvation—or with anything positive for that matter?...To relive those experiences is painful, even in memory. When we remember the past, it is not only past; it breaks into the present and gains a new lease on life.

With this argument for “real presence” through memory, Volf concludes that, at the eschaton, in order for the attainment of heaven or union with God, there can be no more suffering. To remember evil would be to make present again the suffering. Therefore, at some point, for good reasons, forgetting of painful memories must occur. He cites Augustine in favor of this conclusion. The heavenly City “will be freed from all evil and filled with all good, enjoying unfailingly the delight of eternal joys, forgetting all offenses, forgetting all punishments.” At least on the side of the victims, it seems that Volf argues for forgetting in order that one may enjoy eternal life fully. To be healed means one has forgotten (or at least that the offense no longer “comes to mind,”—the distinction that will be considered in the next sub-section).

Even if one concedes this possibility for eternity, however, what about in this life? Volf tries to address some of the more compelling arguments for remembering wrongs

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540 Ibid. 22.

541 Ibid. 20-21.

542 Ibid. 213-214. “Remembering horrendous evils and experiencing joy, especially joy in one another, are irreconcilable....The eternal memory of wrongs suffered implies the eternality of evil in the midst of God’s new world.... Would this not represent a peculiar triumph of evil rather than its complete defeat?....To be fully overcome, evildoing must be consigned to its proper place—nothingness.”

543 Saint Augustine, City of God. XXII. 30.
suffered now. First, he recognizes that memories—both of one’s self and the memories other have of us—shape identity. Yet one’s identity is less about what one remembers and more about what one does with what one remembers, and how one then hopes for the future.\textsuperscript{544} So identity does not rely on memory for existence. Plus, all remembering—that is, the selection of what to remember or include in our life story—requires some forgetting of other events.

We also inescapably forget a good deal of what we have clearly perceived. And yet, such forgetting notwithstanding, our identity remains intact….Indeed, it is possible to show that forgetting is inseparable from personal identity even if we operate with a strong sense of narrative identity, the belief that in a profound sense we are our stories….Given that we are finite beings with particular interests, if we tell a story, we must leave out events and episodes that, from the perspective of the narrator, seem unimportant…forgetting is an essential aspect of the work of identity-shaping recollection.\textsuperscript{545}

So identity relies as much on forgetting as on remembering \textit{per se}.

Another argument for remembering suffering, however, might be that it facilitates personal healing here and now. One cannot heal if one suppresses the memory of traumatic experiences. In order to heal, one must first drag the painful incident out into the open—remember. But, Volf notes, mere repetition in memory of an event is not enough for healing. “As trauma literature consistently notes, the healing of wounded psyches involves not only remembering traumatic experiences; it must also include \textit{integrating} the retrieved memories into a broader pattern of one’s life story…by \textit{interpreting} memories and \textit{inscribing} them into a larger pattern of meaning.”\textsuperscript{546} In both of these cases—identity and personal healing—Volf relativizes the value of remembering by

\textsuperscript{544} Volf, \textit{End of Memory}. 25-26. “Because we can react to our memories and shape them, we are larger than our memories….our identities will consist largely in our free responses to our memories, not just in the memories themselves….If salvation lies in the memory of wrongs suffered, it must lie more in what \textit{we do} with those memories than in the memories themselves.”

\textsuperscript{545} Ibid. 194-195.

\textsuperscript{546} Ibid. 27-28.
making it one step in a larger process. Memory alone is not sufficient to bring about the positive ends often associated with it.

Volf also acknowledges the arguments that the memory of suffering and the victim can serve as both an acknowledgement of a person and what he or she endured (and is therefore a form of justice)\(^{547}\) and can engender solidarity with the victim—leading to social transformation.\(^{548}\) But he instantly qualifies these admissions by assailing the reliability of the memory of victims and disputing claims that solidarity necessarily leads to actions that improve the world. Acknowledging crimes has to be balanced with truth and fair investigation to ensure that no one is wrongly accused or remembered as worse than one really was.\(^{549}\) Furthermore, the action that results from solidarity can just as easily be over-protective or even offensive in order to keep the remembered offenses from ever happening again.\(^{550}\) Furthermore, the supposed “lessons” learned from remembering are often ambiguous and it is difficult to decide exactly how to apply a given memory to a new situation.\(^{551}\) Memories may not actually deter crimes at all, but provide an impetus to commit more and more atrocious acts precisely in order to be remembered. “The memory of their deeds is their glory—the reason that in many ancient cultures, including Israel’s, blotting out the memory of perpetrators was not a crime against their victims, as we are inclined to think today, but a punishment of tormentors.”\(^{552}\)

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\(^{547}\) Ibid. 29. “Since the public remembering of wrongs is an act that acknowledges them, it is therefore also an act of justice….What can be done, though, is publically to restore civic and human dignity of those victims precisely by acknowledging the truth of what was done to them.”

\(^{548}\) Ibid. 30-31. “Remembering suffering awaken us from the slumber of indifference and goads us to fight against the suffering and oppression around us—or so the argument goes.”

\(^{549}\) Ibid. 30.

\(^{550}\) Ibid. 33.

\(^{551}\) Ibid. 89-91.
That “the memory of wrongs suffered is from a moral standpoint dangerously undetermined” leads Volf to conclude that forgetting—or better, non-remembrance—is preferable to remembering, if one can get to that point. “My argument is not that memory is bad and amnesia good…but rather that under certain conditions the absence of memory of wrongs suffered is desirable.” No one should force anyone to forget a wrong suffered, but it would be better if one could forget for one’s self and the good of others too. This seems to be his conclusion, even for remembrance of the dead, because “holding on to the dead in memory can rob us of the ability to give ourselves in love to the living.”

3.2.1.2 Non-Remembrance in Eternity

Despite the fact that Volf concludes forgetting eventually is preferable and more helpful for healing the victims, he in no way wants to forget before justice and reconciliation have been fulfilled. Citing Dante, Volf concurs that, “There can be no forgetting of sin without its clear acknowledgement, followed by genuine repentance and profound transformation.” He does not want to abandon the past as lost and look only to the future by accepting without concern what happened.

For even with a redeemed present and future, redemption is incomplete without the redemption of the past—both our individual pasts and the past of the

552 Ibid. 32.
553 Ibid. 34.
554 Ibid. 148.
555 Ibid.
556 Ibid. 143. “Though non-remembrance of wrongs suffered is a gift, it presupposes both that the one who suffered wrong has forgiven and that the wrongdoer has repented, received forgiveness, and mended his ways.”
557 Ibid. 138.
world….The wreckage of history, a trail of shattered beauty, defiled goodness, twisted truths, streams of tears, rivers of blood, mountains of corpses—must somehow be mended. That the past must and will be redeemed is a conviction essential to the Christian notion of redemption.558

As a Christian, he is convinced that reconciliation will eventually happen. And this eventuality seems to have a good deal of bearing on how one thinks about wrongdoers now. “What’s even more unsettling, since my faith teaches that in Christ God has reconciled my offender and me to each other, I have to think of us as already in some sense reconciled.”559 This could be extremely disturbing to some victims—including Christian victims—who are not yet ready to participate in offering forgiveness.

The goal of all remembering now, according to Volf, is to help bring about the truthful conditions for reconciliation later in this life or the next. “The highest aim of lovingly truthful memory seeks to bring about the repentance, forgiveness, and transformation of wrongdoers, and reconciliation between wrongdoers and their victims. When these goals are achieved, memory can let go of offenses without ceasing to be truthful.”560 This is really a crucial assumption for all that Volf argues: reconciliation between the wronged and the wrongdoer must eventually happen for any healing to fully occur.561 Forgetting never precedes this though, but it could conceivably happen in this life, and not just in the next, if enough reconciliation is attained.

Yet there seems to be something wrong, even to Volf, with prying the memories of abuse or violence out of the minds of victims. The forgetting of wrongs can never be something that is mandated.562 No one can say to another, “You need to get over that and...

558 Ibid. 42. This is also a reference to Benjamin’s “Angelus Novus.”

559 Ibid. 226.

560 Ibid. 65.

561 Ibid. 83. “We cannot experience full internal healing from a wrongdoing suffered without ‘healing’ the relationship with the wrongdoer. After all, it is in the relationship that we have been wounded….The self, however, is always a social self, and a wrongdoing intertwines the wrongdoer and the wronged…."

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forget what happened.” And Volf maintains that this will still be the case in eternity: not even God will require that one forget what has happened. But, when one is faced with perfect healing and reconciliation, the wrongs committed will just fade from one’s thoughts. The awe inspired by God makes all else melt away.

This “non-remembrance,” as Volf calls it, is not the same thing as forgetting exactly. It is not as if one could not remember an event or suffering if one wanted to do so. Non-remembrance means that one no longer needs to think about it or feel once more the pain from the past. So the offense just does not come to mind.

I will use “non-remembrance” or, more precisely, “not-coming-to-mind.”...I do not mean that certain memories will be erased from each person’s cerebral “hard-drive” so as to make all retrieval impossible. Complete erasure would go against the way we remember and forget now; though important memories may completely fade, the never really get erased. I propose instead that the memories of wrongs, rather than being deleted, will simply fail to surface in one’s consciousness—they will not come to mind. If I were to withdraw to some remote corner of the world to come and determine to remember a wrong suffered, I could presumably remember it. But there I would have neither the need nor the desire to do so.

This non-remembrance is a gift from God which will enable wrongdoers and the wronged to dwell together in eternity. “Non-remembrance of wrongs suffered is the gift God will give to those who have been wronged. It is also the gift they will gladly share with those who have wronged them.”

Part of this theory of non-remembrance is based on the fact that none of us is entirely innocent. Supposing that, at the Last Judgment, all the sins of every one of us are

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562 Ibid. 146, 142. “We do not give the gift of non-remembrance because we ‘must’. We give it to imitate God, who loves wrongdoers despite their wrongdoing. And more: we give it to echo in our own way God’s forgiveness of us—wrongdoers all!”

563 Ibid. 145. Somewhat surprisingly, Volf invokes Freud’s idea of fading memories as something similar to what he means by “non-remembering.” See 154-155, 157. He does not mean what Nietzsche means by types of forgetting, which “are more a flight from the negative than the fruit of attachment to the positive” (158).

564 Ibid. 142.
exposed fully, then none of us will want those things recalled.\textsuperscript{565} We relinquish thinking about the wrongs others have perpetrated because we do not want the wrongs we committed to come to mind either. Justice need not be satisfied by the infliction of eternal torment because none of us ultimately wants pure justice.

Would it be right for one horrible deed to mark us eternally, as some people believe that a single sin deserves the punishment of everlasting torment in hell? Even if such marking were fair, would love do that—the kind of love that wishes well and does good even to the enemy? Would we not wish to let go of the pain inflicted both by the wrong we have suffered and by our own guilt through letting go their memory, if somehow we could do so without detriment to ourselves or to our loved ones?\textsuperscript{566}

This supposes a great deal, however. Volf seems to venture far in his speculation about the nature of the Last Judgment and eternal life.\textsuperscript{567} Furthermore, the differences between then and now may be so vast that knowing this about eternity provides little direction for living now. Volf acknowledges this concern and attempts to give a response.

But by definition, in the world to come the questions of justice will have been settled, and there will be no dark corners in which dangers could possibly lurk. Does the way we remember there and then have anything to say about the way we should remember here and now? It does. But the connection between memories in the world to come and memories in the present world is not straightforward. Though connected, they are not identical, and we should not argue: “Since memories of evil will not come to mind in the world to come, we can responsibly give up on such memories now.”...But neither should we argue: “Since we must remember now, we have to remember forever.”...remembering wrongdoing now lives in the hope of its own superfluity then.\textsuperscript{568}

Though this is a challenging aim for this life, Volf’s strong sense of God’s grace, capable of operating in Christian believers now, makes it plausible to him.

\textsuperscript{565} Ibid. 210-211.
\textsuperscript{566} Ibid. 178.
\textsuperscript{567} Ibid. 179-183. Volf goes on to specify many things about how the Last Judgment will be.
\textsuperscript{568} Ibid. 149-150.
Grace-filled forgiveness and the non-remembrance of offenses is scandalous, especially when extended to vile evildoers. No argument independent of belief in the God of infinite love who justifies the ungodly and finally redeems...can be constructed to persuade those who want to keep a tight grip on strict retributive justice....^69

3.2.2 Relationship to Metz’s Presentation of Memory

Volf’s work presents two kinds of challenges to Metz’s conception of memory. The first type is more organic and implicit in Volf’s conclusions. Volf believes that forgetting and forgiveness go together ultimately and that Christians can and should be involved with both. Metz never gets far enough into forgiveness to even discuss forgetting, but remains with the need to remember. In order to explore this type of critique by Volf, a comparison and contrast of the two men’s work is instructive. The second critique is an explicit critique of Metz’s perspective on the crucifixion, the *memoria passionis*.

3.2.2.1 Comparing and Contrasting Volf’s and Metz’s Notions of Memory

Foundationally, Volf supposes that modern, industrial societies of the west are not suffering from a loss of memory. On the contrary, there is an instant and pervasive call to remember tragic events and never forget them. This stands in opposition to Metz’s affirmation that the loss of memory of the least and the dead is a sign of the domination of the exchange system and commodification coming to rule people’s lives today. Already the economic and political motifs in Metz’s work set him apart from Volf, who comes from a primarily sociological and psychological perspective. Volf does concede that this rush to remember in his theory is probably a sign of a personal lack of responsibility to remember, but this is a point that he does not develop.^570 Metz, on the

^569 Ibid. 208-209.
other hand, joins his voice to people like Elie Wiesel, who exhort people to remember those who suffered and died before their time, particularly in the Shoah.

Volf’s concern that the quality of memory being endorsed by these proponents is not stipulated enough is only partially applicable to Metz, however. Metz does recognize the difference between dangerous and placating memories, so he does register that memory can be and often is manipulated to serve the agendas of certain groups. Clearly Metz would insist that dangerous memories be “true”—remembered rightly—insofar as that is possible. False memories bear more resemblance to the official history of the victors that Metz criticizes because they omit entirely the perspective of the victimized and the lost. Placating memories are false, manipulated ones.

Metz’s work on memory, however, does not explore the psychological research about trauma, nor does he address Freud’s work on repressed memories and healing—but this is intentional. Metz chooses explicitly to take his concerns and traumatic memories to the church—where they engage his faith but remain open questions—instead of a therapist—who would focus on healing and integration. There is no discussion in Metz’s work of the faculty of memory as such, its fallibility, and possible weaknesses. To speak of human memories of suffering without addressing the real faculty of memory involved is a danger into which Metz falls. Perhaps this would not be such a serious

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570 Ibid. 40. “We demand immediate memorials as outward symbols because the hold of memory on our inner lives is so tenuous. And then, because we have tangible, observable memorials, we feel absolved of the obligation to remember on our own; we feel free, in good conscience, to immerse ourselves in the blur of the present.”

571 Johann Vento’s project does venture to take Metz in this direction, however. This will be explored more in the fourth chapter.

572 Johann Baptist Metz, “In Place of a Forward: On the Biographical Itinerary of My Theology,” in A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianit y, ed. J Matthew Ashley (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998). 2. Reflecting on his own experience of the loss of his friends, Metz suggests that his avoidance of a psychological approach to memory is intentional. “What would happen if one took this sort of remembrance not to the psychologist but into the Church? and if one did 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?” He is also critical of attempts to turn all metaphysical statements into merely psychological ones. See Schuster and Boschert-Kimmig, Hope against Hope. 36.
criticism if Metz was able to link or somehow ground human right-remembering in God. Volf himself does this. But the fact that the anthropological category of memory in Metz is never grounded in anything strong enough to guarantee its truthfulness is a problem. Given Metz’s apophatic tendencies, it is understandable that he does not do this, but it does create room for criticism.

Many of Volf’s concerns about remembering rightly, however, come from the perspective from which he approaches remembered suffering. Although both Metz and Volf rely on personal narratives of suffering as the impetus and guide for their work with memory, Volf takes a much more first-person, individual approach insofar as his main memory involves himself and Captain G, while Metz is more interested in the forgetfulness of the victors. The one suffering in Volf’s memory is principally himself. His is the memory of a victim who has lived and now is trying to make sense of it in his own life story. Although he may be a part of a believing community, which helps him along the road of forgiveness as a Christian, his motivating memory is only his own individual one.

Metz, on the other hand, prioritizes memories of other people, especially the memories of the other’s sufferings (including one’s enemies!)—in his case, the friends he lost tragically in the Second World War. The subjects of the suffering in Metz’s theology of memory are exclusively other people. And these people are dead. They have lost everything and have never yet had the chance to interpret their suffering. They are simply cut out of life. Metz’s particular memory is primarily a memory of his friends as victims and what they have lost, and not a memory of the Allied Forces who caused their death or his own torment at losing his friends. Metz, like Volf, appeals to the believing community as the preserver of dangerous memory, but the memory is a communal one—the memoria passionis—into which his own memory of his friends’ deaths taps. Furthermore, Metz writes as a member of the group that were the victimizers of the Jews in World War II and, more broadly, he writes as a first-world theologian concerned with
the exploitation currently being committed by first-world nations against poorer countries. He is writing from the position of the victimizers, to victimizers. Forgiveness *per se* is not his concern because it is not the place of the perpetrator to demand forgiveness, especially without significant conversion and transformation (see the German Bishops Letter regarding the Holocaust).

Something that does set Metz apart from the Frankfurt School and other types of Marxist thinkers, however, is his concern with guilt and repentance as a valid and important part of understanding the modern milieu correctly. Metz does not dismiss guilt and the need to be forgiven by the victims and God as a form of internalized oppression. This is key to his affirmation of redemption for humankind instead of just emancipation. So Metz echoes Volf from the opposite direction. Volf is concerned with how and why a victim should forgive and, as a result, forget a wrong, while Metz is concerned with how the forgetful wrongdoer should be jolted into an awareness that demands change as the fruit of conversion. Volf is more concerned with the situation of the perpetrators, since he assumes the victim’s position, while Metz is more concerned with the victims because he writes as a member of the perpetrating group. Both thinkers conclude that their ends—forgiveness and conversion—cannot be attained by human effort alone, but are the result of God’s free grace. But Metz never gets far enough on the eschatological continuum to consider the possibility of forgetting.

Although Metz does have a strong eschatological expectation for the interruption and disruption of human history, he never speculates about what the eschaton might be like. Taking his cues from Horkheimer and Adorno in particular, Metz does not want to say too much. He does not want to seem like he is developing any system or pre-achieved goal for history. This tendency is what he is trying to avoid. The analogy of the

573 Volf, *End of Memory.* 231. Volf makes this clear, for his part. “Yet in this book I argue that we should also remember in a way that is fair, even generous to the perpetrators of wrongs. Such concern for their good may be the most puzzling, maybe even the most offensive aspect of the book.”
hedgehogs depicts his concern for an ahistorical type of thinking in which the end of
salvation has already been achieved, such that what happens in history does not actually
matter. His spirituality of Suffering Unto God precisely insists that one sit with the
discomfort and the uncertainty of the question of suffering (the Good Friday and Holy
Saturday experiences) without passing over prematurely into the resurrection and
triump. One suspects that this might be the main concern of Metz with the approach
Volf takes to memory and forgetting. Does Volf not influence the present overly much
with preconceived notions of how things will be when, in fact, “eye has not seen nor ear
heard” what God will bring about?

Each man’s reliance on eschatology also impacts directly the audiences to which
they write. Not only are Volf and Metz writing for different audiences as far as victim
versus victimizers are concerned, but Volf is also writing to an almost exclusively
Christian audience, while Metz’s audience is broader. He is writing not only to
Christians, but also Jews, atheists, and philosophers. Volf’s argument remains persuasive
only to those who accept his version of what God has done in Christ and what is,
therefore, coming in the future—namely, reconciliation. Metz, while clearly Christian,
uses the memoria passionis as an example of a dangerous memory, or even a
paradigmatic memory to one who is Christian, without excluding the possibility of there
being other memories that may function in the same way. Volf dismisses the need for
memory to preserve the identities of victims because they will be perfectly intact in
heaven. But to someone who does not believe in heaven or is not sure about what sort of
identity might be hoped for there, this is no comfort. Memory is still a form of being that
forgetting or non-remembrance would essentially negate.⁵⁷⁴
It is in the discussion of the memory of Christ’s death that Volf identifies and explicitly mentions a criticism of Metz’s use of memory. The difference at the heart of their interpretations of the *memoria passionis* actually reflects the perspectival difference between them.\(^{575}\)

### 3.2.2.2 Memoria Passionis

Volf identifies two central memories in the Jewish and Christian traditions that help form the proper context for remembering correctly our own individual memories of suffering and discerning how to apply them to other situations. For Volf, “The memory of wrongs suffered can teach us to struggle *justly* against injustice only if it is accompanied by a principled opposition to injustice. Where does a principled opposition to injustice come from? From a source other than the mere memory of wrong suffered.”\(^{576}\) The exemplary memories of the Exodus and the Passion are that source, according to Volf.\(^{577}\) These memories are paradigmatic and establish both the identities of Jews or Christians and in some sense make present again the events remembered.\(^{578}\) “Memory, at least ‘sacred memory,’ is a matter of identification, and its vehicles are commemorative rituals and liturgies….sacred memory bridges time and draws one into the past event

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\(^{575}\) In my own opinion, these diverging treatments are due to denominational differences but are by no means mutually exclusive. Volf emphasizes grace as being absolutely victorious,—seemingly despite human choice or actions—while being mostly concerned with the substitutionary function of Christ in the crucifixion. In this way, Christ’s action was absolutely unique and distinct from all other actions in human history. This seems to me to be more typical of Protestant thought. Metz’s emphasis tends to be more on Christ’s solidarity with the suffering, while acting as transformative from within. This seems more typical of Roman Catholic theology. This distinction is similar to but not identical with the analogical versus dialectical imagination distinction made by David Tracy. According to Tracy, Metz is, in general, a more dialectical thinker. See David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1981). 416.


\(^{577}\) Ibid. 93.

\(^{578}\) Ibid. 97-98.
today….Sacred memory does not simply bring to mind…it reactualizes.”579 For these reasons, these memories are always communal ones, “sustained over time within a group.”580 Perhaps most importantly, these memories, while they are memories of suffering, are also memories of God, who remembers God’s people.581

The Exodus memory, while linked to Christ’s passion according to Volf, is not in itself enough to get believers to forgiveness. The two lessons of the Exodus memory that Volf focuses on are “the lesson of deliverance of the oppressed and the lesson of punishment of the oppressors.”582 The lesson of forgiveness is what makes the Passion memory so critical.

For Christians, forgiveness is paradigmatically enacted in Christ’s death. In that event, God shouldered the sin of the unjust and ungodly world and reconciled it to its divine source and goal. In relation to sinful humanity, God acted as the One who is just but who at the same time justifies the ungodly, as the Apostle Paul puts it (Romans 3:26). Without disregarding justice, Christ’s death pointed beyond the struggle for retributive justice for victims to the wonder of transforming grace for perpetrators and reconciliation of the two.583

The Exodus only promises God’s intervention and deliverance in the future, but the Passion memory actually brings that deliverance into the present and future: it is already here. And not just for the suffering and victimized, but for the perpetrators of injustice.

The relationship of the Exodus to the future is that of enacted promise. As God has delivered the people of Israel in the past, so God will finally and definitively redeem Israel in the future. Christians, however, believe that the world to come has not merely been promised in the Passion: in fact, that new world has

579 Ibid. 98.
580 Ibid. 99.
581 Ibid. 101. “The memories of the Exodus and Passion are most basically memories of God….God is remembered to have been at work in faithfulness to God’s people. And it is on God that memory zeroes in.”
582 Ibid. 104.
583 Ibid. 111.
decisively entered this present world of sin and death. As a consequence, the future of humanity has, in a sense, already happened in Christ.584

Right here it is clear that Volf emphasizes the “already” of Christian eschatology more than the “not yet.” This explains much of the tension between he and Metz, who seems firmly grounded in the “not yet” (but still really coming) aspect of eschatology. Volf’s criticism of Metz, however, comes from the way Volf depicts Metz’s understanding of the memoria passionis. In regards to Metz and the function he assigns to the Passion memory, Volf writes:

Does Metz’s understanding of Christ’s death and resurrection go deep enough? No doubt, solidarity with those who suffer is an important aspect of Christ’s work on the cross. The downtrodden and the needy through the ages have found comfort at the foot of the cross and hope in front of the empty tomb. But Christ did not die only in solidarity with sufferers but also as a substitute for offenders. He died for those who do wrong, who cause suffering—for the enemies of God, the Defender of the oppressed. Moreover, in the New Testament substitution is arguably the dominant dimension of Christ’s work and solidarity a subordinate one. The sacred memory of the passion will be flawed if it contains only the pair “suffering/deliverance.” It must also include the more dominant couplet, “enmity/reconciliation.”585

So Metz’s problem, according to Volf, is that he remains too concerned with the victims and their healing without considering the equally (or perhaps even more!) important need for reconciliation with those who victimize. This is not surprising when one considers the differences in their foundational assumptions, discussed in the last sub-section.

Volf, as the victim himself, is most concerned with the violator’s fate and how it impacts his own. Underneath this is the main issue: we are all equally sinners so how I envision the treatment of another sinner directly impacts how I will be treated. Furthermore, it seems Volf treats all sins as equal. There is no distinction, as in Catholicism, between venial and mortal sins. Victims and victimizers are equally in need of salvation, so forgiveness cannot be withheld from the perpetrator without condemning

584 Ibid. 112.

585 Ibid. 115.
the victim too for his or her sins. To remember one sin—say murder and genocide—means that one must remember all sins.

A non-utilitarian ethical standpoint such as my own dictates that if we have a moral duty to remember, then that duty must extend to every offense, however great or small. Not to remember small offenses while remembering great ones is to be unfair; for letting small offenders off the hook implicitly portrays great offenders as worse than they actually are.586

So it seems that Metz’s problem would be that he does not take into enough consideration the sinfulness of victims and he over-emphasizes the guilt of perpetrators. Or perhaps he does not appreciate fully the gift of forgiveness extended by Christ?

3.2.3 Metz’s Possible Response to Volf’s Criticism587

Is it a valid criticism to say that Metz is not as concerned with forgiveness or the fate of the perpetrators as he is with the victims”? Yes and no. Metz is unapologetically critical of a turn he notes in Christianity: changing from a religion originally concerned with human suffering to a disproportionate focus on sin and human guilt. Augustine begins this shift, according to Metz, by overemphasizing the role that human error has played in the state of the world, thereby diminishing the urgency of the question of theodicy, for which Metz advocates. In response to Marcion’s split between the creator and redeemer God,

Augustine set a course for theology that it has traveled for the most part even to the present day. Correspondingly, the theodicy question was increasingly marginalized in theology….Augustine lays the responsibility for evil and suffering in the world exclusively at the feet of humanity and its sinful history,

586 Ibid. 206.

587 As far as I know, Metz has not actually provided a response to Volf or these concerns. What follows in this sub-section is my defense of Metz, based on what has been seen in his work on memory. It obviously is my interpretation and is not directly attributable to Metz himself.
rooted in its “no” to God. God, therefore, especially the creator God, is out of the picture so far as the theodicy question goes.\textsuperscript{588}

So Volf’s move is exactly what Metz is against—focusing on the human aspect of guilt and forgiveness to the exclusion or marginalization of the question of suffering. Indeed, Metz is not as concerned with forgiveness as he is with the victims who suffer. Suffering—even, ultimately, suffering that comes from guilt—needs to reclaim its central position in Christian theology.

Metz, as a self-acknowledged member of the western, capitalist, colonial societies is most concerned with revealing and fully recognizing the horror of what we have done. He, like the prophets in scripture, is mainly a voice of consternation and accusation. Only the voices of the victims are disruptive enough to get the attention of a culture that focuses exclusively on progress, technology, and market value. We have not yet seen or felt fully the pain we have inflicted on other people and the natural world. Consolation and reconciliation are premature. So yes, Metz gives a voice to victims and focuses disproportionately on the welfare and salvation of the victims.

But why does he do this? Why did the prophets proclaim destruction and judgment? It was out of concern for the victimizers too, for the people of God who had gone so far astray as to commit these horrors. Metz wants repentance, conversion, and a praxis of discipleship—all of which memorative narrative facilitates.\textsuperscript{589}

The Christian \textit{idea of God} is in itself a practical idea. God simply cannot be thought without this idea irritating and disrupting the immediate interests of the one who is trying think it [\textit{sic}]. Thinking-God happens as a revision of those interests and needs that are directly organized around one’s self. Metanoia,

\textsuperscript{588} Metz, "Theodicy." 59.

\textsuperscript{589} Johann-Baptist Metz, "Messianic Or "Bourgeois" Religion?," in \textit{Faith and the Future: Essays on Theology, Solidarity, and Modernity}, ed. Concilium Foundation (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995 (1979)). He links such conversion to the disruptive nature of Christianity. It is not “an endorsement and encouragement for the haves” but a “bomb in our complacent present…[which] has a more familiar biblical name: ‘repentance,’ turning of hearts, \textit{metanoia}….The moving of hearts is, in fact, the first step to the messianic future….However, this change of heart is certainly not an invisible, or, as people say, ‘purely inward’ process….It damages and disrupts one’s own interests and aims at a revision of familiar practice.” 18.
conversion, and exodus are not purely moral or pedagogical categories; rather they are thoroughly noetic. Therefore, stories of conversion and of exodus…belong to the fundamental way theology itself operates.\(^{590}\)

So he is not forgetful for even a moment of the concerns of the victimizers. He knows he is part of them and that their fate is his own too. It is precisely that the perpetrators are not wholly lost that he bothers to drag into the light the memory of what we have done. True to the Catholic tradition, not all offenses are the same. Not all people are equally sinful. Although the redemption offered may be the same, acceptance of it requires much more penance on the part of the victimizers than the victims.

Furthermore, although he tries to defend himself against such charges, Volf’s eschatological vision does treat too lightly the concerns of the current world. To say “We are all sinners” does in some sense cloak the culpability that we have. Paradoxically, his explicit concern with reconciliation and forgiving those who commit grave wrongs may actually diminish the guilt they feel and the impetus to repent. If we are already forgiven, if we are already reconciled with those we have harmed, then why be concerned? Where is the urgency to change? Metz’s emphasis on the present, working to alleviate the suffering here and now as much as possible, and holding in hopeful memory the victims who are no longer a part of this history increases the need to change and help bring about God’s Reign whenever it fully arrives.

Does this mean that Metz omits from his *memoria passionis* the axis of “enmity/reconciliation”? Not entirely. But he is keenly aware of the overemphasis on sin and forgiveness in Christianity historically, which has resulted in ignoring human suffering. His is, by his own admission, a corrective theology.\(^{591}\) This means, among other things, that his is a theology that waits in the interim because that is the message we most need to hear in history, where things are still being decided. It is not that Metz

\(^{590}\) Metz, *Faith in History and Society*. 62.

\(^{591}\) Ibid. 30.
undervalues grace as much as he recognizes the importance of human freedom.\textsuperscript{592} Our actions demonstrate the grace received. Volf seems to strongly affirm the salvation of all people as already achieved. We are already reconciled with those who hurt us. We are already forgiven. Metz never delves into what heaven or hell might be like, but one suspects that he, like his esteemed mentor Karl Rahner,\textsuperscript{593} might maintain the \textit{logical necessity} of hell, or the ultimate rejection of God’s gift of forgiveness, even if no one ultimately makes that choice (which is what we hope). But this remains a hope, not a realized fact. To take history seriously, there must still be a possibility that the end result is not already attained.

Furthermore, Metz’s \textit{memoria passionis}, as a communally commemorative event, is poly-vocal. There are many emphases possible in that one memory. So it need not just be about Christ’s solidarity with the suffering. It is also about reconciliation. It is not “either…or” but “both…and.” Volf does not seem to give this wide range of meanings enough credit. Metz is not excluding the axis of enmity/reconciliation. He is just choosing to emphasize an aspect that his audience most needs to hear.

3.3 Edward Schillebeeckx and God’s Memory as Foundational

Perhaps the most compelling critique of Metz’s use of anamnestic reason or memory comes from another great figure in modern Roman Catholic theology, Edward Schillebeeckx. Born in Antwerp, Belgium in 1914, Schillebeeckx entered the Dominican Order at twenty (1934) and began his theological and philosophical studies at the


\textsuperscript{593} Karl Rahner, \textit{Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity}, trans. William V. Dych (New York, NY: Crossroad, 2000 (1978)). 444. “In the doctrine of hell we maintain the possibility of eternal loss for every individual, for each one of us, because otherwise the seriousness of free history would be abolished.”
University of Louvain. The Second World War interrupted his official formation though, as he was called into the Belgian Army in 1938. He served until the German occupation of the country, at which time he returned to his studies and was ordained in 1941.

Schillebeeckx’s theological formation took place with some of the greatest members of the *Nouvelle théologie*: Dominicus De Petter, Yves Congar, and Marie-Dominique Chenu. As a result, he became one of the most influential theologians of the century, teaching for most of his career at the Catholic University of Nijmegen (from 1958 until his retirement in 1983); being heavily involved behind-the-scenes at the Second Vatican Council as a ghostwriter of many of the Dutch Bishop’s documents and statements (he was never officially recognized as a *peritus*); and writing extensively on Christology, Ecclesiology, Soteriology, and the sacraments in numerous volumes. He also was a founding member of the progressive theological journal *Concilium* in 1965.

Although he was perhaps one generation before Metz in his formation (Schillebeeckx was somewhere between the generations of Metz and his mentor Karl Rahner), Schillebeeckx and Metz share much in common in formulating their theologies. First, both come from the European context, writing in view of the massive suffering experienced during the Second World War. Second, the questions of theodicy and

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596 Ibid.


598 Ibid. 4-5.

599 Ibid. 5.
“Where is God in our moments of suffering?” are at the forefront of both men’s projects. By extension, both men are concerned from the theological perspective about the victims of history: those people who, like Jesus Christ, seem to be absolute historical failures. What can we—and God—offer these people? Third, from a methodological perspective, Schillebeeckx and Metz both are products of a renewal of biblical and historical sources in Catholic Theology.601 Neither of them shy away from entering into modern debates and controversies, or taking as dialogue partners the sciences (both physical and social) and various philosophies. They are unafraid to reexamine the tradition of both the Church and western historical accounts in light of contemporary historical developments and concerns. Scripture is a major resource for both men in doing this, although Schillebeeckx utilizes it in a more systematic fashion in his foundational trilogy (Jesus, Christ, and Church). The work of the Frankfurt School was influential for both men too as they began to grapple with modernity, Marxist critique, and the recognition of the Church as a global, diverse, and culturally polyvalent community.602

With so much in common, the critique that Schillebeeckx puts forward is not meant to call into question Metz’s project in general. Instead, Schillebeeckx’s concern is that Metz does not go far enough in grounding his thought in God as pure positivity.

600 This is stated explicitly by Schillebeeckx: “We can no longer talk of God without relating our thought about God to the massive suffering of men and women.” Edward Schillebeeckx, Church: The Human Story of God (New York: Crossroad, 1990). 54.


602 Ibid. 5. Metz may even have introduced the Frankfurt School to Schillebeeckx, or at least accentuated the importance of the scholars’ thought to him. “Schillebeeckx’s contact with the political theology of Johann Baptist Metz directed him toward the study of the Frankfurt School. (It was Metz, in fact, who first employed the term ‘orthopraxis,’ which was to become so central to Schillebeeckx’s theology.) This engagement marked the turning point in what Philip Kennedy calls Schillebeeckx’s evolution from implicit intuition to negative contrast experience.” Kathleen Anne McManus, Unbroken Communion: The Place and Meaning of Suffering in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003). 27.
3.3.1 God as Pure Positivity and Justice for the Victims

Schillebeeckx’s theological project is so immense, covering virtually every topic at some point, and undergoes such significant shifts at various times throughout his career that it is beyond the scope of this work to consider it as a whole in any competent manner here. For our purposes, however, we will consider Schillebeeckx’s work on Soteriology and Eschatology as it appears mostly in his trilogy and is relevant to the topic at hand.

While Jesus and Christ are obviously Christological explorations, Schillebeeckx’s detailed analysis of scripture from the Christian Testament leads him to conclude several things with immediate implications for salvation and human suffering.

First, Jesus did not choose—as in actively seek out, pursue—to suffer and die in the manner he did. Jesus simply died in the manner in which he lived: proclaiming the Reign of God, challenging injustice, and loving the poor and the neediest.603 His death is salvific insofar as it was part of his life, but not because it was cruel or gruesome.604 Schillebeeckx, while acknowledging language of sacrifice, ransom, and expiation in the tradition, affirms that they are no longer the most appropriate way to understand the saving nature of the cross.605 Instead, Jesus’ being willing to proclaim his message until the end, even to death on the cross, means that Jesus stands in solidarity with those who suffer and die unjustly.606 This solidarity is made even clearer by the fact that Jesus’ own

603 Edward Schillebeeckx, Jesus : An Experiment in Christology (New York: Seabury Press, 1979). 306. “One can hardly maintain that Jesus both willed and sought after his death as the sole possible way of realizing the kingdom of God….That death only comes in prospect as a result of his preaching and mode of life, which constituted an offer of salvation, having been rejected….The truth is: he died just as he lived, and he lived as he died.”

604 “Suffering is not redemptive in itself. But it is redemptive when it is suffering through and for others, for man’s cause as the cause of the one who says that he is ‘in solidarity with my people….The New Testament does not praise suffering but only suffering in and with resistance against injustice and suffering.” ———, Christ, the Experience of Jesus as Lord (New York: Seabury Press, 1980). 640.

605 Schillebeeckx, Jesus. 291-293. See also ———, Church. 127.

606 “God the Creator identifies himself with those who are oppressed by their fellow men, outcast and rejected, written off and defenseless.” Edward Schillebeeckx, “I Believe in Jesus as Salvation for the
ministry appeared to be an historical failure. He died alone, seemingly abandoned by everyone, including God. So it is the victims of history, and not just the victors, who hope for some future fullness or wholeness in God. The fact that God raises Jesus from the dead to new life means that all those with whom Jesus is in solidarity will experience the same gift—it is not something to which one is inevitably entitled.\(^{607}\)

But Jesus also stands with all creation because of God’s love for what God created. Salvation begins with creation for Schillebeeckx, and God, whatever else God may be, is always the Creator.\(^ {608}\) What happened to Jesus was a result of human choice and action.\(^ {609}\) It was not a preordained part of “God’s plan.”\(^ {610}\) Schillebeeckx insists upon this because of how he understands the divine: God as “pure positivity.” This means that God only wills good for what God has made—flourishing and wholeness—“God is essentially a champion of the good and an opponent of all evil, injustice, and suffering.”\(^ {611}\) This is fundamental to one of his basic notions: negative contrast experience.

\(^{607}\) “The victory over death is never understood as any kind of human claim, but as a special gift of God.” Schillebeeckx, Christ. 798. See also, Edward Schillebeeckx, “I Believe in Eternal Life,” in God among Us: The Gospel Proclaimed (New York: NY: Crossroads, 1983). 140. “Eternity certainly does not belong to mankind, but people cannot get away from the idea of it.” To be human, to be created, means that one is by definition finite. See also ———, “I Believe in the Resurrection of the Body,” in God among Us: The Gospel Proclaimed (New York, NY: Crossroads, 1983). 130-135. Hope for life after death “is not a matter of human egoism or rights,” but is belief in “the free event of God’s own divinity which overcomes even death.”


\(^{609}\) It is important to note that Schillebeeckx’s approach to “Christology from below,” also emphasizes the historical reasons and motives behind Jesus’ death instead of looking to God for an explanation (which would be more in keeping with a Christology “from above.”)

\(^{610}\) Schillebeeckx, Church. 127, 129. “In Jesus’ death, in and of itself, i.e. in terms of what human beings did to him, there is only negativity….The messianic ‘must suffer’ of Jesus is not a ‘divine’ must. It is forced on God through Jesus by human beings…..”
Jesus, just like many who suffer and die, did not experience the loving presence of God during his ordeal. In his moment of greatest anguish it felt as if God was absent. There was nothing that Jesus recognized as *Abba* in the moment of death. But does this mean God was really absent? Schillebeeckx says no. God was present. The only shred left of this presence detectable to the human experiencing it, however, is the negative rejection of what is happening—the negative contrast experience. Negative contrast is defined as: “the basic experience accessible to all, namely that of a ‘no’ to the world as it is,” “indignation” mingled with “human inability to give in to the situation... [affirming] the possibility of improving our world: openness to the unknown and better.” The “No!” that erupts almost spontaneously from the victim as well as those who witness the horror is evidence that God is still there, in the rejection of what is happening. God is present in the rejection of what is occurring as unworthy of true humanity, the *humanum*. The positive aspirations of something worthy of humanity are not available in most cases, but are present only as absence.

As a contrast experience, after all, man’s experience of suffering presupposes an implicit craving for happiness, a craving for well-being or ‘making whole’; and as unjust suffering it implies at least a vague consciousness of what in a positive sense human integrity or wholeness should entail. In other words, *qua* contrast

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612 Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*. 317. “The Father, however, did not intervene. Nowhere indeed did Jesus see any visible aid come from him whose cause he had so much at heart. As a fact of history it can hardly be denied that Jesus was subject to an inner conflict between his consciousness of his mission and the utter silence of the One whom he was accustomed to call his Father.”

613 ———, *Church*. 126. “God is also present in human life where he is absent from human view.”

614 Ibid. 5-6.

615 The *humanum* is actually Schillebeeckx’s way of representing what true humanity is but it is not yet fully known. What it means to be human will only be revealed fully to us at the eschaton. Ibid. 133. “The undefinable aspect of the *humanum*, i.e. the eschatological fullness and freedom of men and women, which is sought and constantly found in a fragmentary way, only to be constantly threatened again, can only be expressed in symbolic language, by speaking in parables and metaphors....”
experience it implies indirectly an awareness of a positive call of and to the humanum.\textsuperscript{616}

In the case of Jesus, these positive hopes only become accessible as a fleeting glimpse, in light of the resurrection. Only a God who does not punish wrathfully or smite the wicked, who never wills suffering and ignominious death, can conclusively be said to be on the side of the suffering, of the victims.

Although there may have been no overt, positive signs of God’s presence at the crucifixion (or in any instances of suffering) the communion between Jesus and the Creator was unbroken, as Kathleen McManus concludes—although the unbroken nature is clear only in light of the resurrection itself.

It is in the face of the world’s negativity that we see and experience the power of Jesus’ unbroken trust in God. This inviolable thread of communion with God standing in resistance to the evil of the world is the heart of Christian faith. This, for Schillebeeckx, is what resurrection faith proclaims….Yet, negative contrast entered even into Jesus’ Abba experience. For this communion was not always experienced as presence. In the experience of failure and abandonment, God’s presence—even to Jesus—was experienced only darkly as absence. And, in this dark absence, Jesus’ trust attained its truest form. Jesus’ utter surrender to the mercy of God throughout his life brought him not only to, but through, death. It is Jesus’ love to the point of death, rather than death itself, which is salvific. \textsuperscript{617}

So the resurrection begins there, in what I will call the unbroken trust of remembrance—but only after the resurrection is this inception clear.\textsuperscript{618} Although there was no discernable presence, Jesus calls out to God in all the gospel accounts at his death. It is evidence that God is remembered by Jesus. The resurrection itself is the sign that God also remembers Jesus. There is no moment in his life or at the moment of his death in which Jesus did not look towards the Creator God. And God never removed God’s gaze

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\textsuperscript{616}———, Jesus. 622.
\textsuperscript{617} McManus, Unbroken Communion. 97.
\textsuperscript{618} Schillebeeckx was criticized for actually overemphasizing the role of human memory in the resurrection. Critics were concerned that he was claiming that the resurrection was only the memories of Jesus cherished by the disciples. This is not the case, however, as he clearly affirms the resurrection of the body. This experience is what lies behind the transformation and conversion of the disciples, not just their memories of Jesus. See his response to these criticisms in: Schillebeeckx, Jesus. 644-650.
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from Jesus. One might say (although Schillebeeckx does not state this in these words), in the context of this current examination, that Jesus and God never forgot one another for a moment. The unbroken communion was unbroken mutual remembrance. This remembrance was the inception of new life. I want to argue that human participation in new life, through the acceptance of the gift offered by God in Jesus, is possible because God remembers us too. This is not a remembrance that limits God by our time or history, but a way of acknowledging that we are always before God’s gaze. Memory, like any human term applied to God, is an analogous term. But it affirms a presence of one’s self that is not ensured by one’s own effort or preservation. Only another—and God is the ultimate Other—can remember us. Our acceptance of this salvation is our remembrance of God throughout our lives and deaths—just as it was for Jesus. But Schillebeeckx does not go this far.

Schillebeeckx’s brief discussion of the possibilities of Heaven and Hell, and their relationship to orthopraxis in the present, provide sparks for contemplating this memorative reading (which will really be developed in the next chapter through the writings of Gustavo Gutiérrez). Because God is pure positivity, God wills the salvation of all things and all people. Furthermore, such a God, who never created evil to begin with, would not allow there to be a state or “place” of uninterrupted punishment and anguish. “It is an unimaginable scenario for me as a Christian, familiar with the gospel, that while there is said to be joy among the heavenly ones, right next to heaven people are supposed to be lying for ever, gasping for breath and suffering the pains of hell forever (however you imagine this—spiritually or physically).” Hell, as it has traditionally been understood, is untenable if one maintains God is pure positivity.

The anxiety which prevailed throughout Europe between the fourteenth and the eighteenth centuries as a result of the vision of the last judgment is well known. Architecture, the graphic arts and literature are full of it. We also have visions of

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619———, Church. 137.
permanent suffering, damnation to eternity in the New Testament (e.g. Rev. 20.10). Whereas in the same Bible we hear that God comes near to outcast men and women in Jesus, according to the apocalyptic vision a ‘kingdom of the damned and suffering’, a kingdom of those definitively cast out from the kingdom of God, a kingdom of permanent suffering men and women, will exist for ever alongside the kingdom of God. And this hellish suffering will continue for ever without any meaningful perspective, because by definition in hell no therapeutic significance can be attached to it. In that case it is solely the perpetuation of revenge: vengeance and retribution.620

But this has been the only option considered by the most popular tradition, since it is equally untenable to most people that the oppressed and their victimizers could spend eternity together in happiness. “One could think in that way, perhaps too humanly: can the victims of Hitler and Eichmann happily spend eternity in their company?”621

However, because Schillebeeckx places such great emphasis on human freedom and choice in shaping our history (as individuals but also as creation tout court), there must be the option for people to definitively reject the love of the Creator God. This choice, of course, is made and manifest in how one lives in the here and now.

Goodness and evil, ‘heaven’ and ‘hell,’ are in the first place anthropological possibilities, in other words, decisions by men and women themselves. Not God, but human beings are the inventors of hell, precisely by the way they behave. In their situated freedom human beings are in fact in a position to do both good and evil. In this sense both heaven and hell are human possibilities. Whether there are in fact people who definitively choose evil I do not know; that is quite a different question….The saying of Thérèse of Lisieux,…I believe in hell but I think that it is empty, is anything but unbiblical!...Some church fathers speak of a general apokatastasis or recapitulation, which means that in the end everyone will be saved.…

But I have my reservations about these somewhat too superficial solutions. To my mind they suggest too cheap a view of mercy and forgiveness; moreover,

620 Ibid. 135. This sets up a concern that is identical with Volf’s really. How can heaven be a place of perfect healing and wholeness when there is still suffering in existence—even if the suffering are the oppressors in life?

621 Ibid. 136. Of course Volf’s answer to this is yes, that is precisely what we as Christians hope will happen. Schillebeeckx can provide a middle ground that takes seriously the possibility that people will not repent or give/receive forgiveness ultimately while still not postulating an eternal place of torment beside eternal bliss.
they trivialize the drama of the real course of events in the conflict between oppressed and oppressors, between the good and evil in our human history.622

Schillebeeckx’s solution to this dilemma raises the notion of memory—both human and divine—although this is a passing reference and by no means a developed topic in his writings. Since humans are by nature finite (this is not a bad thing for Schillebeeckx, but part of what it means to be created), the possibility of living after our natural death is purely a gift from God. (This affirms the Judeo-Christian understanding instead of the Greek notion of the naturally eternal state of the soul). How one lives determines whether or not one has actually accepted that gift. One’s life here determines what is to come.

If one rejects God’s love definitively (and it is entirely possible that no one makes this choice), then one does not “go to Hell,” one simply ceases to be. “The evil do not have eternal life; their death is in fact the end of everything….”623 Death really is one’s ending as the natural conclusion to a finite life. Schillebeeckx expresses this as one no longer being remembered by anyone—not even God.

Heaven and hell are asymmetrical affirmations of faith. You cannot consider them on the same level. Christian faith in eternal life in the form of ‘heaven’ has its foundation not in the Greek affirmation of the immortality of the human soul but in living communion with God in grace (expressed in human solidarity) during earthly life….The bond of life with the living eternal God, sensed as being positive, cannot be destroyed by death. In Jesus God overcomes death for those who anticipate the kingdom of love and freedom in history. So there is a ‘heaven.’

There can be no hell for evil men and women on the same symmetrical level. But those who are evil, oppressors certainly punish themselves thoroughly for ever. If living communion with God is the foundation of eternal life, then the absence of this living community (not so much through theoretical denial of God as through a life-style which radically contradicts solidarity with fellow human beings and precisely in that way rejects God and living communion with God) is at the same time the foundation of non-eternal life for these people. That seems to me to be the ‘second death’ of the fundamental, definitive sinner (if there is such a

622 Ibid.
623 Ibid. 137.
person). That is ‘hell’: not sharing in eternal life nor being someone who is tortured eternally, but no longer existing at death. That is the biblical ‘second death’ (Rev.20.6). This sanction is the result of one’s own behavior and not a positive act of punitive justice of God who sends sinners to an eternal hellish fire...there is just no ground for eternal life. These people have resisted God’s holiness and are incapable of loving. No one in heaven will ever remember them.624

God, as pure positivity for Schillebeeckx, would not allow a place of eternal suffering. There is instead, no new life for those who reject salvation. So the prospect of new life, wholeness, and joy depend both on how one “remembers” God in this life—mostly manifest through our remembrance of the needs of our fellow people here and now—and on the fact that God remembers one before, during, and after one dies.

Interestingly, there seems to me to be a human sharing in God’s memory here that is also part of the font of life with God. When we “remember” the least and the most in need, Jesus affirms we remember him. The idea of the communion of saints also affirms that, after death, those we love continue to remember us in prayer, as we also pray for them. It appears that we remember one another, both on earth and in heaven, and that this contributes to us all receiving God’s gift of salvation.

Given his great concern with suffering and the reality of human finitude, Schillebeeckx affirms that a distinctly Christian hope must offer something to the victims of history and not just to the species or future generations.

For millions of men who in the past or the present have already been excluded because they have died or have been martyred...any form of liberation, however successful, will come too late. And if salvation means perfect and universal wholeness, do we then no longer include these in our modern conception of salvation? Are they the chaff in our history that we throw away?...There is no true liberation unless these forms of suffering which are not accessible to human liberation are also overcome.625

624 Ibid. Bolding is my emphasis. This is an isolated reference to the idea of memory. I am not arguing Schillebeeckx really introduces “God’s memory” but his language got me thinking in a different way about Metz’s project.

625 ———, Christ. 764.
Here is where Metz’s and his concerns merge. Both want orthopraxis here and now. Both are faced with modern critiques of faith that focus on redemption as too much of an “otherworldly” solution to our problems and propose merely human emancipation in its place. Both believe that God’s Reign starts now, with human action, but that human action is ultimately not sufficient to right all the necessary wrongs. The dead are victims with wrongs we cannot touch. Without getting too detailed, trying to specify conditions that one could not possibly know, limiting what God will do in human history and beyond, or diminishing the importance of human orthopraxis in the present, Schillebeeckx can hold out hope for victims through memory. Remembering God rightly in this life, so as to be happy with God in the next, requires that one remember the victims and allow those dangerous memories to set the agenda for conversion and change that helps initiate God’s Reign now. Metz comes to the same conclusion.626

3.3.2 Critique of Metz

Schillebeeckx’s critique of Metz’s theology is that Metz does not elucidate the foundations of memory in a God who is specified as pure positivity. As the last section shows, this affirmation is critical to Schillebeeckx’s other theological moves. The key, for Schillebeeckx, is “emphasizing the theological dimension of the power of the story of Jesus as the story of God.”627 So it is important for him to say something about God in se—that is, that God is pure positivity who offers the gift of life to all God creates,

626 They both also seem to agree that ultimately God is the only true subject of history, although Schillebeeckx cannot see how this follows for Metz from the assertion that “it is impossible for mankind or a group in it to be the subject of all history….Sometimes one can hardly avoid the impression that for Metz ‘suffering man’ becomes something like the universal subject of human history” (Ibid. 755-756). But Metz is quite clear about God being the eschatological subject, even if what that means is only understood eschatologically. See Metz, Faith in History and Society. 112-113. This does show how Metz is perhaps more apophatic than Schillebeeckx on this point.

including those that are lost to human emancipation movements. He puts the critique like this:

Insofar as it relates to the histories of human suffering, his [Metz’s] memoria thesis is above all inspired by philosophy (H. Marcuse, T. Adorno and finally, above all, Walter Benjamin—which is no bad thing in itself). Whereas his reference to the story of the resurrection of course has a Christian, religious significance. But what I miss in Metz is a really theological consideration of the memoria thesis. Metz does not reflect on the concept of God as he is understood in the light of Jesus, as a God of pure positivity, as the author of good and enemy of evil. And this concept of God must colour what is in itself a correct theory of the narrative communication of the history of human suffering in a special way which Metz does not analyse.628

This criticism, if valid, is the most serious one for Metz. It essentially claims that Metz stops at the level of philosophy. Schillebeeckx does not seem to consider the possibility that memory itself is a theological remnant in philosophy, as the previous chapter attempted to show, and that Metz goes beyond the concepts of memory that he finds in the Frankfurt School. There is a distinctly theological component to Metz’s memory thesis insofar as it relies on the God of scripture, the God of the Jewish and Christian scriptures. This is the God Jesus proclaims, even if Metz’s discussions of God in se does not go as far as Schillebeeckx would like. Especially in Metz’s more recent writings, one must ask whether or not Schillebeeckx’s concern is still valid. Furthermore, whether Metz’s project would be enhanced by such a reflection on God as pure positivity is the question to which we will now turn.

3.3.3 Implications for Metz

Like Habermas’ and Volf’s criticisms, Schillebeeckx’s critique is both valid and invalid. Metz does not refer to or describe much about who or what God is in se. There is no systematic writing on it. There is no discussion of God as “pure positivity” the way

628 Schillebeeckx, Christ. 755.
Schillebeeckx does, nor is there anything akin to Rahner’s The Trinity. God appears and is known most through what God has done in history for Metz, especially as scripture and tradition reveal this. But Metz himself makes no claims about God directly. He refers to God as if a reader who already participates in the Jewish and/or Christian faith traditions will understand what he means. For those readers who are not people of those faiths he is more concerned with defending why faith in general is necessary for true human liberation and responding to Marxist and Nietzschean critiques rather than expounding the exact nature of God. This does prove to be something of a problem, however, as specifying some things about God in se would allow him to ground his notion of memory better (especially the veracity of communal memories of suffering, like the memoria passionis) and provide an obvious divergence of his notion of memory in a theological sense from claims of purely philosophical memory. So Schillebeeckx is right, in one sense—Metz does not specify in a theological way that God is pure positivity.

But Metz does move beyond the philosophical idea of memory from the very beginning by including God at all in his thought on memory. And Metz’s references to God are to the God of Job, not to the metaphysical placeholder Habermas concedes

629 It seems to me that Metz shares in what he perceives to be Karl Rahner’s assessment of the universal knowledge of God in all humankind. So not only believers, but even his non-believing interlocutors, will have something important to say about God. There is some innate knowing. In speaking about the definition of God offered at Vatican I (“God, ground and goal of all things, can be known with certainty from created things with the natural light of human reason” (DS 3026), Metz says, “In this view the definition is not talking primarily about the competence of the church, but about the natural competence of all human beings in matters concerning God….a fundamental matter on which everyone can join in the conversation and on which therefore everyone must be heard….The church and theology must stand ready, in whatever concerns its God, to converse with everyone, listen to everyone, to argue with everyone who cannot in advance be denied having reason and good will….“ Johann Baptist Metz, "Karl Rahner's Struggle for the Theological Dignity of Humankind,” in A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, (1994)1998). 110-111.

630 Even if Metz were to say something about God in se I am not sure he would use the term “pure-positivity” to describe God. God in the Book of Job, for example, is not first and foremost a God who wills only life and flourishing for creation (God apparently allows evil to befall the innocent). To affirm God as pure positivity is more of an eschatological wager. It is what will become clear at the end of time, although it may not be apparent in history’s suffering. Metz actually feels Christianity today overemphasizes the love and positive aspects of belief in God and neglects the necessary lamentation and cries of complaint to
appears as a philosophical concept. God, for Metz, is first of all the one who wants and guarantees the subjecthood of all—the living and the dead. “The intention and task of any Christian theology may be defined as ‘an apology for hope.’…It is that solidaristic hope in the God of the living and the dead who calls all persons to be subjects in God’s presence.” Subjects actually exist “before God and through God”; the two go together. The existence of human subjectivity because of God is due perhaps to the fact that, for Metz, “God appears in his eschatological freedom as the subject and meaning of history as a whole,” which is itself “under the so-called ‘eschatological proviso of God’.” No human subject can be enthroned politically as that subject, but the fact that we are subjects at all comes from our relationship with The Subject, God.

Second, God is the one to whom we address our cries of outrage, prayers for conversion and forgiveness, and eschatological questions about suffering. God is a

God. He purposely avoids speaking of God as pure positivity as a form of corrective to this overemphasis he detects.

631 Metz too notes this distinction: “In his ‘Memorial’ Pascal…continually fell back on the distinction between the narratively presented ‘God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob’ and the God of pure argumentative reason, ‘the God of the philosophers.’” Metz, Faith in History and Society. 193.

632 Ibid. 70-71.

633 Ibid. 23.

634 Ibid. 70, 77. “Men and women only same to their identity as subjects at all by means of religion, in relationship to their God. It is only in this way that they became subjects of their histories.”


636 Ibid.

637 Metz, Faith in History and Society. 80. See also ———, "Messianic Or "Bourgeois" Religion?." 18.

638 “There are for me questions that may be directed back at God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Jesus. Here though are questions for which I have a language, but no answers. Why, God, suffering? Why sin? Why have you made no provision for evil?” Johann Baptist Metz, "In Place of a Foreword: On the Biographical Itinerary of My Theology," in A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998). 5.
dialogue partner who often remains silent in our history, but one who (we trust) will respond at some point. Here there is “the concept of a temporally charged expectation that, if anything, God will ‘justify’ himself in God’s own time in the face of this history of suffering.” This is the mystical aspect of Metz’s political theology, a Suffering Unto God, which participates in the biblical history of the Jews being unwilling to be comforted by myths or easy answers.

Finally, God is the one in whom we hope for a future for the victims of history (and only secondarily for ourselves). This, for Metz, stands in the place that God as Creator does for Schillebeeckx because even the statement that God is “Creator” itself is marked by temporality.

An important theological statement (which encompasses all the other assertions about God, for example, about God’s being as creator) corresponds to this theological primacy of apocalyptic eschatology: God is God of the living and of the dead, God of universal justice and of the resurrection of the dead.

This is not an empty hope in an abstract “messianic” concept that appears in philosophy, but a hope with content and filled with a person—Jesus Christ—who disrupts our expectations for more of the same. And that hope also begins with us as actors now.

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639 Perhaps Schillebeeckx puts this best when he speaks about God’s silence as God’s “listening” to what we have to say with our lives until they have ended. Schillebeeckx, Church. 131.

640 Metz, “Theodicy.” 56.


643 Schuster and Boschert-Kimmig, Hope against Hope. 48. “Now when it comes to talking about God’s omnipotence, we should never forget that every divine attribute also carries an eschatological stamp….that forces theologians to use the form of negative theology even when talking about the power of God as creator. Not even creation is something that is simply back ‘behind us.’”

644 Metz, Faith in History and Society. 82.
The idea of God certainly is an ineluctably political one....It follows from this that Christian memory’s freedom over and against the existing situation consists not just in the fact that it imagines a fictitious counterworld (the way art does, for example). Rather, it appeals to the history of human beings as subjects in God’s presence and tries to compel Christians to respond to the practical demands that this history makes. Their praxis ought to give some inkling of the fact that all persons are called to be subjects in the presence of their God.646

This expectation for an end to history, the full irruption of something totally new, also comes with the eschatological God: God as the end of time and history. “All biblical statements carry a time stamp, a stamp of the end of time....Israel...did not...believe in and think of its savior God as outside the world, as that which is beyond time, but as the limiting end of time.”647

I would argue that implicit in Metz’s thought is the Creator God who is pure positivity. God would have to be supposed to be such a God if one is going to argue that God cares about our subjectivity, the suffering, and the lost. That God is just, loving, merciful, and absolutely creative is presupposed in postulating any future for the dead in the way Metz does. Furthermore, Metz’s rejection of the theological move to somehow include God in our suffering is based upon that fact that he denies any eternality to suffering or evil.648 They have no place in God for Metz. So that is one way of affirming

645 ———, "Messianic Or "Bourgeois" Religion?.” 19. Metz alos describes the radical nature of fallowing Jesus most clearly in his discussion of the value and vocation of religious orders in ———, Followers of Christ. 38-44. He also emphasizes again that Jesus’ suffering and death must not make us indifferent to the human suffering in the world but, on the contrary, make us more aware of the unacceptable nature of all human suffering. Johann-Baptist Metz and Johann Reikerstorfer, Memoria Passionis : Ein Provocierendes Gedächtnis in Pluralistischer Gesellschaft, 1. Aufl. ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 2006). 58.

646 Metz, Faith in History and Society. 76.

647 ———, "Time without Finale: The Background to the Debate On "Resurrection or Reincarnation"." 82.

648 Metz provides a good answer to this effect in Schuster and Boschert-Kimmig, Hope against Hope. 47-50. “is there not something like an aestheticization of all suffering that shines through this talk about a suffering God? Suffering is a negative mystery, a mystery of human beings that is untransferrable. I wonder if we are not underestimating the negativity of suffering? After all, at its roots suffering is anything but a powerful or even triumphant and solidaristic co-suffering. It is not even simply a sign and expression of love: rather, it is much more a horrifying sign that one is no longer able to love.”

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God as pure positivity. But such an affirmation must always be tempered by Metz with the admission that creation, while good, is filled with a great deal of horrific suffering. One must always be aware of what is still absent in God’s good creation.649

I believe that it is Metz’s commitment to practical “political” theology that keeps him from discussing too much the “theory” or idea of God by itself (i.e. without simultaneously speaking about what God has done and wants from disciples). God is a practical “idea” for Metz650; one knows God only through encounter, action, and discipleship. Schillebeeckx would not disagree with this. “This practical structure of the idea of God also explains why it is that memory and narrative are not just subsequent additions or ornaments to talk about God.”651 Clearly human memory and stories about God are revelatory of who God is as God has been encountered in concrete human life. But Metz does not draw too many conclusions about God that are not completely grounded in a specific experience (e.g. the Passion of Jesus). Would it be helpful for Metz to reflect on God more explicitly, perhaps making statements based on cumulative revelation that transcends any one experience? Absolutely. I would argue that it has now become necessary. But there are several probable reasons that Metz has not yet done so.

First, he has a distinct apophatic strain to his thought. He does not want to say too much or appear to be placing limits on God. To do so somehow “tames” God and creates idols (very Barthian) that the status quo can easily force into preserving the current system. God is always more, always interruptive, always new. “God simply cannot be thought without this idea irritating and disrupting the immediate interests of the one who is trying to think it.”652 Furthermore, how to speak correctly about God at all is the task of


650 Metz, Faith in History and Society. 62-63. “The Christian idea of God is in itself a practical idea.”

651 Ibid. 62.
theology itself, and so one must deliberate a great deal before doing so. People often get it wrong, misunderstand what God is or has promised. For example, Metz speaks of the myth that God is meant to make us happy, to be consolation for modern people, in the sense that they no longer feel pain or suffer.

Does not the biblical God will above all to be this: comfort for those who have collapsed in suffering, relief for those who are driven by existential anxiety? Here, in my view, everything depends on not misunderstanding the biblical promises of consolation…. The God of Jesus does not make one unhappy. But does that God make one happy? Does God respond to our expectations of happiness?... What we have to be clear about is that today, however, certain expectations of happiness are becoming increasingly widespread and influential that do not recognize any “happiness that includes pain,” nor any happiness having an undercurrent of suffering or mourning. Rather they promote the individual’s happiness, using strategies that avoid suffering and mourning. Does God make one happy in this sense? in the sense of a happiness free of longing and suffering? Was Israel ever happy in this sense with Yahweh? Was Jesus ever happy in this sense with his Father?...I am not so sure.

Metz resists the temptation to make God into our wish-fulfillment machine. Hence, explicitly talking about God in se has not been a focus in Metz’s project.

Second, Metz’s awareness of the Shoah makes him reticent, as a Christian theologian, to make absolute statements about God, especially in regards to theodicy. “Who really has the right to give the answer to the God-question—‘Where is God?’…. As far as I am concerned, only the Jew threatened by death with all the children in Auschwitz has the right to say it….here…no Christian-theological identification is possible.”

One affirmation about God, however, which Metz attributes directly to the

652 Ibid.

653 ———, "Postidealism." 31. “Theo-logy, if it does not want to deceive itself and others, is the continual and continually renewed attempt at discourse about God, however contested and endangered it may be and however much it falls short.”

Jewish biblical understanding of God, is that God is the end of time and history. God is what stands against the modern myth of evolutionary, unending, time. “The Israel that is this-sidely gifted and involved in the world has not, according to all the important witnesses, experienced and thought its saving God outside the world, as transcending time, but rather as time’s end, coming toward it and bounding it.” But this again says more about what God does or how God acts than who or what God is in se.

Third, Metz’s non-religious interlocutors don’t want to talk about God. They are suspicious of hegemonic claims coming from theology (and with some reason, given Christian history) and want to avoid totalizing systems in general.

Frequently this idea [the Jewish-Christian idea of God], secularized and ideologized, is held to be the truly dangerous mono-myth that stands in the background of modernity: as godfather of a predemocratic way of thinking centered on a sovereignty that is hostile to any notion of separation of powers, and father of obsolete patriarchalism, It is viewed as the well-spring or vanguard of totalitarian ideologies of history, a conceptual shorthand for a master narrative that endangers individuals.

Getting too specific about God would drive such critics away perhaps. Of course, this does not keep Metz from speaking about God—which he does frequently—it just curtails how much discussion of God in se versus a discussion of what God does appears in his writing.

With these in mind, I affirm that the time has come for Metz to reflect more explicitly on the God implicit in his theology of memory. First, there is enough confusion over terms and concepts being used by both theology and philosophy to warrant such


656 Metz, "Versus Polymythicism." 82.

657 Ibid. 73.
clarification. Second, there are obvious theological advantages to doing so. Schillebeeckx provides a good example of how grounding memory in God can help clarify our hope for the dead. Without violating the awareness of God’s freedom, it is still possible, through analogy, to speak of God’s memory and its foundation in God as “pure positivity.” In the next chapter, the theology of God’s memory in the writings of Gustavo Gutiérrez will be explored as an exemplary way in which this can be done. Finally, as the next chapter will also demonstrate, grounding our memory in God’s validates something profoundly true in our lived experiences of ancestors, the communion of saints, and sacramental celebrations. Why this is so and how Metz’s theology of memory has been used by other theologians to explore these areas will be the topic of the final chapter in this dissertation.

3.4 Summary to this Point

Before embarking on the more constructive fourth chapter—considering how Metz has been used (or indeed, could be used, if he has not been already)—it is instructive to consider what has been discussed and concluded thus far in the dissertation.

First, Metz’s theology is grounded in his lived experiences and memories, especially the memory of losing his friends during the Second World War, and the Shoah, as typified by Auschwitz. These memories are specific and particular, and that is what gives them power to influence the present. Metz was able to see that his experiences and crying out to God for an answer were connected to the biblical traditions of lamentation and inconsolability. Metz became acutely aware that many of his contemporaries were unwilling to be so disturbed by the past. The forgetfulness in the culture around him forced him to formulate a political theology opposed to letting the past die. The notions
of the mysticism of suffering unto God and anamnestic reason both grew out of Metz’s own unwillingness to accept easy answers about what happened to his comrades.

Second, memory in theology has strong ties both to biblical and philosophical thought. Metz was deeply influenced by the thought of the Frankfurt School (both regarding the current social situation in general and memory in particular). However, Metz’s notion of memory remains deeply theological because of his insistence on including the God of the Bible in speaking about memory and a “thick” eschatology that hopes for an actual interruption of and end to history by God. Philosophical treatments of memory do provide examples of some things that resist co-optation by the dominant political and economic systems (i.e. the exchange system), but reflections on memory make up a significant quantity of only Walter Benjamin’s writings. But Benjamin’s openness to transcendence—which is often termed “theological” by his fellow philosophers—is not truly theological by Metz’s standards because it does not involve the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition. The theological treatment of memory is more concrete and more directly correlated with a specific praxis than philosophical approaches to memory, in which remembrance remains a form of resistance but does not necessarily manifest itself in a particular way of acting.

Third, Nietzsche’s advocacy of forgetting instead of remembering provides the challenge to which Metz rises in expanding on the types and functions of memory in his latest work. Metz is not, however, able to absolutely refute or dispel all the concerns about the possible negative aspects of memory (i.e. the possible psychologically pathological aspects of human memory). One of Miroslav Volf’s implicit criticisms of
Metz is that he does not deal with the more recent research on the benefits of forgetting, especially on the part of trauma victims. This is a valid and serious criticism.

Fourth, Metz ties his theological treatment of memory to a very specific memory of suffering—that of Christ—and a specific community of people (the Christian church) as bearers of that memory. Doing this reminds believers of the horror of human suffering but also of the promise of life and wholeness that God makes to all who have suffered and died unjustly. Hope is always focused on this “other” first, never one’s self, and we cannot hope anything for ourselves that we do not first hold out for others. Living and making decisions that are rational but that always take into consideration the history of suffering and the memory of the victims is what Metz calls anamnestic reason.

Jürgen Habermas challenges the claim of primacy that Metz makes for anamnestic reason by proposing that his own theory of communicative reason/action as more foundational. He claims that philosophy shares the mixed heritage of theology—Greek as well as Jewish intellectual contributions—and therefore provides the grounds for making rational decisions without the baggage that theological ideas do, due to the history of conquest with which it has been associated. Metz’s dialogue with Habermas on this issue accentuates the equivocal way in which certain terms are used by philosophy and theology. The same word means something different depending whether or not one includes religious faith in God when using it.

Fifth, Miroslav Volf questions the truthfulness of human memory and makes a case for forgetting wrongs suffered at some point as part of Christian hope for the salvation and reconciliation of all people. Explicitly, Volf calls into question Metz’s treatment of the memoria passionis Jesu Christi, noting that Metz focuses too much on
the suffering in solidarity aspect of the crucifixion and not enough on the forgiveness of sins. Metz would agree that his own focus is primarily on suffering as a way of retrieving a fundamental tradition that has been wrongly eclipsed by overemphasis on enmity/reconciliation. Metz prophetically focuses on Jesus’ solidarity in suffering because that is the message he judges modern western industrial people need to hear most. He and Volf remain fundamentally at odds on this point. But Metz clearly agrees with Volf that memories need to be truthful in order to be dangerous. False memories often are fictions created by the status quo to maintain things as they are. Metz does not, however, have a way of guaranteeing the veracity of human memory (i.e. he does not ground human memory in God).

Finally, Edward Schillebeeckx, while sharing many of Metz’s concerns about the subjectivity of the dead and the eschatological transformation being brought about by human and (ultimately) divine action, criticizes the lack of grounding in Metz’s thought on memory in God as “pure positivity.” Metz does not explicitly consider God to be pure positivity, but such an understanding is implied by what Metz affirms we hope for the dead. Metz just is very wary of emphasizing the positivity of God to the point of silencing cries of lamentation in the face of human suffering. Once again, Metz is reacting to and trying to correct an excess he notes in modern bourgeois Christianity. To keep a questioning and restless urgency to the question of theodicy, God as the eschatological end and interruption of history subsumes for Metz God as Creator. It allows Metz to keep the dangerous edge to his thought that he finds surrendered in so much Christian thought. A comfort with the unknown and unanswered, Metz’s apophatic tendencies result in a lack of discussion about God in se. This is an endorsement of
negative theology, his awareness of the Shoah and the authority of suffering, as well as an awareness of his non-religious interlocutors.

The equivocal nature of some terms in Metz’s thought (i.e. “theological” and dangerous memory), however, are increasingly demanding an explicit exploration of how human memory is founded in or participates in God’s memory of creation. This would help answer the outstanding criticisms considered here. It would separate the theological from philosophical treatments of anamnesis, it would provide human memory a ground for truthfulness by linking it with God’s memory, and it would allow him to address the role that God as “pure positivity” may play in his theology. What such an exploration might look like will launch the fourth chapter, beginning with the theology of God in the work of Gustavo Gutiérrez.
CHAPTER 4

EXPANSIONS ON THE THEOLOGY OF MEMORY
AND APPROPRIATIONS OF METZ

So far this dissertation has explored both the philosophical roots and theological contributions of Johann Baptist Metz’s theology of memory. The task that is now open before us is to explore where Metz’s own thought could potentially still expand and then consider how others have used Metz’s insights to go beyond what he can or extend his original project. As the last chapter suggests, Metz’s theology of memory would be enhanced by a more fleshed out theology of God—namely, how does who God is impact human memory and hope for the dead? Grounding human memory in God’s own memory—which is, of course, an analogical term\textsuperscript{658} because God is outside space and time as well as active in them and therefore not susceptible to “forgetting” the way humans are—is the way I will propose that Metz’s theology could benefit most directly from such an exploration.

One theology that provides a wonderful example of such grounding is the theology of liberation crafted by Gustavo Gutiérrez. By grounding present human ethical action in the gratuitous love of a Creator God—the God of life—that holds all things in the life, Gutiérrez demonstrates a unity between human and divine action. This parity

\textsuperscript{658} I am thinking here of Thomas Aquinas’ discussion of analogy in the \textit{Summa Theologiae}.  

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extends to memory, in which God’s memory of the poorest and most oppressed must translate into human anamnestic action on those same people’s behalf here and now. I argue that one comes to recognize those who have died prematurely and unjustly as the poor—perhaps the very poorest of the poor, since human memory of the particular life and death of many such individuals no longer exists. In these cases, God’s memory of them becomes an efficacious re-creation of their identities and potentialities. To God, outside of space and time, all are present. To be thought of by God is to exist in a real and ontological way—to begin to live the resurrection. Our limited memories, especially those celebrated in the community of the church, are manifest in action because the truthfulness and urgency of that which is remembered are preserved by God’s living memory of those who seem lost to history. This analogical use of God’s memory will ultimately be discussed in the final section of this chapter as a way to begin to speak of, what I will call, an anamnestic soteriology.

Gutiérrez writes from a very particular social location when doing his theology—the situation of oppression and poverty in Latin America, especially his homeland Peru. Two other major trajectories in theology, which develop further Metz’s notion of anamnestic memory and the importance of an outstanding future for the dead, also originate in explicitly cultural experiences. The two that will be considered in this chapter are feminist and womanist theologies and one form of liturgical theology. These are selected because, while making some definite appeal to Metz’s notion of memory, each

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659 This is my own description and conclusion, not something that Gutiérrez ever says. This is where I hope to take a step further than either he or Metz do—to claim an ontological status for things remembered by God.
author chooses to add or modify Metz by applying Metz’s work to a specific situation other than his original one.

4.1 Gustavo Gutiérrez: God’s and Humans’ Memory

When reading Gustavo Gutiérrez’s body of writing, one is impressed by two distinctive influences that have endured throughout his career. The first is the lived experience of witnessing and being with the poor of his native Peru, many of whom are indigenous peoples. This is the “particular” aspect of the truly universal, or “catholic,” theology that Gutiérrez has enunciated. The second is the pervasive influence of Bartolomé de Las Casas on Gutiérrez and the former’s insights on humanity, God, and liberation. There is one quotation from Las Casas that appears again and again in Gutiérrez’s writings: “God has the freshest and keenest memory of the least and most forgotten.”

This one affirmation resonates with much of what Gutiérrez writes about the poor, liberation, and how faith and action work together. To understand these two influences, however, it is first helpful to know something of Gutiérrez’s history.

Gutiérrez trained in Europe between 1951 and 1960, becoming immersed in the nouvelle théologie, the vast European theological traditions of Thomism, and the reforms of Vatican II. The impacts of the first and the last are evident most clearly in his constant return to scripture itself as a source of theological reflection and his joining in the affirmations that salvation history and world history, the supernatural and the natural,


the church and the world, are not separate but intertwined. He was also deeply influenced at this time by his engagement with the Catholic Action movement and their mantra of “see, judge, act.”

While clearly resonating with his European theological training, Gutiérrez’s own liberation theology is distinguished by its aim at giving a voice to the insignificant and making those who are not poor aware of the premature death and insignificance that accompanies poverty today. Furthermore, his theology is an exploration of how one may speak about a God of love and life to people whose current experience reflects little love and much premature death. Ultimately, this language comes from the lived experiences of the poor themselves and their reflections on scripture in light of them. This growing awareness—both on the part of the poor and on the part of those complicit in creating unjust poverty—compels action, especially for one who is Christian, to change the inhuman situation of poverty by joining in “the struggle to construct a just and fraternal society, where persons can live with dignity and be the agents of their own destiny.” So liberation theology serves a prophetic function insofar as it calls for conversion and repentance on the part of the oppressors and gives comfort and hope to the oppressed.

662 Ibid. 112.
663 Ibid.
664 Gutiérrez, Theology of Liberation. xxi-xxii. Since there can be some confusion, it is important to understand what Gutiérrez means by poverty here. “In the final analysis, poverty means death: lack of food and housing, the inability to attend properly to health and education needs, the exploitation of workers, permanent unemployment, the lack of respect for one’s human dignity, and unjust limitations placed on personal freedom in the areas of self-expression, politics, and religion. Poverty is a situation that destroys peoples, families, and individuals….Being poor today is also increasingly coming to mean being involved in the struggle for justice and peace…and being committed to the liberation of every human being.”
665 ———, The God of Life. 143. “The most profound and difficult question believers must face is: How are we to speak of the God of life and love in a situation of death and injustice?”
666 ———, Theology of Liberation. xiv.
It is important to note, however, that Gutiérrez’s role as a theologian is first that of a listener, hearing what the poor say, sharing in the stories they tell about their own experiences, and their spirituality.667 “If there is no friendship with them [the poor] and no sharing of the life of the poor, then there is no authentic commitment to liberation, because love exists only among equals.”668 Because he shares their lives, Gutiérrez then has helped open a way for those people to gain a voice of their own, to demand liberation and recognition of their full humanity, grounded in scripture and the living gospel of Jesus Christ. This is what he terms the “irruption of the poor” into history: “the new presence of those who in fact used to be ‘absent’…of little or no importance, and without the opportunity to give expression themselves to their sufferings, their comraderies, their plans, their hopes.”669 Here is the vital link between theory and practice. Theology is not only theoretical but it also flows from and back to the lived experiences of the people.

Gutiérrez’s practical intentions for his theology owe much to the second major influence in his theology—Bartolomé de Las Casas. “Las Casas is Gutiérrez’s theological and ecclesial hero. Although Gutiérrez makes it clear that he does not want to make Las Casas a ‘liberation theologian,’ it is crystal clear that he is for Gutiérrez a model both in perspective and in content for liberation theology.”670 Las Casas is a man of his own times, limited to the vocabulary and cultural location from which he comes.671 But his

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667 Gustavo Gutiérrez, “The Task of Theology and Ecclesial Experience,” in The Density of the Present: Selected Writings (New York, NY: Orbis, 1999 (1984)). 171. “Working in this world and becoming familiar with it, I came to realize, together with others, that the first thing to do is listen. Listen endlessly to the human and religious experiences of those who have made the sufferings, hopes, and struggles of this people their own. Listen, not condescendingly, but to learn about the people and to learn about God.”

668 Gutiérrez, Theology of Liberation. xxxi.

669 Ibid. xx.

670 Martinez, Confronting the Mystery. 104.

671 Gutiérrez acknowledges this, especially in regards to the need for the natives to receive the sacraments in order to receive eternal life. Gutiérrez, Las Casas : In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ. 241.
location is that of a Spaniard in the late 1500s who sees and experiences the living hell in which the enslaved natives of the Americas now live. And he refuses to remain silent. While denouncing the supposed reasons for armed enslavement of the non-Christian natives (e.g. that they are unredeemable sinners who practice human sacrifice and cannibalism\textsuperscript{672}, that they are not truly human at all\textsuperscript{673}, that it is a way for them to hear the gospel and be baptized\textsuperscript{674}), he also denounces the hypocritical proponents of Christianity there. These, while promising to catechize the indigenous people so as to save their souls, are in fact completely unconcerned with the native peoples, their salvation, or even their lives. Greed alone motivated the vast majority of colonizers and Las Casas did not hesitate to say so.

Although it was a seemingly impossible task, given the wealth and power amassed against them, Las Casas determined to fight for the rights of the enslaved peoples until his own death. Much of his battle, however, was waged on the “professional” theological front insofar as he had to rebut the arguments that legitimized the actions against non-Christians in the Americas. It was clearly his actual life that provided the academic impetus though. His experience of death and injustice in the New World led him to several theological insights, which in turn had major implications for how the Spaniards were treating the indigenous peoples and the need for repentance. These insights also are ones that Gutiérrez relies on heavily in constructing his theology of liberation.

\textsuperscript{672} Ibid. 166-167.

\textsuperscript{673} Ibid. 42. “One of the reasons adduced for holding them [the Indians] ‘in trust’ (\textit{en encomienda}) was the notion that the inhabitants of these lands were somehow inferior beings. This was the conviction of those who used the Indians—the Franciscans and Dominicans write—“as if they were brute beasts,” on the pretext that they are ‘fit neither for marriage nor for receiving the faith.’”

\textsuperscript{674} Ibid. 115.
The first insight is that God is foremost a God of life who is concerned with the least throughout history.675 God does not will the death of anyone, regardless of sinfulness, because God is a God “who wishes all creatures well.”676 This leads Las Casas to the bold soteriological affirmation that even the native people who committed ritual sacrifice could be saved by God through means known only to God.677 So no war, torture, or subjugation was ever warranted in order to “save souls.”678 The gift of life is far too precious to be lost just for the sake of religious conformity: “In other words, a live pagan Indian is worth more than a dead Christian Indian.”679 But going even farther, God as the God of life means that all people are created as equals—none are inferior—so the unjust taking of life looms large in God’s memory.

The soteriology, or salvation doctrine, prevailing in the church in Bartolomé’s time seemed an invincible stumbling block to any understanding of the situation in the Indies. In this soteriology, Europeans, being Christians, were at an advantage over the Indians when it comes to being saved by God. But it is our friar’s deep conviction not only that God has created all human beings equal, but that God wills them actually to be treated as such, in all regions of the earth. This, indeed, is the reason for God’s special concern for the “insignificant of history”—persons who are treated by others as if they were somehow inferior. God “remembers” the injustice to which these persons are subjected.680

The second realization is that unjust situations endanger the salvation of the perpetrators. The reality in the New World put the salvation of those people—most of

675 Ibid. 194-196.
676 Ibid. 220.
677 This is not to imply that Las Casas rejected the orthodox affirmation of the time that “outside the church there is no salvation.” He simply expanded the definition of how one finds one’s self in the Church. He does explore how an erroneous conscience can lead one into acts “of an excusable and invincible ignorance, and their error ought to be forgiven,” and God alone can be their judge—not the Spanish. Ibid. 203, 213. See also 247.
678 Ibid. 208. “No sin the Indians could commit would make acts of war against them legitimate.”
679 Ibid. 215.
680 Ibid. 217.
whom appeared to be staunchly “in the Church”—who took part in or had knowledge of the encomienda system and did nothing to stop it and make reparations for the injustices perpetrated therein, in jeopardy. This even included the king. The ultimate fortunes of the natives—who had nothing and were the poorest of the poor—and their conquerors would be reversed, as the gospel makes clear on several occasions. Las Casas worked tirelessly to bring that more just situation into reality here and now by trying to change the temporal situation of the poor who suffered greatly and died before their times, as well as to save the souls of his compatriots by proclaiming the need for an end to the exploitation of Indians. Liberation for the poor demands solidarity with them on the part of those who can help change the status quo but this always requires repentance and conversion first. Whenever change and conversion did not come soon enough for the victims (and this was true for the majority of the native population), Fray Bartolomé joined with the native people in remembering them as he struggled onward for change. Their hope for the victims themselves was that God too would remember the victims and that such memory was efficacious somehow. Gutiérrez specifies one such example given by Las Casas himself:

In a letter to a personage of the royal Court, he [Las Casas] relates the sad affair of a young Indian woman burned alive by a Spaniard whose advances she had rejected. Her life was regarded as of such little value that the murderer had only been sentenced by a judge to pay the ridiculous sum of five castellanos. Bartolomé concludes his account: “I could tell of this and other, worse things that have occurred, here and elsewhere on this continent and on these islands. I know that God will not forget this girl: I know that ‘pupillum et magnum diligit Deus, et ipsi cura est de omnibus’ [God loves the small and the great and cares for all’], as Scripture says” (1535, O.E. 5:61a). No one is out of reach of God’s solicitude, least of all the abandoned and insignificant, like this young Indian of Nicaragua—whom Las Casas remembered, too….Bartolomé proposed to make God’s memory the guideline of his life and reflection.681 (emphasis mine)

681 Ibid. 221.
So Las Casas—and presumably Gutiérrez shares this perspective—is convinced that not only humans, but God too remembers the victims of history. What is even more significant perhaps is that human memory joins with God’s and that from this an agenda for just action here and now becomes clear. This notion is not actually novel, as its firm grounding in scripture evinces. “His [Las Casas’] outlook has deep biblical roots. The ‘memory of God’ is an expression of the divine fidelity and accordingly places a demand on every Christian as well. In the Bible, God exhorts at least those who believe: ‘Remember…’”\(^{682}\) It is to these important scriptural references to God’s memory, as they appear in Gutiérrez’s writings, which we now turn.

4.1.1 Biblical Testimony to God’s Memory

The Christian Bible is a book of memory: people and God remembering the covenants they have made with one another and the entwined love story of God with all creation. Although it is not “historical” in the modern sense, it relates the meaning that certain events or narratives had for groups of people in specific times and places—i.e. the Jewish people and the early Christian communities—in relation to the divine. It tells us that “the God of the Bible is a God who remembers, a God who does not forget the covenant established with his people.”\(^{683}\) It continues to have meaning insofar as people in the present connect with and re-member what is related in scripture, through the particular cultural lens of their social location. For Gutiérrez, scripture is the arbiter to which believers bring their experiences in every age in order to enter into theological reflection and dialogue with the text and each other. The goal is to allow one’s own

\(^{682}\) Ibid.

experience to shed new light on what scripture contains while letting the living God spoken of through scripture challenge and inform how we now live.

I approach the Scriptures in an attitude of faith. The intention of the books of the Bible is to speak to us of God and to communicate the faith of their authors and of persons, groups, and an entire people….To read the Bible is to begin a dialogue between faith and faith, between the believers of the past and the believers of today: a dialogue that is taking place today within the ecclesial community as it pursues its pilgrimage through history….The stories, whether based on real situations or are literary fictions, give voice to an authentic faith experience….The Bible is not a kind of depository of answers to our concerns; rather it reformulates our questions and sets us on unexpected paths. We can truly say that we read the Bible. But it in turn reads us….684

Both human memory and God’s memory are vital to this process because the relationship between creation and the Creator are often couched in terms of covenant. Covenants are made in order to keep those involved in one another’s minds always and violations of covenant are lapses in remembrance.

4.1.1.1 Covenant, Creation, and God’s Memory

As noted above in discussing Las Casas, the God encountered in scripture for Gutiérrez is first and foremost the God of Life. “The lack of the necessities for living human life is contrary to the will of God whom Jesus reveals to us.”685 This is so because God creates purely out of love, not out of merit or utility, and wants what has been created to flourish for God’s own pleasure.686 “Not everything was created for the service of human beings; there are many things in the natural world that human beings may

684 Gutiérrez, The God of Life. xvi-xvii. In reading scripture the past becomes present—we remember in a way that places us in dialogue with the past still with us now. Instead of being a depository, scripture, as Gutiérrez seems to speak of it here, is alive and active. Memory is not static, concluded, but dynamic and efficacious within the community today.

685 Ibid. xi.

686 Ibid. 40.
consider ‘useless’ but in which God finds delight.” God opposes injustice because “Oppression in any of its forms means death….liberation brings life….The theme runs through the entire Bible and reveals to us a God who loves life; life is God’s will for all beings.” God’s actions in history evince this and the Bible recounts the human memories of what God has done: the Exodus is the main example Gutiérrez uses. The people remember God who first remembered them and came to their aid when they were enslaved and suffering. But this memory has a present meaning because it imparts certain responsibilities on those who believe in the here and now.

Memory is the place where faith resides; consequently, memory is related to the present. For this reason, Deuteronomy offers us a searching meditation of the liberating events recounted in the Book of Exodus, with the evident intention of showing the demands these events make upon the Jewish people in the here and now….God’s action requires that the people put God’s commandments into practice; it requires a certain behavior in the today of their lives.

This joining of privileges with responsibilities results from the manner in which God sustains a relationship with creation. This is done through the making of several covenants and it is in relation to covenant that the first discussions of divine memory occur. “God’s nearness finds expression in the covenant made with the people, a commitment that closely binds the two parties together and lives on in the memory of God and in believers who put the requirements of the covenant into practice.”

687 Ibid. 82, 159. Gutiérrez actually cites the Book of Job as evidence of this. “Rain in the waste lands is beautiful, and this beauty is its ‘usefulness.’ The Lord sends rain because God freely desires to do so; because it pleases God to see the rain.”

688 Ibid. 3.

689 Ibid. 4-5. In reference to Dt 26:4-9, Gutiérrez writes “here is a simple yet profound remembrance of a historical event pregnant with consequences….We need note only that in expressing its faith the Jewish people narrate the intervention of God in history: concretely in the history of their deliverance from the yoke of pharaoh, but with the clear intention of thereby shedding light on their entire history as a people.”

690 Ibid. 5.

691 Ibid. 33.
Covenants are always freely made and reflect the very nature of life itself: communion. Gutiérrez affirms that “As understood in the Bible, ‘to live’ always means ‘to live with,’ ‘to live for,’ ‘to be present to others’; in other words, life implies communion. Death is utter isolation.” The God of Life offers and preserves covenant because it is the most direct means to a full communion of the living—with God and one another.

Remaining in right covenant relationship is described as “remembering.” Humans are said to “remember” God whenever they obey the commands given by God—treating the created order with concern and care, and praising God for the goodness of the created world. “‘God will not forget the covenant’: fidelity is, first of all, a remembering. To be faithful is to remember, not to forget our promises, to retain a sense of tradition. Fidelity to the covenant supposes remembrance of the origin and demands of the agreement.” But God’s memory is also prescriptive of our own here. “The Lord remembers all and each of the members of the people with whom he has made his covenant; the Lord is especially mindful of the most helpless and poor among them.” And so human remembering of the covenant is reflected in a similar concern for the poor.

Whenever covenant is violated, the people are said to have forgotten God. But the forgetting of God is always accompanied by the forgetting of the poor and vulnerable as well. The consequence of this infidelity is described as God “forgetting” the people. Repentance, as one may guess, is couched in terms of the people’s remembrance, and God’s forgiveness is also described as “remembering” the people and a “forgetting” of

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692 Ibid. 12.

693 Ibid. 35.

694 Ibid.

695 Ibid. Gutiérrez provides a meditation to this effect in regards to Dt 8:11, 18-19. “Be careful not to forget the Lord, your God, by neglecting his commandments and decrees and statuettes which I enjoin on you today...Remember, then, it is the Lord, your God, who gives you the power to acquire wealth, by fulfilling as he had now [or: today] done, the covenant which he swore to your fathers. But if you forget the Lord, your God, and follow other gods, serving and worshipping them, I forewarn you this day that you will perish utterly.”
their sins. “The God who remembers also knows how to forget. When the people are unfaithful, God calls them to conversion and, finally, promises them a new covenant; then God erases from mind all their former sins….To be able to forgive is part of being faithful.”

But the analogy of remembering and forgetting starts with creation inasmuch as God makes humans in the Imago Dei. It is actually the first covenant in which all subsequent ones partake. Although Gutiérrez does not use the language of memory here, I maintain that this affirmation is very important for Gutiérrez because it grounds the belief that all people are of equal dignity and resemble God to the same extent simply by being created. Any “preferential” love of the poor and the least comes, not from their greater merit or holiness, but out of a defensive concern for those whose equality is most in jeopardy and least acknowledged. “Yahweh is protector of the Israelite people to the extent that Yahweh is defender of the poor, for the defense of the poor is the ineradicable seal that permanently marks the covenant.” I would argue that God remembers the poor in defending them, remembering what humans have forgotten because God wills each being to live as an end unto itself. God takes pleasure in creation in se and therefore wills life and ultimately joy for each being as intrinsically valuable. In this sense, creation is ongoing and humans participate with God as co-creators, helping the full Reign of God come.

When we approach the subject of creation as philosophers, we sometimes think of creation as an action done once for all and now over with; as something like a push given by a first mover that sets in motion a chain of movers with whom God

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696 Ibid. 37. Note that this resonates well with what Volf says about forgetting. It would be interesting for Metz to reflect more on this very real theme in scripture. See also ———, "Memory and Prophecy." 21. “Although it seems paradoxical, God forgets the people’s faults because he is a God who remembers: he remembers the promise of love and the covenant (see Wisd. 11:23-24). Indeed, the prayer of the believer is frequently directed to this divine memory....”


698 Ibid. 22-23.
then ceases to have anything to do. In the Bible, however, God’s creative action is presented as something that abides. God creates all the days, as it were, because God loves all the days. God rejects nothing that has been made, but keeps created reality in existence. God’s love enfolds everything.\(^{699}\)

God’s love gives and sustains life. It is ultimately God’s love that defies death too and brings about a re-creation of all that God has loved unceasingly. “The love of God is mightier than death and keeps the hope of a people alive. God is life.”\(^{700}\) And this life is more than technical heart or brain activity; it is a thriving of the whole person, body and soul. The prospect that “all are alive to God” is the foundation of the hope we, like Las Casas, have for those who have died before their time. God will restore to them all that could not be given by human justice in this world.

4.1.1.2 Job and Memory

The story of Job, as the prototypical story of innocent, horrendous suffering, is so important to Gutiérrez that he devotes an entire book to an examination of it alone. There are several key points to his analysis. First, Job’s suffering is not a result of his own sin. There is an explicit rejection of the theology of retribution—“that God punishes the wicked and rewards the upright”\(^{701}\)—in Job’s case because even God does not ultimately indict Job for any sin.\(^{702}\)

To the death that is at work in his [Job’s] flesh there is added social death, for in the opinion of that time persons suffering from incurable illnesses were to some extent outcasts from society. A factor contributing to this attitude was the conviction that poverty and sickness were a punishment for the sins of the

\(^{699}\) Ibid. 18. This connects to memory because God’s ongoing presence in creation keeps that which is created constantly before God. The Bible tells of God’s continuous action with and on behalf of creation and therefore, I claim, God is always “remembering,” God’s creation.

\(^{700}\) Ibid. 64.


\(^{702}\) Ibid. 11, 69.
individual or the family. In the eyes of his contemporaries, therefore, Job is a sinner....

And yet this social consensus does not influence Job’s assessment of his situation. In his reflection he knows that “Adversity does not cause him to lose his innocence,” it is not a matter of cause and effect. Nothing Job has done merits the torture he presently is experiencing. It would be a sin, in fact, for Job to accept the council of his friends and admit any guilt in the matter. God alone can understand what is happening to Job, and his friends, although meaning well, are totally misguided.

The second insight is that Job comes to a greater awareness of his solidarity with all who suffer in the course of experiencing his own ordeal. His sufferings are not isolated: there are many who are poor, suffering, and dying through no fault of their own. He is in greater solidarity with these other people because he shares their pain. His experience is key. “At the instigation of his friends, he [Job] broadens his perspective, abandons his initial narrow position, and realizes that the issue here is not simply the suffering of one individual. The real issue, he sees, is the suffering and injustice that mark the lives of the poor.” They share in one voice crying out to God for help and an explanation.

An important point is reached in this progress when he [Job] realizes that he is not the only one to experience the pain of unjust suffering. The poor of this world are in the same boat….The question he asks God ceases to be a purely personal one….Job begins to free himself from an ethic centered on personal rewards and to pass to another focused on the needs of one’s neighbor.

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703 Ibid. 6.

704 Ibid.

705 Ibid. 22, 38. “Were he to agree with his friends, he would be lying; neither his faith in God nor his state of mind will allow him to do it.”

706 Ibid. 27. “Job becomes aware that the dividing line between himself and his interlocutors lies in the area of personal experience and of the thinking that experience yields.”

707 Ibid. 16, 19.
Finally, Gutiérrez makes clear that Job does not receive a clear answer to his question of “Why? Why Oh God is this happening to us?” Although God does indeed respond to Job, it is not with an answer. God is too immense for human comprehension. Even God’s ways are too much for us to grasp. “God indeed has a plan, but it is not one that the human mind can grasp so as to make calculations based on it and foresee the divine action. God is free; God’s love is a cause, not an effect that is…handcuffed.” Instead, God’s response is to have Job remember all God has done in creation. The natural world itself demonstrates that God has a plan and it is one that includes abundant life for all God has made.

Job… [has made] notable progress on the way that leads to correct talk about God. This must take as its starting point a recognition of God’s plan and of the fact that because of it the entire work of creation bears the trademark of gratuitousness. It is under that aspect that Yahweh is revealed to Job. Yahweh does not crush Job with divine power but speaks to him of Yahweh’s creative freedom and tells him of the respect Yahweh has for human freedom. Job’s call for justice is legitimate, and Yahweh is committed to justice. But if justice is to be understood in its full meaning and scope, it must be set in the context of God’s overall plan for human history.

The response, while not an answer, is a summons to remember what God has done and that God is good. That which is remembered is actually the fact that God at no time forgets creation.

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708 Ibid. 31.

709 Ibid. 15. “Precisely because the author has himself shared Job’s experience, he does not seek an ultimate rational explanation of human suffering; neither, however, does he look upon suffering as simply a pretext for discussing other themes. Rather he accepts it with all its meaning, confusion, and implications for something that lies deep, very deep, in his soul: his faith and hope in Yahweh. He knows, as his vivid descriptions make clear, that the suffering of the innocent is the most inhuman of all possible situations.”

710 Ibid. 73.

711 Ibid. 67.

712 Ibid. 68. “God speaks, but in an unpredictable way—making no reference to concrete problems and therefore not responding to the distress and questions of Job. This does not seem correct. What God says is disconcerting to the reader. But Job seems to understand it….God does not crush the addressee, but returns to the theme of God’s own greatness.”
I maintain, based on Gutiérrez’s presentation (although he nowhere says this explicitly) that memory—both human and divine—are more central to the Book of Job than it might at first appear. The present is so full of anguish for Job, and his fortunes have been reversed so suddenly, that he cannot help but search for answers. He remembers his own deeds and his blamelessness before God, but, in doing so, he remembers God constantly as the unseen interlocutor. Job remembers how all things come from God as a gift. “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, naked I shall return again. Yahweh gave, Yahweh has taken back. Blessed be the name of Yahweh! [Job 1:21] Although it seems that God had abandoned Job, Job does not forget God. The constant calling out, bitter lamentation, and complaints are Job’s remembrance. What is more, Job remembers other people who are poor and suffering. He remembers them and knows that their cause is ultimately his too.

God’s only response to Job’s questions is to invoke the memory of what God has done. God remembers all of creation daily and holds it in life. “Have you ever in your life given orders to the morning or sent the dawn to its posts, to grasp the earth by its edges and shake the wicked out of it?” [Job 28:12-15]. If Job, a mere human, has been faithful in remembering God and not despairing, then how much more must God—author of life and creator of all things—remember Job and each thing God has made out of sheer, gratuitous love? What Job suffers has not gone without note. God has heard every word of the debate of Job and his friends. God too remembers every deed of Job’s and knows his care of the poor. God will not abandon Job or forget him. God therefore invites

713 Ibid. 55. “This difficult journey will not essentially change Job’s recognition that everything comes from God….But the road Job travels will show clearly that his acceptance of God’s will is not simply resignation. His full encounter with his God comes by way of complaint, bewilderment, and confrontation.” All of which require Job to remember his life with God and God’s action in creation, as well as in his own life specifically.

714 Gutiérrez characterizes this as a concern of Job’s before his meeting with God. “Convinced though he is of his innocence, Job ‘fears that his cause may be forever forgotten, and therefore he cries out.’” Ibid. 62.
“Job to sing with Yahweh the wonders of creation—without forgetting that the source of it all is the free and gratuitous love of God….Creation is seen as a saving action of God.”  

The culmination of all this remembering is joy. Although Job’s problem has not been solved magically by God, nor even an adequate explanation given, knowing a bit more about God and God’s freedom that opts for life out of love for creation makes Job forget his lamentation. In a more novel interpretation of the phrase that Job “repents of dust and ashes,” Gutiérrez affirms that:

The text in Job means: “I repudiate and abandon (change my mind about) dust and ashes.”…Job is retracting the attitude of lamentation that has been his until now. The speeches of God have shown him that this attitude is not justified. He does not retract or repent of what he has hitherto said, but he now sees clearly that he cannot go on complaining.

The suffering has not ended, the world does not yet reflect God’s love and justice, and yet there is joy because of the hope that God can always bring about something new and unexpected. The memory of God’s love and fidelity gives the present the strength to rise up and seek change in expectation of something new.

Job still has many questions, but the unknown is no longer a monster that threatens to devour everything, including his few fragile certainties. The beast that is his ignorance has not vanished, but, like Behemoth and Leviathan, it is under control because of what he now knows about God and God’s love….God is a presence that leads amid darkness and pain, a hand that inspires confidence. Not all ignorance is dispelled, but the route is clearly marked.

715 Ibid. 75.
716 Ibid. 87.
717 Ibid. 91.
4.1.1.3 The Present Memory of Jesus Christ

Although Gutiérrez does not rely on the language of “dangerous memory” like Metz, biblical memory in his theology is naturally challenging to all injustice because it “goes beyond the conceptual; it points toward a conduct, a practice designed to transform reality. To remember is to have in mind, or care for, someone or something. One remembers in order to act. Without this, memory lacks meaning; it is limited to being a kind of intellectual gymnastics.”718 This is because of the present nature of the past. Echoing Augustine, Gutiérrez maintains that “memory is the present of the past.”719 There is a depth dimension to the present, filled with the echoes of the past.

This fosters a very sacramental notion of time. “Time becomes, thanks to memory, a space where we encounter the face of Jesus, the Son of God made flesh, and a space for encounter with others.”720 Time and again Gutiérrez reiterates the idea found in Las Casas, that Christ is visible in the tortured faces and bodies of the poor.721 “A perspective from the underside of history, from the experience of the ‘crucified peoples,’ as Ignacio Ellacuría called them, invites us to make our own the memory of the God of Jesus. In the hungry and the thirsty, the ragged and the marginalized of history, we should recognize the face of Christ.”722 The memoria passionis is something that the poor “remember” in their bodies as they live out premature death on a daily basis. The encounter of memory means that those who remember actually walk the way to the cross


719 Ibid.

720 Ibid. 20.

721 ———, Las Casas : In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ. 11. The title itself alludes to this idea. “In the ‘afflicted, scourged’ inhabitants of these lands, Bartolomé was able to see the presence of Christ himself. From this evangelical outlook springs a reflection upon Jesus Christ, a christology, that becomes flesh and history in the Indies and the backbone of his thought.”

with Jesus, and Jesus, in turn, picks through garbage heaps looking for food or experiences the non-identity of being poor with them. It is a “real” presence that Gutiérrez could almost use Eucharistic terms to describe.\textsuperscript{723}

Our goal as Christians is precisely to do everything, as Christ enjoined, “in memory of me.” Christians join their own memory to God’s and, in so doing, must remember their fellow people, especially those in greatest need. “God’s memory fosters the memory of the people who believe in him….Therefore, the Bible invites us to make God’s memory our own. One of the essential components of this memory is the priority of the oppressed and forgotten ones.”\textsuperscript{724} But it is not just the memory of Jesus’ suffering and death that constitute God’s memory, which becomes our own.

It implies the memory of all Jesus’s teachings (cf. Matt 28:20) through ‘his actions and words.’…The eucharistic celebration, the central act of the life of the church, synthesizes the fundamental aspects of Christian life: the loving memory of God as expressed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the love for all, and the preference for the most insignificant and forgotten come together. The memory of the ways one should proclaim the good news and to [remain] faithful to the design of God’s life and to solidarity with others is also included.

Remembering, both for God and for us, means remembering the human person in his or her entirety. It is not just the suffering, but also the joy and hope, which defines who one is.

To keep in mind the ills of those who suffer mistreatment and exclusion is extremely important, but to recognize only this is to see only one aspect of a broad and complex reality. The situation of the poor does not make them less human, and all human beings experience moments of authentic joy and laughter, no matter how humble, fragile, or transitory these may seem to those who view them from afar. It is precisely these moments that sustain them as human beings….Recognition of these aspects of the condition of the poor is not meant to downplay their victimization or the systematic violation of their most fundamental human rights. It is part of remembering their humanity: the fact that they are not

\textsuperscript{723} This is my own statement but it is based on the brief consideration of the Eucharist and its implications for inter-human communion and communion of God and people. See ———, \textit{Theology of Liberation}. 148-150.

\textsuperscript{724} ———, "Memory and Prophecy." 21, 22.
simply objects of pity or help but, above all, persons destined to be the subjects of their own destiny and history.\textsuperscript{725}

It appears that, for Gutiérrez, the more that the faithful are able to remember the poor and most marginalized in their full humanity, the closer we come to sharing in God’s memory of them—almost a path to mystical union. But one must be clear that this joy of the poor is “not the superficial kind of rejoicing that springs from unawareness or resignation, but the joy born of the conviction that unjust mistreatment and suffering will be overcome. This is a paschal joy proper to a time of martyrdom.”\textsuperscript{726} Here the dead too—the martyred—appear as joyful because the faithful know they are not swallowed in death. “Joy, which in the Bible always accompanies the fulfillment of the messianic promises (e.g., Isa. 65:17-23), thus recovers its deepest meaning: that it flows from the conquest of death.”\textsuperscript{727} The God of life does not forget anything that God has made. “Death and injustice are not the final word of history.”\textsuperscript{728}

It also appears that, whatever God’s memory is like, it is not a list of facts because, Gutiérrez affirms, human memory (which, I contend, is modeled on God’s) is primarily narrative in form.\textsuperscript{729} “Jesus was a storyteller. His stories give rise to others that one way or another speak of him and of his witness. Jesus is the narrator narrated. From that standpoint, Christianity is simply a collection stories. Storytelling is the proper way

\textsuperscript{725}Ibid. 30-31. See also Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Theological Language: Fullness of Silence," in Density of the Present: Selected Writings (New York, NY: Orbis, 1999 (1995)). 190. “A religion that saddens and does not try, as it should, to help the heart grow in joy and hope plunges the poor back into their misery and their needs.” For Metz, we remember precisely the unfulfilled hopes and joys of victims, so he comes close to Gutiérrez here as well.


\textsuperscript{727} Ibid. 121.

\textsuperscript{728} Ibid. 1.

\textsuperscript{729} Gutiérrez, "Theological Language." 201-203. “An event must be told, spoken. The story heard gives rise to other telling. “What we have heard gives rise to other telling. ‘What we have heard—that we tell,’ says a psalm. The result is a chain of narrative, composed of both the memory of past events and the imprint of other new ones. A believing community is always a narrating community.”
of speaking about God.”

But these stories are not like fairy tales because they change who one is in the hearing now. “Narration incorporates the hearer within it. It tells an experience and makes it an experience of those who hear it.”

Not only do memories related in narrative bring the listener into the past situation of the story, but they also bring the people of the past into the present. Jesus is paradigmatic of this. In reference to the gospel stories of Jesus, Gutiérrez writes

> that hope is expressed not in the repetition of that narration, but in its re-creation in the life of those who feel called by the experience of Jesus and his friends….The fact that he is the reference point is not a fixation on the past, but rather a way of bringing him into the present, so much so that memory of him has been regarded as dangerous for a history that is dominated by selfishness and injustice.

By sharing in God’s memory of people we are able to act in unity with those who have gone before. There could be no greater way to honor the victims of history, the poor who have experienced unjust and premature death, than to live with them present in our memory here and now.

4.1.2 Gutiérrez’s Contribution to Metz’s Notion of Memory

Gutiérrez and Metz share many important theological features in common. Both men’s theologies emerge from their lived experiences of the premature death of those

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730 Ibid. 204. One might object that there are many genres in scripture—which is true. I would contend that even something like a proverb or psalm, however, arises from an experience that is initially narrative and is then transformed or distilled into another form and genre that conveys memory.

731 It is clear, based on fragments from many of his writings, that Gutiérrez means for memories (as the fodder of narratives) to cause active change. “Our approach to the past must be motivated not by nostalgia but by hope; not by fixation upon former painful and traumatic occurrences, but by present suffering and the conviction that only a people which has a memory can transform the situation it is in and build a different world.” ———, “Centenary.” 106.

732 ———, “Theological Language.” This reminds one of Martin Buber’s story about the crippled man who told the story of his teacher dancing and jumping while praying. In telling the story, he himself jumps up and dances, being healed.

733 Ibid.
around them. Both are concerned about how to speak of God in situations of suffering. Both have pronounced apophatic tendencies. God as free and more than humans can grasp or control is important for both men’s thought. Both want to remain grounded in the practical, present moment in which praxis and theory can bring change. So both men also struggle with the relationship between the universal and the particular. They both are responding to Marxism’s criticism of faith and religion by trying to demonstrate the efficaciousness of Christianity for changing people’s lives for the better. And they both are facing a Church that is just beginning to grapple with questions of cultural diversity and inculturation. Finally, both men increasingly rely upon memory and narrative in their writings.

Clearly Gustavo Gutiérrez explores uncharted theological terrain by extending his consideration of memory to God’s memory. I propose that, if Metz could provide a similar discussion, or simply echo what Gutiérrez affirms, his theology of memory would be strengthened considerably in several ways. First, grounding anthropological memory in God’s memory dispels concerns that Metz is somehow trying to disguise a merely philosophical idea in theological clothing. As the previous chapters have indicated, this is untrue from the start. However, drawing on God’s memory and the extensive scriptural references to it explicitly would make such concerns obviously unnecessary.

Metz’s entering into dialogue with Gutiérrez’s analysis of God’s memory would also be helpful in addressing the charges made by Jürgen Habermas, that theology has too much associative baggage with domination and colonialism to be useful in fostering public discussion between diverse people. Showing the connective potential that memory and action have between Metz and Gutiérrez would provide one example of how theological discussion is capable of transcending its past collaboration with domination and cultural destruction. Gutiérrez not only accentuates the horrors of the conquest—both past and those aspects still lingering in the present—and how Christians participated in it, but he also provides evidence of resistance through that same faith (i.e. Bartolomé de Las
Casas). Looking from the “underside” of history does not demonstrate that all theological communication is tainted with cultural devastation. On the contrary, defenders of culture and the poorest and most oppressed people also speak theologically.

A second advantage to Metz drawing on Gutiérrez’s discussion of God’s memory as the model for human memory is that it provides a way for Metz to address concerns of truthfulness and the extensiveness of human memory. While human memory remains fallible and limited,—even when it is analogous to God’s memory—affirming that memories about the dead go beyond what humans in the present know introduces the element of a third party who listens and also remembers what has happened. We can be confident that God remembers even those people who no one living now remembers. Their cries for justice and an explanation are not silenced simply because human memory has lost (or never even knew!) the details of their ordeals.

Furthermore, there is less of a need for an exhaustively accurate memory of events or facts (although these are important too) and more emphasis can be placed on remembering the actual people as subjects. God alone knows everything that happened. But the dead, as persons, are present with us as we act now because we remember them and their stories. We don’t need to rehearse in detail the horrors of what happened over and over again just to keep them from being lost because we are not the sole keepers of their memory. This provides some avenues for addressing the psychological and social scientific data about the deleterious effects of fixating on traumatic memories. Remembering the victims in a more holistic manner, which includes but is not limited to what they suffered, allows the dead to participate in the positive actions in which the living engage on their behalf. What is important in the present is that we strive to change the conditions that allowed such horrors to happen. The motivation for anamnestic action based on “dangerous memories” becomes less about avenging specific wrongs for victims (who we already know cannot benefit personally from anything we do in history) and more about living in a way that makes what those people suffered efficacious in
change. We pick up the torch that the victims of history can no longer carry themselves, in memory of them, while maintaining the hope for an outstanding future for them individually based on the eschatological proviso of God.

Because we are able to remember the victims of history as fully human persons—not just victims—we no longer allow what the perpetrators did to them to define who they are. As Gutiérrez eloquently argues, people are more than what they suffer. There is joy and hope. It is possible still to cry out to God in protest for what has happened and work to change the status quo without reducing all memories of a victim to ones of pain and death. To rejoice or laugh despite the perpetrators best efforts at extinguishing anything in a victim but pain and suffering is also great resistance.734 Ultimately, God remembers people so as to hold them in life. More good can be enacted in this life with a positive vision of flourishing before our eyes than just the negative (although totally just) condemnation of horrific suffering that we want to avoid. This need not mean skipping too quickly to answers and passing over the negative, but it will force us to enunciate more concretely that towards which we are working. The great danger, of course, is creating a new system of oppression out of our positive vision for the future. But this is a danger even if one attempts to change the world without clearly stating what one hopes to accomplish. Keeping the dead firmly in mind acts as a mechanism of constant critique of whatever projects we pursue in history.

Finally, engaging God’s memory as Gutiérrez presents it allows (or perhaps forces!) Metz to address the role that God as creator should have in his theology.

734 I am reminded here of the hymn “How Can I Keep From Singing?”: “My life goes on in endless song; above earth’s lamentation. I catch the sweet, tho’ far-off hymn that hails a new creation. Through all the tumult and the strife I hear the music ringing; it finds an echo in my soul—how can I keep from singing? What tho’ my joys and comfort die? The Lord my Saviour liveth; What tho’ the darkness gather round? Songs in the night he giveth. No storm can shake my inmost calm, while to the refuge clinging; Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?...When tyrants tremble, sick with fear, and hear their death-knell ringing, when friends rejoice both far and near, how can I keep from singing? In prison cell and dungeon vile, our thoughts to them go winging; when friends by shame are undefiled, how can I keep from singing?” Robert Lowry, Bright Jewels for the Sunday School (New York, NY: Biglow and Main, 1869). Hymn 16.
Currently, Metz maintains that the eschatological God he emphasizes encompasses God’s role as creator. This does not seem clear, however. Schillebeeckx’s concern with Metz’s lack of specificity about God as pure positivity falls along this same trajectory. It would strengthen Metz’s assertion that there is still an outstanding future for the dead and that we are awaiting something totally new—a new creation—to end history if he were to stipulate that this comes from a God who is already the creator, the God of Life, who wills only good for what God has made. Also, by drawing on the idea of the *imago dei* in creation, Metz could establish an analogical link between divine and anthropological memory without being so specific that he would compromise his concern with God’s “otherness.” We remember because God remembers, and to be remembered by God is to be alive. So, one could argue, human memory participates in the work of salvation and re-creation because it participates in God’s memory. Furthermore, I would argue, being remembered becomes an ontological category. One IS because one is remembered. If God’s breath, Spirit, gives life initially, then to be thought or remembered by God could be a new form of life—consistent with what we know (i.e. to be alive is to change and become) but also different because the scars and wounds of sin are removed. It could be a resurrected life of becoming without limitations. This allows for an individual identity that is also fundamentally communal or relational in nature.\textsuperscript{735}

4.2 Feminist and Womanist Usage of Metz on Memory

The potential for expansion on Metz’s theology of memory is borne out by the work that other theologians have undertaken. Drawing on Metz’s pioneering theology of memory to explore facets of particular experiences of suffering, feminist and womanist theologians have used memory to re-member women whose stories are omitted in

\textsuperscript{735} This is entirely my own assertion. It again gestures towards a future project that interests me, namely anamnestic soteriology, or using the language of memory (both God’s and humans’) as a way of speaking about salvation.
scripture, tell the stories of women who survived in desperate situations, and revitalize the idea of a communion of saints. Only a few paradigmatic examples will be considered here.

4.2.1 Elizabeth Johnson and the Communion of Saints

Elizabeth Johnson’s recovery of the communion of saints’ potential for a modern faith begins by acknowledging, as Metz does, the contemporary situation and setting. She starts by addressing the Catholic Church in the United States. We are a population that has become: more urban; less “ethnic;” more accustomed to noise and distraction; less reliant on master narratives, heroes, and the family; more consuming; and less able to experience the divine in a positive sense—left only with the notion of mystery in a negative, empty sense.736 Perhaps most significant for our subject, Johnson concurs with Metz, that the dead are no longer felt to be present in modern western cultures. “In truth, people in this culture tend to sense as a rule that those who have died have truly disappeared from this world. They are no longer accessible to the living in any direct fashion….the sense of the dead’s presence has radically diminished.”737 Only the Hispanic culture within US Catholicism has resisted this trend of forgetting.738

The principal cause of this lacuna lies not just with modern culture, however, but with the inadequate way in which the communion of saints has been developed by the

736 Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 1998). 16-19. Johnson does note that many cultures are better at preserving memory and remaining connected with the dead, including cultures in Mexico, Latin America, Africa, and Asia. This is mostly due to the enduring value and sense of relationship with ancestors. See 13-14.

737 Ibid. 19.

738 Ibid. 21. There are many reasons for this, not the least of which is the popular Catholicism practiced by and sustained by the laity themselves. The work of Virgilio Elizondo is especially helpful on this point. See Virgilio P. Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise*, Rev. and expanded ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2000).
official church. It has often been laden with exemplars who seemed distant from the majority of people—especially women—and the process of canonization has taken little note of the *sensus fidelium* when selecting candidates. The result has been an ambiguous form of official remembrance in which “construals of saints’ memories and orchestration of their cults…could be used equally well by civil or ecclesial rulers to enhance their position or by those ruled to resist structures of governance that they found oppressive.”\(^739\) Saints’ memories have been simultaneously pacifying or nostalgic and dangerous. In order to function, however, Christianity needs to remain united as a community of memory. The central memory is that of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, and it must be used as an impetus to resist injustice wherever it is found.

Interwoven with this story are the stories of countless other women and men who have responded in vastly different ways to the Spirit’s call to discipleship. In a particular way, the stories of the world’s forgotten and unnamed resonate with the promise of the Crucified. Losing a sense of connection with these lives weakens the ability of the church to pass on gospel values and to empower the growth of constituted selves who live with “habits of the heart” in free and caring relationships. Retrieving the symbol of the communion of saints would therefore contribute to a mature spirituality.\(^740\)

But who and what exactly is remembered about these faithful people is critical. Christian feminism\(^741\) accentuates the fact that

the standard construal of the communion of saints in canonizations, liturgical feast days, exemplary lives, and practices of devotion has been a decidedly mixed blessing for women. While upholding a blessed destiny for human life and the world itself, and while offering the possibility of relationship with helpful

\(^739\) Johnson, *Friends of God*. 10.

\(^740\) Ibid. 23.

\(^741\) Johnson uses the definition provided by Sandra Schneiders: “Feminism…is a comprehensive worldview that engages in a critique of patriarchy as an essentially dysfunctional system, embraces an alternative vision for humanity and the earth, and actively seeks to bring this vision to realization. Christian feminism does this within and toward the tradition and community of the church, while feminist theology is that aspect of the endeavor that seeks to interpret the intelligibility and accountability of the faith through the lens of women’s flourishing.” Ibid. 34-35. See also Sandra Schneiders, *Beyond Patching: Faith and Feminism in the Catholic Church* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1991). 15-31.
ancestors in faith, the tradition about saints is pervaded with the values and virtues of the overarching system of patriarchy in which it took shape. As a result, women’s history of holiness has been largely erased from the collective memory of the church. Furthermore, even when they are remembered, exemplary women’s lives are interpreted as models of virtue that support the male-dominated status quo and cast women into submission.742

For this reason, women today have begun to remember in a different way than the official church has to this point. They do this by: engaging in feminist biblical research in order to “tease out the stories of women rendered invisible and silent by patriarchal texts”743; researching and recovering more exemplary women’s lives—making their own saints; and reshaping the dominant “narrative paradigm so that female perspectives are as central as male ones in a community of mutuality.”744 There is a unity and a strengthening that comes from remembering the women who have come before, a “bonding in memory with the suffering, victimized, creative, and victorious foresisters and foremothers in the tradition.”745 Johnson explains her approach through a biblical and historical consideration of the development of community between the living and the dead, united in God.

742 Johnson, Friends of God, 27, 28. “A simple head count shows that the number of biblical saints, martyrs, confessors, ascetics, and holy people of later ages honored in the church are overwhelmingly men...European, upper class, and clerics.” Especially telling is the fact that even the women saints who are included are often virgins or celibate so that “to be a sexually active woman renders one almost incapable of embodying the sacred.”

743 Ibid. 30.

744 Ibid. 33.

745 Ibid.
4.2.1.1 God’s and Human’s Memory of Friends

Rather than an elite group of patrons, Johnson affirms that all the faithful are saints.746 “The whole church is a communion of saints. Saints are all the living people who form the eschatological community, chosen and beloved, called, gifted, and sent by God.”747 This membership—sainthood—is conferred by the Holy Spirit and “not because of a state of life they choose or set of virtues they practice, not because of their innocence or perfection, but because of the gift of the Spirit who is given to all.”748 Held in unity and life by the Holy Spirit, even death is not strong enough to break the bond of communion that unites one to God and to the rest of the community.

In light of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, early Christians vigorously developed this vein of belief. In their experience, the power of the Spirit shaping them into a community of the friends of God in Christ was so strong that death could not break the relationship….If even death cannot separate persons from God’s gracious and compassionate love, no one who dies, then, is lost….If living persons shared in the life of God, and if the dead were likewise still clasped by the living God, then both the living and the dead were united to each other, forged into one community by the same vivifying Spirit….This belief, later expressed as the communion of saints, is not held because of logical deduction but as an act of hope in the fidelity of God….In dying, one falls into the hands of the living God and is quickened by loving-kindness which is forever faithful…the living and the dead are held in a community of life and memory centered in God.749

The community remembers those no longer present on earth because they all are one in God. God holds them both—the living and the dead—in existence.

746 The “faithful” need not all be within the confines of the church. “the communion of saints comprises all living persons of truth and love. The point to emphasize is ‘all’: all Christians as well as all persons of good will.” We also need to be aware of common holiness. “Recovering a sense of the holiness of the ordinary person is a first step in unleashing the symbol [the communion of saints] to its full, comprehensive scope.” Ibid. 220.

747 Ibid. 60.

748 Ibid. 59-60.

749 Ibid. 64-65, 70.
Far from being just a comforting thought, the unity of the living and the dead has important implications for action. God’s commission to those who have died still remains effective for the living.

The configuration of their [the dead’s] lives adds luster to the community and gives glory to God; their memory releases energy for discipleship…. Notice too how the roll call of the deceased friends of God flows into exhortation to the community currently alive on earth to find courage and heart for the journey….Here the faithful dead are proposed not as the objects of a cult, nor even as exemplars to be imitated in any one particular, but as a compact throng of faithful people whose journey Christians are now called upon to share and continue. Remembrance of their lives already lived, by the intrinsic power of memory itself, galvanizes the courage of those presently running the course. It is a matter of being inspired by the whole lot of them. *(emphasis mine)*

The aims of the living and the dead are still united. Our salvation is also theirs, and their struggles and unfinished projects are ours to resume. We are responsible to them and they are our cheerleaders. But how do we remember the women and men whose stories and lives of faith are not well preserved? If history eclipses the stories of the victims and those not in positions of power—a situation into which too many women throughout history and even today find themselves—how can we remember and connect with them?
The first step is an imaginative re-vivification of the fragments of women’s stories found in scripture. Johnson gives several examples of what such an approach entails.

4.2.1.2 Feminist Biblical Memory

Johnson advocates the retrieval of the ancient model of the communion of saints in which the dead were known as friends and companions “surrounding the living with lessons of encouragement” instead of being “heavenly intercessors before the distant

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*750 Ibid. 66, 68.*
throne of God obtaining good things for needy patrons.” In order to do this, however, we need to become friends with the women who went before. In many cases this means recovering and reimagining their stories or delving more deeply to get at the historical person behind the façade erected by official tradition.

Something that is important to note here, both in Johnson’s work as well as in the writings of Shawn Copeland that will be discussed subsequently, is that there is not a clear distinction maintained between memory and narrative. Dangerous narratives are presented as dangerous memories and vice versa. To remember is to remember the stories of women and so narrative and memory really become one. Metz, however, does maintain a distinction between the anthropological categories of memory and narrative (as well as solidarity), although they can never cleanly be separated from one another. One may wonder if this is an intentional departure on the part of Johnson and Copeland or not. I maintain that, even in Metz’s own works, memory and narrative are too intertwined to speak of one without the other and that this is not an intentional change but a natural development of the particular focus of Johnson’s and Copeland’s projects.

4.2.1.2.1 Recovery of Women’s Biblical Stories

Many women in scripture are only mentioned in passing or the import of their roles are ignored. Recovery of these accounts means listening again to their silence and their presence in the text with new ears. The story of Hagar is an example of the

751 Ibid. 79.

752 This typology of remembering different biblical stories of women in a more adequate manner than tradition has to this point is provided by Johnson in how she chooses to discuss examples.
recovery of the memory of a strong woman whose faith in God sustained her and her son, despite her position as a slave and an outcast from Sarah’s service. “From the first, Christian interpretation spun her story to the periphery of interest,” even casting her as the negative foil to the true heir of Abraham’s line through Sarah. But recent womanist scholars, drawing on the lived experiences of black women in the United States—in particular those experiences of servitude and surrogacy—have recovered Hagar. Delores Williams especially has reread Hagar’s story so that it “create[s] an immediate resonance among women whose lives are similarly laden with social and economic suffering. But far from her narrative being pressed into service as a law-gospel allegory, it is read to bring the injustice of her situation and the strength of her character to light.”

Hagar is no longer a stranger to a reader because one can imagine that she would understand and sympathize with the struggles of the “painful history of race relations between black and white women” just as black women today detect something of their own journey in Hagar’s wandering in the desert. Recovering this memory allows something of the true Hagar to be present with us now because she is not a one-dimensional character. Her

753 This often means reclaiming the stories of anonymous women who are unnamed in scripture and never actually speak for themselves. “Feminist interpretation reclaims from the silence and the invisibility of history those labeled ‘anonymous.’….Faithful amid countless hardships, hungry yet committing acts of untold existential courage, denied a voice, excluded from official circles of power and yet clinging to their God—these women have nourished the goodness that is the legacy of the world and church today. Remembering them gives rise to a surge of awareness, grief, gratitude, and hope.” Johnson, Friends of God. 156-157, 159.

754 Ibid. 142.

755 Ibid. 143. For an extensive and foundational examination of the recovery of Hagar and her story see Delores S. Williams, Sisters in the Wilderness : The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993).

756 Johnson, Friends of God. 143-145. It is important to note, as Johnson does, that women of many different cultures identify with Hagar for different reasons. “It seems that African-Americans focus on Hagar as a slave woman, the Latin Americans stress that she was poor, the Africans underscore the fate of Hagar in polygamy, and Asians emphasize the loss of cultural identity.”
complexity and courage are recovered. And it sets a precedence that challenges the church to “make room for the female, the foreigner, the one in servitude, the religious stranger—and the person who is all four—as a vital player in the history of humanity with God.”

4.2.1.2.2 Fixing Distorted Biblical Stories of Women

Some women, while present in scripture, have been unjustly misrepresented in the subsequent tradition of interpretation. No example of this is more egregious than that of Mary Magdalene. For too long in preaching and catechesis this “apostle to the apostles” has been remembered falsely as a prostitute or an especially sinful woman, noted more for her repentance than her role as the first witness to the resurrection in all four gospels.

Recounted in all four canonical gospels and in later extra-biblical texts such as the “Gospel of Mary,” the contributions of this woman to the ministry of Jesus, her fidelity during the crucifixion, and her leadership as first apostolic witness to the resurrection place her in a pivotal role at the foundation of the ekklesia. Yet centuries of patriarchal construal in literature, art, and preaching have depicted Magdalene primarily as a repentant sinner, most likely a prostitute, forgiven by Jesus for sins of a sexual nature. There is an ethical issue here, for the distortion that shifts the story of a leading apostolic woman into someone remembered mainly as a sexual transgressor is a deep untruth….It cheats women out of the dangerous memory of her discipleship….And it deprives the church as a whole of the prophetic power of the memory of women’s leadership.

Perhaps this is the most difficult memory to rectify because it requires first obliterating a false memory that is in the place of a true one. It is so great a scandal that one can

757 Ibid. 146.

758 Ibid. 146. This shows that memories can go beyond Metz’s distinctions of dangerous or nostalgic, crossing over into what Volf is concerned with as blatantly false memories. Here is the totally false memory of Mary of Magdala prevalent in western Christianity.

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scarcely begin to comprehend the scope. But simply considering the biblical text itself makes clear who this Mary is.

In essence, Miriam of Magdala is a first-century Jewish woman who speaks and acts in the power of Spirit-Sophia. A faithful disciple of Jesus during his ministry, first witness of the risen Christ, on fire with the Spirit of Pentecost, she is an apostolic leader who helps develop the gospel message and continues Jesus’ preaching once he is gone….she acts as a wisdom figure….a companion whose memory cheers them [women] with a dynamic flash of faithful friendship, spiritual insight, and self-confident leadership, and challenges them with a cautionary tale of how even the most outstanding witness can be bent by the pressures of patriarchal dominance.759

4.2.1.2.3 Reassessing Assigned Value

Johnson eventually comes to challenge, not only the omission or distortion of women’s depictions in scripture and in accounts of martyrdom, but also how women who are martyred are remembered in general. It is not enough to remember women without considering seriously the reasons for which those women are being remembered. When one considers the female saints that are officially recognized by the church one realizes that:

Traditional ecclesial interpretation presents female physical virginity as a phenomenon of the highest spiritual value. To protect their virginity from contamination by marriage…these young women…are remembered because they defended their virginity and because they suffered for it….underscoring the values of virginity and suffering as ways of perfection for women….The not so subtle message conveyed by this cache of stories is that women who exercise or enjoy their sexuality, or who do not suffer enough, belong on a plane of lesser holiness for precisely these reasons.760

The problem is that even the examples of female holiness that are remembered by the official church community do not apply to the majority of women and actually serve to

759 Ibid. 150.

760 Ibid. 151.
denigrate most women’s ordinary holiness. These memories, while not false in se (these women did die as virgins), are erroneously focused. The real point was not about sexual definition but the power of these women to define who they were for themselves. “Their refusal of marriage defies the conventions of ‘feminine’ behavior, witnessing to a wild power of self-definition.” It is time to remember them for who they really are and not domesticated versions of what later people decided they would be for us. What these women actually lend to us today is the spirit of being defined and directed by God and not social convention. It is because of the passion with which they lived, and not that they died, that they inspire and accompany believers still.

4.2.1.3 The Memory of Miriam of Nazareth

Mary the mother of Jesus is, of course, one of the most visible and lauded women in the Christian tradition. But even she—perhaps she the most!—is in need of reclamation for women today. For this reason, Johnson devotes an entire book to her.

761 Ibid. 153. This, in distinction to who they have become in our memories to this point. “They die, horribly, at the hands of imperial authorities. They are sanctified by church authorities, who eventually betray them by turning their struggle and their witness into pious cliché, fudging the causes of their martyrdom to such an extent that many contemporary Catholics…consider them an embarrassment, a throwback to nineteenth century piety; the less said, the better.”

762 Johnson makes, in regards to this, one of the most important points for me personally: the dead do not inspire us to die, but to live. The virgin martyrs “seized the opportunity to be protagonists in their own history….But why should death be the only option for women seeking self-definition? Holding this up as the ideal in all situations implicitly glorifies the torture and the murder while undermining women’s motivation to resist male predation….The destruction of women through ruination of their female bodiliness occurs too readily in the course of history, and needs to be resisted. The whole edifice of theological legitimation of suffering is at stake in this feminist metacritique of unjust suffering known by women, by poor people, by victims of racial prejudice, by all those who feel the boot of the oppressor on their neck. In alliance with the God of life, the ekklesia is called to resist rather than justify such suffering. If in the process life is taken, then the critical narrative of the struggle, far from promoting passivity, releases hope that energizes continuing resistance on the part of others. But terrible death need not be the only nor even the ideal road to salvation….survival [too can] be a holy choice.” Ibid. 155. I think this is the passion that Metz finds operative in memory of massive suffering. We remember the suffering and death so that life may prevail, both now and at the eschaton.
Mary has been used as a symbol in the tradition to the exclusion of her true humanity. She has at different times represented the ideal woman, the perfect disciple, the church, and even the feminine face of the divine.\textsuperscript{763} Unfortunately, this has been as harmful to women as it has been helpful.

When it comes to the subject of Mary, women’s judgment is decidedly ambiguous. On the one hand, the marian tradition has functioned negatively to promote an idealized notion of the obedient female self, a construal that legitimates women’s subordinate place in the church. On the other hand, the living remembrance of this woman can function positively to inspire the struggle for God’s compassionate and liberating justice.\textsuperscript{764}

Johnson rejects this symbolic approach in favor of returning to the historical woman herself. “Convinced that history is the arena of encounter with God, I do not begin, as does so much contemporary Mariology, by thinking about Mary as a religious symbol. Rather, I seek to understand her meaning as a particular person with her own life to compose.”\textsuperscript{765}

Returning to the historical Mary helps alleviate many of the concerns of feminists and Protestants both. She rejoins the rest of humanity in the struggles and sufferings of history instead of being perched on a pedestal somewhere above us.\textsuperscript{766} This is beneficial to all believers because Mary does have much to impart to us about faith and life, but it

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\textsuperscript{763} Elizabeth A. Johnson, \textit{Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints} (New York: Continuum, 2003). xiv. “She [Mary] has been symbolized to such an extravagant degree divorced from her own history—symbol of the maternal face of God, of the eternal feminine, of the disciple, of the idealized church—that approaching her as an actual human being surprises us….”

\textsuperscript{764} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{765} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{766} Ibid. xvi. “In a word, this proposal invites Mary down from the pedestal where she has been honored for centuries and rejoin us in the community of grace and struggle in history. Far from dishonoring her, this connection esteems her and the whole company of saints in one liberating way appropriate to our time and place.”
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also revitalizes her. She is someone with whom a modern believer can have a relationship without being concerned with idolatry or quaint and outdated devotions. Furthermore, she emerges as a woman whose memory can and should remain “dangerous” to dominant powers, rather than their accomplice.\textsuperscript{767} She is a poor woman—probably a refugee at one point—young and pregnant without a clear human father being involved, who nonetheless worries and works her entire life to protect and promote the ones she loves.\textsuperscript{768} “No submissive handmaid, her memory moves in solidarity with women everywhere who act critically according to their best lights to seek the well-being of those they love.”\textsuperscript{769}

Mary was dangerous in her own time because she defied cultural norms and structures of stability. “In the eyes of society her pregnancy is a scandal damaging to the social order since she had not lived with her husband. She is vulnerable to the sanctions of the law and liable to receive rigorous punishment.”\textsuperscript{770} But God is on her side, not that of the law and convention. “God acts as ‘one who sides with the outcast, endangered woman and child.’”\textsuperscript{771} Her memory testifies to the fact that God makes a preferential option for the poor, not just in the past, but here and now as well. Mary’s memory and

\textsuperscript{767} Ibid. 5. Mary has been used for widely different political purposes, “from right-wing imperial power to the struggle of the poor for justice.”

\textsuperscript{768} Ibid. 224, 243. According to Johnson, Mary shares a few key features with other extraordinary women mentioned in Jesus’ genealogies. “There is something extraordinary, irregular, even scandalous in their sexual activity, which places them in some peril, in view of which they take initiative thereby becoming participants in the divine work of redemption.” God sides with these outsiders.

\textsuperscript{769} Ibid. 221.

\textsuperscript{770} Ibid. 225.

\textsuperscript{771} Ibid.
real life challenges the judgments leveled by political and ecclesial authorities on women and all those marginalized because they do not “fit in.”

Johnson further re-reads the whole conception account as an assertion, not of Mary’s physical virginity or purity, but a faith profession that “Jesus would be God’s beloved child no matter how he was conceived….”

This allows the emphasis to be shifted from Mary’s sexual practice or state and onto her full and vital action with God to bring Jesus into the world. “Mary is a disciple, not in the historical sense that she accompanied Jesus during his ministry, but in the existential sense that she heard the word of God and acted upon it.” She is a witness to the fact that God calls everyone and works through the least. Her Magnificat actually provides a glimpse of the eschatological reversal of fortune of the powerful and the weak, the wealthy and the poor. God is a God that interrupts and disturbs, “remembering” those others forget.

Mary must also be remembered as someone who really lived like us. She was a married woman, with all the joys and trials of that state. Jesus’ birth was messy, painful, and not in a comfortable or safe place. Like so many poor women, she had no doctor. Furthermore, her daily life influenced immensely who Jesus was and would

772 Ibid. 236, 237. “The action of God does not have to replace or cancel natural sexual activity.” Johnson even quotes Joseph Ratzinger as saying “the doctrine of Jesus’ divinity would not be affected if Jesus had been the product of a normal human marriage.”

773 Ibid. 247, 250. This, Johnson asserts, makes Mary a prophet too. Instead of meek and passive submission, the announcement is Mary’s prophetic call. “Replete with angelic voice, fear and reassurance, message, objection, and sign, this is a story of Mary being commissioned to carry forward God’s design for redemption.”

774 Ibid. 266. “The approach of the reign of God will disturb the order of the world run by the arrogant, the hard of heart, the oppressor.”

775 Ibid. 281.

776 Ibid. 275-277.
become. There were times she did not understand him and was angry with him (e.g. his running away to the Temple when he was twelve). 777 And she was devastated by the death of her child. “She joined the desolate cadre of women through the centuries who experience the terrible human condition of outliving one’s child.” 778 She was a woman who did not have all the answers, yet she was actively engaged in questioning and making sense of her experiences. “No mindlessness here….hers is a life in the process of becoming—no final answers yet available.” 779 She was a woman imbued with the Spirit who is still present to us, with a whole host of witnesses. 780

4.2.1.4 Johnson and Metz

Johnson’s conception of memory, and its relationship to narrative and solidarity, is directly based upon Metz’s. 781 She relies heavily on his notion of dangerous memory and the way in which the suppression of memory leads to subjugation of people through loss of identity. “The pallid state into which the roster of saints has fallen can be measured by the degree to which the official memory of this company now fails to

777 Ibid. 284.
778 Ibid. 295-296.
779 Ibid. 278.
780 Ibid. 305.
781 Johnson, Friends of God. Chapter 9 is brimming with Metz’s influence, much of it explicitly attributed to him. Johnson adopts tout court Metz’s assertion that memory has an inherently narrative structure. 170-172. She also takes over the language of solidarity to describe the relationship between the living and the dead in the communion of saints. 176. “The narrative memory of the dead creates a solidarity backward through time that emphasizes the common character of human destiny and its unfulfilled promise.” But Johnson is quick to note that solidarity needs to respect diversity. Women of the past must remain people of their own times and cultures—not just mirror images of the one remembering.
function in this dangerous and life-giving way.” But Johnson takes Metz’s notions and applies them concretely to the specific circumstance of patriarchy, engaging the specific suppressed memories of women’s leadership in the church. Also, she emphasizes more than he does the idea of “real presence” of the dead to the living, in accordance with her recovery of the communion of saints. As friends, the dead are with the living in both the crises and ordinary moments of life. There is mourning and lamentation, but also joy and thanksgiving. “We, the remembrancers, will carry their lives along and mourn the darkness which destroyed them, to celebrate the goodness which endures.”

That goodness has not disappeared, partially because living humans remember the dead, but mainly because it is alive still in God. Johnson, whose main project has always revolved around the theology of God in particular, goes further than Metz does in discussing eternal life based on what Christians believe about God. The notion of an outstanding future for the dead—which she and Metz share—is developed through a discussion of the reinterpretation of Christian symbols. Discussing purgatory, Johnson affirms that “while the literal image of the doctrine disappears, religious scholars find it newly meaningful to think that human development is perhaps not frozen at death but that maturity is a continuing possibility,” offering even perhaps “the opportunity for personal repentance and reparation.” Drawing on the relational ontology of John Zizioulas,

782 Ibid. 168.

783 Ibid. 167.

784 Johnson poses the question this way: “do the dead live on only in the memory of the living or, in some unimaginable way, do they themselves also live anew by the power of the vivifying Spirit of God?...the communion of saints itself developed as part of the vocabulary of this hope....” Ibid. 181.

785 Ibid. 202. “Questions about death and life ‘after’ death are ultimately questions about God.”
Johnson affirms the possibility that it is God’s love and the love we share with others that holds us in existence:

Life and love are identified in the person: the person does not die only because it is loved and loves. In other words, since a person is essentially constituted by relation to God, then even in the shattering of death one is held in communion by this relation of Love, which always and everywhere creates new being. Love is the voice of eternity in our heart.

As Christian believers, we hope for something beyond death for those who have died because we remember who God has been, what God has always done—especially as related in scripture. “Death is not the end because God is faithful.”

But this hope of continued existence, based on God’s love for creation, must not become a way to soften the reality and horror of death or suffering. Neither Metz nor Johnson want hope for the dead to somehow diminish or mitigate our lamentation and mourning, action and transformation, in the face of unjust and premature death. One of the main reasons both Johnson and Metz are interested in human memory of the dead in the Christian tradition is because of its ability to inspire praxis. By preserving identity and maintaining the relationship between the living and the dead, memory, guided by God’s Spirit, transforms personal and communal structures and practices. “Practices of

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786 Ibid. 188.

787 Ibid. 204-205.

788 Obviously this is manifest in Metz’s spirituality of Suffering Unto God. Johnson acknowledges this by addressing the “dissolution scenario” discussed by Bartholomew Collopy, which seems plausible based on observation and modern science. Various theologies of the afterlife have always tried “to mitigate the fact that death cuts us to shreds. It finishes us so that there is nothing left….theology in our age should practice a conceptual asceticism….The resurrection of the crucified then appears as no natural fruit of death, but as a counterclaim that radically rebuts death while leaving it empirically unaltered. In this approach, there is no survival of death that would not be based on the most creative act of God.” Ibid. 200. Of lamentation she also writes: “there is no positive meaning in unjust radical suffering that destroys persons. We must take the full measure of its negativity, refuse to ignore or spiritualize or glorify it. Then this affliction becomes a live question that must be addressed to God.” Elizabeth Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2007). 66.

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memory then release hope for women as a group by breaking the patriarchal silence about the vast heritage of female witness, a speaking that becomes an element in reclaiming the center for women as well as men.”  

And this change goes beyond the present moment, inspiring a future that is different from what has been before.

“Remembering the great crowd of female friends of God and prophets opens up possibilities for the future; their lives bespeak an unfinished agenda that is now in our hands…."

Finally, Johnson also goes further than Metz in linking pneumatology with memorative hope for the dead. She crosses over into the language of sacrament in order to do this (more will be said on memory and sacrament in the liturgical section of this present chapter). Taking Jesus as the paradigm she affirms,

As the narratives of the Easter appearances make clear, henceforth he [Jesus] is present through the power of the Spirit in word and sacrament….faith in the creating God gave rise to the conviction that the Creator Spirit keeps faith with the beloved creature even in death….The future will be on a cosmic scale what has already happened in Christ.”

If the Spirit is Christ’s presence with us now, then those who have died are also still present with us through the Spirit. Perhaps this conviction is best expressed by the older terminology for the Spirit: the Holy Ghost. All the saints—that is, all people, and

789 Johnson, Friends of God, 169.

790 Ibid.


792 Ibid. 214-215. “Our solidarity with those who have died consists not only in a common history, origin, and goal, but in the same Spirit who flows through and enlivens all….Having arrived at their destiny, the living dead become our companions in hope.”
even creation itself—are sacraments of God, making God present, because the Spirit
dwells in all that God has created.\footnote{Ibid. 223-224. This should in no way be taken as an affirmation that God is all things. Johnson clearly is not an advocate of pantheism.}

The mystery of the incomprehensible God, whom no one has seen or can see, is
made present and active through created things in their own integrity that disclose
something of divine quality. This relation of participation is traditionally
articulated as the sacramental principle, a postulate that governs the spiritual
meaning of things far beyond the concrete seven sacraments. The world itself is
the primordial sacrament.\footnote{Ibid. 223.}

By sharing in the official Sacraments of the church one can say, therefore, that one has
not only encountered God, but all those who have died as well. Time is bent or even
transcended. It is actually in the context of the Eucharist, the Sacrament \textit{par excellence},
that Johnson utilizes Metz’s language of \textit{anamnesis}.

Saints on earth have access to the company of saints in heaven through memory
and hope. Memory is meant here in the sense of \textit{anamnesis}, and effective
remembering that makes something genuinely past to be present and active in the
community today.\footnote{Ibid. 234.} The primary \textit{anamnesis} of the Christian community occurs in
the sacramental action of the Eucharist, where the community makes memorial of
Jesus’ death and resurrection in such a way that it becomes a living, transforming
reality in the lives of those who celebrate it. Christian remembrance of saints is
linked to this action, making present the creative struggle and witness of so many
who themselves participated in this paschal mystery. Retelling their story brings
the subversive, encouraging, and liberating power of their love and witness into
the present generation.

Johnson adds to this something that Metz would no doubt agree with, but which he does
not explore at great length: the need to remember the individuals, as a community.
Especially in regards to victims of horrendous evil, we must “defy the tendency to reduce
victims to statistics and, by creatively preserving the identity of the dead, allow for
ceremonies of grief that ultimately awaken resistance to the cause of their deaths….It should give a voice to the dead.”\textsuperscript{796}

4.2.2 Shawn Copeland, Remembering Slavery and the New Subject

Shawn Copeland takes Metz’s theology of memory as part of her starting point from which to examine the authority of suffering in the specifically black experience in the United States. Copeland, as a black woman, brings the experiences of racism as well as sexism to bear in her theology. This is one of the main ways in which womanist theology differs from the more general category of feminist theology—the acknowledgement of how race and gender combine to form a double oppression.\textsuperscript{797} Its goal remains the same, however, insofar as it seeks the human flourishing of all, especially those most endangered and oppressed. It moves from particular experiences to make more universal claims.

Metz is explicitly mentioned by Copeland as an important influence on her project. In a volume dedicated to Metz, she writes of her contribution:

\begin{quote}
With this essay, I hope not simply to honor Johann Baptist Metz, whose intellectual and religious commitment has been of personal inspiration and encouragement, but to provoke theologians of all viewpoints and all racial-ethnic cultural backgrounds, particularly those working in the United States, to recognize the moans and musings and memories of battered and despised peoples around the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{796} Ibid. 248. One example of such a practice is the custom in Latin America of responding “presente” to the litany of saints.

\textsuperscript{797} M. Shawn Copeland, "Wading through Many Sorrows: Toward a Theology of Suffering in Womanist Perspective," in \textit{A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil & Suffering}, ed. Emilie M. Townes, \textit{Bishop Henry M. McNeal Turner Series} (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993). 111. "Womanist theology claims the experiences of Black women as proper and serious data for theological reflection. Its aim is to elucidate the differentiated range and interconnections of Black women’s gender, racial-ethnic, cultural, religious, and social (i.e., political, economic, and technological) oppression. Hence, a womanist theology of suffering is rooted in and draws on Black women’s accounts of pain and anguish, of their individual and collective struggle to grasp and manage, rather than be managed by their suffering.” But one must also be aware that there is a real tension between white feminist theologians and womanist theologians, given their history. For a good discussion of this see Jacquelyn Grant, "The Sin of Servanthood and the Deliverance of Discipleship," in \textit{A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil & Suffering}, ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993).
globe as what Metz has called a “subversive factor in our society, the ferment for that new political life we are seeking on behalf of our future.”

Clearly, Copeland shares Metz’s dedication to changing the present in light of the injustices of the past, remembering past suffering with an eschatological intention. Remembering itself can be an act of change and resistance. “For the enslaved community, Memory was a vital and empowering act. Remembering gave the slave access to ‘naming, placing, and signifying,’ and thus the recovery, the reconstruction of identity, culture, and self. Memory, then, was an essential source of resistance.” This echoes Metz’s assertion that the removal of memories of the conquered is the first step in stripping away a people’s identity so that they can be more easily controlled. Remembering who one is, is an act of defiance. The refusal to let another define who one is, is an act of faithfulness to God.

Copeland, like Metz, is also very concerned with examining how Christian theology and practice has aided powerful interests in exploitation—namely, the establishment and sustenance of slavery, racism, and sexism. She, like Metz, knows that memories, especially those of Jesus Christ, can function in both a pacifying as well as liberating way. Finally, Copeland shares Metz’s critical but ultimately supportive attitude towards modernity. There are still universal claims and the human “subject” is not yet extinct.

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800 ———, "Knowing Christ." 64-65. “Slavery was also deeply entangled with Christianity…. White ministers employed the hermeneutics of sacrifice and servitude in their proslavery arguments.”

801 Ibid. 65-66. The slaves were not fooled into accepting white people’s accounts of Christianity. “But, in spite of slavocracy’s eisegesis, the Bible came to occupy a pivotal place in the religio-cultural life of the enslaved Africans.” It could be used both ways.

The essential “dangerous memories” that Copeland deals with are those of women in chattel slavery in the American south—inherently narrative in form. “The Slave narratives allow us some access to the musings and memories of women and men who were well acquainted with hardship and pain. These narratives quite properly may be understood as a form of what Johann Baptist Metz has named ‘dangerous memories, memories which make demands on us.’” Telling these women’s stories of sacrifice, resistance, suffering, and often death help make them present still and provide inspiration for women of color who are currently fighting for themselves and the ones they love.

Several important features of these memories should be noted because of their correlation to Metz. First, Copeland relates memories of specific people, by name. She includes detailed accounts of individual experiences of suffering. She remains grounded in actual lived experiences. Second, these accounts of former slaves are remembered to inspire, call to conversion, and provoke questions. As with all massive, horrific suffering, behind the experiences lurk the questions of theodicy and anthropodicy. These memories are not intended to nurse hatred and pain, nor elicit crushing guilt from white people today, but to pose real and persistent questions of how Christians have been involved and can change injustices now. Third, there is wisdom and resistance that comes just from remembering what has been utterly lost. Lamentation is worthwhile in itself. There are scars that people carry forever, which remind them of what God does not intend, and gives a vision of what the eschatological future might be. “The old slaves knew that we

“Professor Copeland…subscribes to the critiques of modernity that have accumulated and complexified over the last forty years or so in various political and liberation theologies, but she is not a ‘postmodernist.’ She stays attached to the universal of a common human nature. She retains notions of freedom, hope, and progress, though she reinterprets them. Her approach is not to reject the universal, our common human nature, just because in fact it has for so long been identified with the ‘white, male, bourgeois European.’ Her approach instead is to reject modernity’s dominant discourse, its ‘no’ to all the others, which has rendered them the dispensable, forgotten, or subordinate objects of history.”

803 Copeland, “Knowing Christ.” 61. Here is an example of what I mentioned in an earlier section on Johnson, that both she and Copeland seem to combine the categories of memory and narrative—which Metz keeps separate. Perhaps this is due to the fact that, for Metz, these remain only anthropological categories while Johnson and Copeland already (I would argue) make a shift to including a theological notion of God’s memory.
cannot overlook affliction and loss and that the pain of such suffering lasts. Indeed, enslaved women and men wept inconsolably for the loss of children, parents, husbands, and wives, nor did they forget the massive public oppression of their enslavement.\textsuperscript{804}

One commonality among the slave memories (all of which are memories of Christian slaves, as far as this writer can discern) that Copeland relates is the sense that Jesus is a fellow sufferer. But the memory of Jesus’ death and suffering is not an historical event, removed from the slaves’ present. These memories are anamnestic—transporting the slaves so that they are truly present at the crucifixion and likewise making Jesus truly present in their own tortured reality.\textsuperscript{805} But here Copeland actually steps beyond Metz’s notion of anamnesis in a strict sense. Traditionally, for Augustine and for Metz, Gutiérrez, and Paul Ricoeur too, anamnesis has been making the past present. But Copeland, based on the lived experience and narratives of slaves, introduces reciprocity to it. Not only is the past present now, but those in the present are joined with the people suffering in the past. There is an added relational aspect to memory when the past and present seem to share in one another, the way friendship is reciprocal and alive instead of static. Especially evident in their Spirituals, “the enslaved folk pour out an empathy for Jesus that transcends the limitations of time and space. Jesus stood with them in their sufferings, they stood with Jesus in his.”\textsuperscript{806} In remembering both the slaves and Jesus’ suffering today, we are present with them on their crosses, just as they lift us up in the continuing struggles for life now. This imposes a great responsibility on we who live now. We must both resist the injustices still perpetrated in order to make the world

\textsuperscript{804} Ibid. 77.


\textsuperscript{806} Copeland, "Knowing Christ." 73.
better for the future (i.e. help God’s Reign begin now) while doing whatever we can to make sure the sufferings of the past are not in vain. Of course, nothing we can do can fix what happened to the victims, but we are responsible to them by the authority of what they suffered and the love we have for them still.

The victims of history are lost. But we are alive—and we owe all that we have to our exploitation and enslavement, removal and extermination of women (and men) of color….Solidarity mandates us to shoulder our responsibility to the past in the here and now in memory of the Crucified Christ and all the victims of past history. 807

Acting in the awareness of responsibility to the past, still present, leads to what Copeland calls “dark wisdom.” “They [the enslaved people] were sustained by a dark wisdom: the story of Jesus is their story, the suffering of Jesus is their suffering, the vindication of Jesus is their vindication.” 808 We see through their eyes anew the injustices that endure. They impel us to embark on a new journey to set free the captive, heal the wounded, and oppose injustice. This is why Copeland proposes that poor women of color become the new subjects of theology. 809 Displacing the Enlightenment “subject” that was implicitly assumed to be a white, bourgeois, male, European, Copeland affirms the dignity of the human person and the value of the humanum by seeking it where it is most neglected and endangered. In doing so, she draws upon Metz’s concepts of dangerous memories (and narratives, really), but she adds reciprocity within anamnesis, which emphasizes the solidarity and friendship between the past and present in a way that Metz had not previously done. I would argue that Metz could not have made this move, largely because of the strictly anthropological nature of memory and narrative in his work. The

807 ———, "New Anthropological Subject." 42-43.

808 ———, "Knowing Christ." 71.

809 ———, "New Anthropological Subject." 28-29. “Once the humanity and realities of poor women of color are moved to the foreground, new questions begin to orient Christian reflection and anthropology….These questions seek to understand and articulate authentic meanings of human flourishing and liberation, progress and salvation. They have foundational, even universal relevance for the faith of a global church....”
fluidity between the past and present relies upon God and God’s memory as a facilitator and guarantor of a relationship beyond space and time.

4.2.3 Memories of Abuse and Trauma: Johann Vento and Flora Keshgegian

As Miroslav Volf’s critique pointed out in the last chapter, Metz does not engage in any meaningful way the research in the social sciences regarding trauma and memory. Metz himself chose to bring his personal trauma of losing his friends before the church community rather than taking it to a psychologist or therapist. This choice seems to influence his work, contributing to a type of “blind spot” where this research could be addressed.\(^\text{810}\) Two feminist scholars, Johann Vento and Flora Keshgegian, take Metz’s theological work on memory in this direction, specifically by considering the journey of survivors of violence and sexual abuse towards wholeness and new life.

Johann Vento starts with Metz’s notion of dangerous memories because “it expresses what I believe to be one of the most important tasks for theology in the face of the problem of violence against women: theology must be a praxis of saving victims, past and present, from the obliteration of their subjectivity by the ‘conversation of the victors,’” —a phrase by which she understands specifically “the patriarchal image of women as appropriate victims of violence…”\(^\text{811}\) Violence against women has been so

\(^{810}\) Flora A. Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories: A Theology of Healing and Transformation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000). Of her book and project, Keshgegian says “I imagine Metz would be suspect of the project of this book because it presumes that we can learn something about how liberation and transformation work by attending to these so-called secular disciplines [history, social theory, or psychology].” 142. I am not sure one could substantiate this, given Metz’s eagerness to engage philosophy and any other discipline that presents itself. Just because he has not gone in these directions does not mean he finds no value in such a dialogue. Metz’s actually does not have any inherent problem with psychology, just when people use it to skip too quickly past the properly disturbing nature of what they have experienced.

accepted in modern culture that it no longer disturbs us as it should. This is a type of cultural amnesia, Vento maintains, drawing on Metz’s vocabulary.

The memory of the suffering victims is needed to restore the sense of outrage at what has been ruined and lost and to allow for a praxis of resistance to “the monotonous victoriousness” of violence against women….Our immersion in a culture that provides the conditions for violence against women represents a particular form of cultural amnesia…[which] has formed in us a “moral callousness” regarding the violence itself and its victims. Because of this callousness, we have lost our ability to feel the outrage appropriate to the phenomenon of violence against women and therefore to be in solidarity with victims.812

Vento focuses on the particular suffering of women, including “pornography, rape, and battering” as well as the attitudes that allow for these to be normalized: “ignoring or trivializing the prevalence or severity of crimes such as childhood sexual abuse, rape, and battering, understanding these as primarily private issues, blaming the victims, and glorifying images that link sexuality and violence.”813 Like Metz, Vento advocates the public acknowledgement of abuse that has, for too long, been considered private. Confining issues of abuse to the domestic realm has allowed public policy and political intervention to remain useless, not addressing the problems as thoroughly as they could. The victimization is not acknowledged as a societal problem as well as a personal one. It is a form of minimization to claim that only a few “sickos” or “sociopaths” engage in the abuse of women instead of the violence against women being linked to the wider hegemony of patriarchy.814 Telling the stories of abuse and victimization publically interrupts the myths of denial. They “bring discomfort to the comfortable in the process of giving voice to the voiceless and making visible what has

812 Ibid. 80.
813 Ibid. 82-83.
814 Ibid. 83.
been erased,” in order to inspire transformative action because we will first “recognize
the loss and confront the full pain of it.”

Overall, Vento remains very faithful to Metz’s theology of memory and
interruption, as well as the recognition of the authority of suffering, linked to the
memoria passionis Jesu Christi. She emphasizes the importance of hoping for the dead as
well as the living, crossing the boundaries of the present’s preoccupation with itself and
progress. “Communities dedicated to preserving the memory of the suffering of the dead
communicate to women that violence done to any woman at any time is a cause of
outrage and a source of sorrow for the community.”

Also, she points to Metz’s theology of “Suffering unto God” as a good example of
the way in which theology needs to approach experiences of trauma. They cannot be
integrated smoothly into theologies (nor psychologies and social theories for that matter,
according to Metz) that try and explain or give justification for why things happen.
Violence against women especially stands as a radical experience of evil that remains a
question before God. In order to heal, women need to recognize the full horror of what
they have experienced and mourn their loss.

Metz’s mysticism of suffering unto God presents us with a theological stance
toward suffering which allows for mourning and resists the glorification of radical
suffering. It counters the tendency in victims themselves, and in well-meaning
others who try to assist them, to find a redemptive meaning in their suffering, to
see it as a necessary part of discipleship, or to subordinating their need for well-
being to the duty to suffer….Metz’s radical questioning of suffering and the
questioning of God about suffering keeps the focus on the unacceptability of
victimization and guards against resignation to it.

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815 Ibid. 87.
816 Ibid. 91.
817———, "Violence, Trauma, and Resistance: A Feminist Appraisal of Metz’s Mysticism of
Vento does, however, acknowledge the limitations of Metz’s mystical protest of Suffering unto God for facilitating the full recovery of women from trauma. This, she also notes, is not part of Metz’s project. He is not attempting any therapeutic advising or resolution.\textsuperscript{818} Quite the contrary. He wants to keep the disturbance present. “Metz’s mysticism of suffering unto God is a necessary but probably not sufficient category in our reflection on the suffering of victims. It may be that something more than this cry of suffering unto God is needed.”\textsuperscript{819} It is to this need that Flora Keshgegian turns. She both draws upon and criticizes Metz’s theology of memory as inadequate for reforming one’s identity after trauma.

Keshgegian, as the child of survivors of the Armenian genocide, knows about memories’ power to establish and maintain identity, as well as to protest continued injustice (e.g. the denial by Turkish officials that the genocide even happened).\textsuperscript{820} In the face of overwhelming evil, the fact that someone remembers the victims and what happened is critical for survivors and the dead alike. It is as if remembering is all that can be done for the dead, so the living do so faithfully. But the memories also establish a new praxis, a new way of living in the present, which can resist and attempt to change the sources of past woe. This moral or ethical imperative is often what is passed most definitively to subsequent generations after the one who endured the initial trauma. “The remembering of past suffering is for the sake of a present ethical intent. Remembering is not meant to enshrine a memorial but to point to and affect present action….remembering lays claim to the continuing redemptive activity of God into which we are called as partners.”\textsuperscript{821}

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\textsuperscript{818} Ibid. 19.

\textsuperscript{819} Ibid. 21.


\textsuperscript{821} Ibid. 25.
Metz’s theology obviously is very influential on her thought and Keshgegian remains in continuity with Metz’s theology of memory in several ways. First, she does advocate memory as both a way of preserving identity and resisting future injustice. To this end, she also recognizes the importance of listening. “In the beginning is silence….We are called to enter this silence as witnesses. We are bade to listen attentively to the words of those who have not yet been heard.” Metz affirms this listening too as the first step for political theology. Both also recognize the importance of mourning and lament the loss of a public space for it today.

Second, Keshgegian recognizes the unavoidably political and public nature of what is remembered, by whom, and on whose behalf. She acknowledges the ambiguity of memory, as both an aid and an impediment to recovery from trauma. Metz too highlights the difference between dangerous and nostalgic memories. For neither of them is memory an absolutely positive thing. It can be used in a myriad ways by anyone. But the ambiguity that Keshgegian acknowledges is also distinct from Metz’s because she chooses to take a much more post-modern route with it. She embraces relativity and a constructed notion of truth to a far greater degree than Metz would be comfortable, which will be discussed shortly.

Third, remembering is always both an individual and communal action for Metz and Keshgegian. This implicates the Christian community in remembering the “right” memories—the stories of the victimized, but also the hope and vindication promised in Christ—in the correct manner. The reverse side is also acknowledged by both scholars:

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822 Ibid. 21.

823 Ibid. 139.

824 She does acknowledge her debt to Metz on these points. Ibid. 136.

825 Ibid. 208.
Christians as a community, and not just via individual representatives, have been part of the injustice and victimization of people. It cannot claim innocence.

Fourth, Keshgegian advocates for a new level of comfort with uncertainty, with a world that is interrupted and fragmentary. “There is no true certainty among those who remember suffering, only a learning to dance amid the tremors, to move with grace and hope….it is only by remembering in the face of the danger that new life can be fully claimed.”

Metz too urges Christian political praxis that is constantly aware of the possibility and need for interruption. Security, stability, and certitude are all desires that result in and from the blunting of the sharp apocalyptic-eschatological edge to Christianity.

Keshgegian does, however, break with and criticize Metz’s notion of dangerous memories. A few of these critiques have merit. First, she notes that the term “dangerous” is itself ambiguous in Metz’s theology. “He uses the term in an evocative way, almost as a rhetorical device: to say a memory is dangerous is to say it disturbs us and makes demands on us.” But she identifies four ways in which the term is used: in connection with the dead and vanquished; as a way of describing concrete memories of suffering and freedom; as a way of evoking eschatological hope; in relation to the specific yet universal memories of Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection.

826 Ibid. 23.

827 “In the end, I have come to question the adequacy of the term ‘dangerous memory,’ to hold the complexities of remembering for salvation.” Ibid. 124.

828 She claims six main criticisms of Metz that makes his theology of memory “not…practically effective for victims.” Ibid. 140-143. The ones I think she cannot substantiate are “the valuation his approach gives to suffering” and “his exempting Christianity from ideological bias.” Metz does not give any value to suffering in se—this is, in fact, what Johann Vento likes about his theology of memory.

829 Ibid. 149. “Herein lies another ambiguous use of the term ‘dangerous’: it is used in reference to dangers to memory and dangers of memory.”

830 Ibid. 137.
these revolve around the cross—the ultimate experience of pain and loss—without sufficiently providing hope. This neglects the fact that, to survivors of trauma, random irruptions of memories of violence are a profoundly negative thing.

Danger and interruption are seen as good things; they correlate with Metz’s perspective on the value of apocalyptic understandings of time and religion. In and through danger is the possibility of redemption, which is more rescue than transformation. Metz offers little elaboration, however, on how danger is experienced or understood…. such danger is not good. Traumatic interruption brings back terror and pain so immense that they have to be blocked from memory. Such return causes its own suffering…it is in itself not redemptive.832

Second, she argues that Metz only focuses on memories of suffering, not memories of resistance, survival, and renewal. His “dangerous” memories do not provide enough grounds for life affirmation and connection—errning by going too far on the side of disruption without leaving anything for survivors to draw on in re-membering themselves and their relationships. “If all that is remembered is the suffering and loss, then those who remember are still caught in the victimization.”833 She makes this criticism based on her lengthy study of “the works of trauma theorists and those social theorists who are keenly attuned to the effects of violence and the workings of power.”834 Her analysis of childhood sexual abuse survivors, Jewish and Armenian survivors of genocide, and the black descendents of slavery in the US bolster her criticisms.

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831 Ibid. 137-138. Here is also a great explanation of how Jesus’ memoria passionis is both specific to him, yet shared by all who suffer. “Because Metz understands all memories of human suffering to be, in some sense, part of Jesus Christ’s suffering, he uses the term memoria passionis to refer to human suffering. That participation in Jesus’ suffering gives human suffering meaning, structure, and a place in God’s ongoing care for the world. The cross represents God’s solidarity with all who suffer so their pain is never forgotten, but retold in the story of Jesus.” This is also tricky, however, because Metz does not try to explain anything about suffering or its meaning in se in his theology. This is the direction Keshgegian wants to move with it though.

832 Ibid. 143.

833 Ibid. 121.

834 Ibid. 30.
While she concurrs that traumatic memories need to be confronted and not forgotten in order for healing to happen, she cites the trauma researcher Judith Herman’s discussion about coming to a new ability to live after trauma: “The work of reconstruction actually transforms the traumatic memory, so that it can be integrated into the survivor’s life story.”

Flourishing and fullness of life in love now is what the goal of remembering must be, not just a constant state of agitation, albeit one that leads to redemptive political praxis.

Although I understand Metz’s motivations and his fear of enthroning any future resolution that ‘forgets’ the past, I think his emphasis on the remembrance of suffering might well reinforce the hopelessness many victims feel. Metz is wary of pointing to any…evidence of the resurrection….Yet for those who struggle for life, who seek to honor the living, there is danger in not committing to concrete historical achievements. Those who have been victimized yearn for remembrance of more than suffering.

Finally, Keshgegian concludes that Metz does not give a voice to the victims themselves, but attempts to speak for them. One manifestation of this is that Metz, while emphasizing narrative, includes very little narrative in his theology—with the exception of his own experience in the Second World War. “He wants to grant them voice and insists that authority belongs to those who suffer, but only as long as they are victims, only as long as they are suffering.”

This returns to the second issue—that only victimization has a place in Metz’s theology. Solidarity, Keshgegian asserts, needs to be based on more than victimization. Metz does remain concerned more with the least

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835 Ibid. 41. She is drawing directly on Herman here. For more detail see Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1997).


837 Ibid. 140.

838 Ibid. 154-155. “To offer solidarity with victims is to suggest that it is their victimization that elicits our witness….We enter into ‘solidarity’ for the sake of life/ This practice of solidarity is grounded in incarnational thinking. It contrasts with other theological approaches that emphasize following Christ as an imitation that leads always to the cross. Solidarity is most properly a relation of empowerment through presence, alliance, partnership, and advocacy.”
than with those who have begun to heal. Or perhaps it is more accurate to note that he is concerned with those who have never been given a chance to get that far in history. Once one begins to heal, one no longer is at the bottom of history’s heap. One has gained enough subjectivity to even begin the healing process. The radical critique and edge is maintained by him through concentrating only on those who are most in danger of being forgotten as subjects. Furthermore, the last two criticism leveled by Keshgegian are addressed by Gustavo Gutiérrez, which supports the collaborative potential noted at the start of this chapter between his theology and that of Metz. Gutiérrez explicitly speaks about joy and about letting the poor speak for themselves. Furthermore, God’s memory, when understood analogically, can be a way of speaking about the “victims” as more than static recipients of evil action. If, as I will propose, God’s memory is life-restoring, then the “victims” still have potential, joy, and fulfillment beyond what they suffered in history. They are no longer defined principally by what was done to them but by their relationships of love and friendship, which still endure.

Keshgegian also goes further than Metz down the post-modern path.\textsuperscript{839} For instance, she affirms that what one remembers or finds in history is determined by one’s interest, hence “all history is a construction.”\textsuperscript{840} If one wishes to find victimizations, then one tells stories that reveal this. If one looks for stories of empowerment or resistance, those are the ones that one will retell. This also relates to the notion of truth. To say that a memory is “true,” in her estimation, does not mean a claim to anything absolute. “The reality for most survivors who remember toward healing and transformation is that…they come to an understanding of truth, not as certainty, but as complex and ambiguous

\textsuperscript{839} Metz would, in fact, deeply oppose this move. He has consistently criticized the move to “postmodernity.” Appealing to God’s memory would actually give him some traction in such a disagreement with Keshgegian because then there is some guarantor of truth, goodness, and subjectivity.

\textsuperscript{840} Keshgegian, Redeeming Memories : A Theology of Healing and Transformation. 95.
knowledge. They also realize that there are few absolutes about good and evil.”\footnote{Ibid. 52.} Later she states that “the ‘certainty’ of memory is grounded in a commitment to life and empowerment.”\footnote{Ibid. 125.} Towards the end of her work she also adopts more the language of power and its uses, which she attributes to Foucault.\footnote{Ibid. 148, 155.} She seems to support the idea of a self that is only a construction—not a fixed subject.\footnote{Ibid. 158.} “The relationship between narrative and ontology is processual and mutually constitutive. Both are conditions of the other; neither are \textit{a priori}.” Such narratives ‘make identity and the self is something that one \textit{becomes}.”\footnote{Ibid. 157.} Here Keshgegian is quoting the work of sociologist Margaret Somers as part of her argument. For a full citation see: Margaret R. Somers, “The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach,” \textit{Theory and Society} 23, no. October (1994). 618.

One notices that Keshgegian also focuses almost exclusively on the survivors and spends minimal time on speaking about the dead. She agrees that we hope something for the dead. But she is not interested in saying any more. “Ultimately, the purpose of remembering and of witness is to expand the narrative for the living.”\footnote{Keshgegian, \textit{Redeeming Memories : A Theology of Healing and Transformation}. 122.} This comes largely from the fact that she does not share Metz’s concern with the dominance of the exchange system or the commodification of everything—which are inspired for him by the early Frankfurt School. Keshgegian is more concerned with survival in the face of patriarchy and power structures that are set up to increase only the agency of those who already have it. She, like Volf, is also primarily dealing with and integrating memories of
one’s own suffering whereas Metz is focused on memories of other people’s suffering. This might explain some of the differences in approach. One requires or demands something different for one’s own healing perhaps than one has a right to demand from someone else who has suffered (e.g. that one forgives or that one finds a way to integrate the trauma in one’s identity).

One of the most promising developments of memory from Keshgegian is using memory as a way of discussing Christology and soteriology. Like many feminist writers before her, she questions the redemptive cause and effect relationship of suffering and death that traditional soteriology has employed.847 “Jesus was not born only to suffer and die.”848 Instead, she directs her formulation of soteriology to Jesus’ participation in a community.849 “He lives on in the community of resurrection, making life possible again and again. He is present even now among us through our remembering of him and our being re-membered through him.”850 Ultimately salvation lies not in the cross or resurrection exclusively, but in every moment of Jesus’ life that affirmed living, love, and connection—even in and through death.851 Here she alludes to a way in which human memory can participate in the divine action of redemption and resurrection. It is along these lines that I want to continue in my research. More will be said about this in the closing section of this chapter.

847 Ibid. 168-175.
848 Ibid. 165.
849 Ibid. 178-179.
850 Ibid. 165.
851 Ibid. 182, 184. “If the memory of Jesus Christ is to be redemptive then it must help the victimized and all of us remember our lives, re-member our lives, to include love and power and life-sustaining connection….In a very real way, Christianity needs to …decenter crucifixion and resurrection toward a redeeming memory more inclusive of Jesus’ life and the history of God’s people.”
Ultimately, one feels that Keshgegian ends up quite far from Metz. She does not want to focus on remembering the dead, but healing the living. Also, she embraces postmodern discussion far more than Metz does. Keshgegian also notes the polyvalent use of the term “dangerous” in Metz’s works. Metz, interestingly, runs into a similar problem with Marcuse and some of the Frankfurt School, where it is unclear to whom the memories might be dangerous—the victims or the victimizers. In light of her concerns, I would recommend Metz be more specific and consistent about what “dangerous” memories mean in his theology. What does it mean that memories are dangerous, to whom, and in what capacity? Furthermore, Keshgegian’s criticisms that Metz only remembers victimizations and defeat without remembering resistance and agency is something that Metz, in dialogue with Gutiérrez, can effectively address. By appealing to God’s memory one can still be outraged and motivated to change the current public order without leaving the victims in their misery. Although our historic action can do nothing directly to compensate them, the “victims,” are still living as dynamic individuals with potential in God’s living memory of them, which means they are more than they suffered. They are capable of love and relationships, still present with the living, and therefore there is something yet-to-do-determined in their stories. Here Keshgegian’s interest in discussing soteriology without glorifying suffering may again be able to intersect with Metz.

4.3 Liturgical Expansions of Metz’s Memory

Metz’s theology of memory has transcended systematic theology and plays a significant role in Bruce Morrill’s formulation of liturgical theology. Political and liturgical theology have more in common than one might initially expect. “Over the past few decades in North Atlantic countries two types of theology have emerged which look to the concrete circumstances and practices of contemporary Christians and wider society
as primary sources for their theological work—liturgical and political theology.”

Morrill shares Metz’s concern with specifying how Christian discipleship requires both a mystical and political component in order to fully enter into the mission that Christ has left believers in the world. The fact that the church (specifically the Roman Catholic Church) has not always made this connection, but has celebrated the sacraments while remaining supportive of oppressive leadership and political oppression, signals to Morrill the need to make the dangerous memorative element in worship and ritual efficacious.

Morrill draws on Metz and anamnestic memory as a way of challenging current liturgical celebration—especially the celebration of the Eucharist as the sacrament of memory *par excellence*—to be more interruptive and demanding of Christians in industrialized western counties. Morrill agrees with Metz’s analysis of contemporary western industrial Christianity as being complacent and abetting bourgeoisie religion’s privatization of belief, forgetfulness of suffering and injustice all around, and loss of eschatological expectation for something new. He wants to reconnect Christian worship and prayer with political action for justice in the world. “The performance of liturgical worship...far from being an end in itself, is for the purpose of revealing our entire lives as an ongoing act of worship, of glorifying God by sharing in God’s creative and redemptive action in our world.” This means primarily being in solidarity with the poor and suffering.

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853 Ibid. 58-59. “An excessively legalistic, rubrically-oriented, and often magical focus on the physical objects of sacramental action has greatly hindered Catholicism from making connections between sacramental practice and the other sensual and social-historical dimensions of experience.”

854 Ibid. 21-26.

The Christian life of faith is a life patterned on Christ’s God-given mission of redemptive solidarity with a suffering world. If what sustained Jesus of Nazareth in his mission—especially as its social-ethical implications caused increasing conflict with religious and political authorities—was his mystical relationship with God, so too Christians sustain lives of solidarity with the suffering by their mystical practices of prayer and liturgy. Hence, the centrality of eucharistic worship as the weekly revelation in word and sacrament of ourselves and our world as the ongoing story of God’s redemptive presence and action among those who suffer.

This starts with the proclamation of the word as well as the celebration of sacraments. Referring to the Passion Narratives as well as narrative accounts of suffering in South America, Morrill writes: “My concern is with how the contemporary, well-educated, socially secure North Atlantic believer is able to read texts that testify to horrific human suffering…so as not to be immobilized by their terror but, rather, to be moved with a desire to encounter God in suffering humanity.” It is clear to him that the stories of human suffering parallel the passion account of Christ, his main example being the testimonial resistance literature *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala.*

Morrill uses this text as a way of considering the questions of truthfulness and memory, as well as the solidarity-producing result of memories, told through narrative.

The truthfulness of memory, for Morrill, is less about historical accuracy than conveying the lived reality of a horrific event in order to engender solidarity among the community of readers. Solidarity for change is more important than connecting specific facts with a certain individual witness. Truth transcends the capacity of a certain person

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856 Ibid. 39.
857 Ibid. 37.
858 Ibid. 41, 51. Published in 1984, “I, Rigoberta Menchú…quickly gained status as the premiere example of ‘testimonial literature’ within the discipline of Latin American studies…” which also became a paradigmatic example of “an original type of writing emerging from marginalized peoples, a form of ‘resistance literature’ whereby the subaltern narrator gives personal testimony to the suffering, injustice, and struggle experienced by her people so as to gain sympathy and support for their cause of liberation.” Morrill later identifies “the obviously open use she makes of biblical imagery and texts to persuade the reader—at least the Christian reader as a subset of potential Northern sympathizers—to join in solidarity with her people’s cause.”
to remember because the credibility of what is remembered in the narrative is bolstered by the multiple attestations. The veracity of the account depends, not just on objective facts, but also on the trust the members of the community have in one another’s ability to convey their shared lived experience. In this way, Morrill departs from Volf’s concerns with absolute historical accuracy and the remembrance of wrongs by a single victim. For Morrill, reading these “texts of terror” actually has a performative, almost liturgical, aspect insofar as the text—while conveyed perhaps in the first person—is actually a communal remembrance.\textsuperscript{859} Hence, while a singular person may not have experienced or witnessed each event or aspect of the memory told in narrative, it is true insofar as the community, as a whole, did experience it in various members. Remembering itself creates a unity, a community, whose memory is true by virtue of its multiple attestations—conveyed as one voice.

This leads to tensions for many modern readers and scholars, as echoed too in recent biblical scholarship regarding the veracity of the gospel accounts. Participants in the debate introduce “pairs of opposed categories: literal truth versus larger truths, fact versus fiction, collective memory versus history, narrative versus legal testimony, narrative truths versus historical truths, strict veracity (of modern autobiography) versus embroidered facts (of testimonials).”\textsuperscript{860} Is it not possible from an ethical perspective, Morrill asks, to condone the oppressed’s usage of any means necessary to elicit the proper response of solidarity from people who are in positions to help them? Is that not also an aspect of truth in memory?\textsuperscript{861} The problem, of course, is that this could lead to an

\textsuperscript{859} Ibid. 47, 48. “Scholars had from the start acknowledged and discussed the genre of Menchú’s narrative as testemonio in terms of her speaking in the first person singular as witness to a reality she shared in the first person plural….Rigoberta’s narrative synthesized a range of her people’s experiences much wider than her own individual or personal ones.” This, Morrill maintains, is true for how the gospels came to be and function.

\textsuperscript{860} Ibid. 49.

\textsuperscript{861} Ibid. “If the genre of testemonio is what marginalized, oppressed peoples need in order to elicit help from those who enjoy, even take for granted, the quotidian privileges and powers they experience as rights
oversimplification of the “good” versus the “bad” actors in history when, in fact, the truth is more complex. Where does one draw the line in doing something for the greater good? Could one slander or twist the actions of an individual for a greater good?

Here Morrill again draws on Metz and his discussion of the Marxist observation that all knowledge and truth are “interested”—that is, influenced by one’s own convictions and concerns. Metz’s interest is in preserving the subjectivity of all, starting with the most endangered—the dead—before God. But for any Christian reader (including Metz), knowing the gospel account of Jesus’ own passion forces us to look for certain things in the text, influenced by “the biblically traditional association of truth with an interest in universal justice, justice for the living and the dead.”

Memories are dangerous, therefore, insofar as the interests they represent are resistant to the dominant and exploitative powers in society.

Morrill takes this question of truth and memory much further than Metz does. He applies what he has concluded to the gospels. If Christ’s passion sheds light on and even provides a framework for telling and hearing other narratives of suffering and resistance, then might not those same narratives shed light backward on our reading of Jesus’ passion? And just as these narratives may not conform to literal history, yet remain true, might the gospel stories likewise be more about “prophecy historicized and not history remembered,”

In this way, our memories of human suffering also become dangerous to the ways of remembering the passion that neglect their political and social implications—especially in liturgy.

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on the basis of their economic and political locations, then must not we who read such texts, while doing so critically, not maintain a position of respect for the strategies their narrators find essential to conveying the ‘truth’ of their situations?"

862 Ibid. 53.

To realize that the Son of God shared the fate of millions of forgotten victims summarily disposed of in the shallow graves of history is not to cast aside faith in Christ the Savior but, rather, to deepen our longing for him. What we need today are readings, liturgical and otherwise, that bespeak the sheer incomprehensibility of the scope and depth of human suffering and the ongoing desire for God to meet us therein. This is a religion, to echo Metz, much more of questions than ready answers, but one not lost or without direction. It is a praxis of faith requiring theology to rely increasingly on “the supposedly weak categories of memory and narrative,” thinking less in “systems concepts” and more in “subject concepts.”

We need to allow ourselves to be confronted in our neat rituals each Sunday—especially in the Eucharist—by the real horror of the suffering other in our midst so that our acclamation of the Easter resurrection remains a challenge to bring life to those suffering crucifixion now.

But Morrill, like Metz, holds fast to the conviction that both prayer and mysticism need to be the foundation for a liberating praxis in the world. This is not, however, a matter of individual, private action grounding public, communal ones. Prayer itself is a form of solidarity. “Those who venture into the practice of prayer, however, discover that they ‘are not alone; they form part of a great historical company; prayer is a matter of solidarity.’”

The Eucharist, as the pinnacle of communal prayer in the church, is the moment where memory, narrative, prayer, and action must meet. Morrill draws explicitly from Metz here, who “indicates…awareness of the eucharistic liturgy as the premiere ecclesial tradition for both expressing and empowering faith as a practical imitation of Christ in solidarity with the living and the dead…[the] ritual location of Christian memory.”

Morrill detects even greater potential in Metz for a liturgical turn in

864 Morrill, “Reading Texts.” 57.


866 Morrill, Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory. 67. He also affirms that “Metz’s formulation of the faith as dangerous memory was ‘ultimately founded on liturgical celebration.’”
“Metz’s more recent thought” in which he has coined “a German neologism to articulate this biblical tradition of memory: *Eingedenken*, which Matthew Ashley translates as ‘remembrancing’.”

As Ashley explains, Metz constructs this word on the basis of the German adverb “in remembrance of,” the very phrase used in the institution narrative of the Church’s Eucharistic Prayer, “Do this in remembrance of me” Metz argues that this cultic action of the Church constitutes the key way in which Christianity has preserved its distinctive form of memory.

There is a sense in which all memory—specifically the dangerous memories of suffering—are linked for Christians to Jesus’ passion in such a way that they are grounded and kept alive by the remembering that happens through participation in the Eucharist. Part of my future project will consist in flushing out this connection, attempting to discern how the saving sacrament of the church relates to the saving action of Jesus, connecting the living and the dead. More will be said about this in the conclusion of this chapter.

Morrill already begins to go in the same direction that interests me, drawing on the work of Alexander Schmemann, who ties God’s memory and human memory together in the celebration of the Eucharist. Relating Metz and Schmemann is the premise of his book, originally his dissertation, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory*. Schmemann adds the additional piece of God’s memory, in a liturgical sense, to Metz’s

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anthropological memory, which is clearly grounded in the Eucharist. Here there is a most fruitful conversation.

“Without any exaggeration one can say that the commemoration, i.e., the referral of everything to the memory of God, the prayer that God would ‘remember,’ constitutes the heartbeat of all the Church’s worship, her entire life.”869… Schmemann argues…that genuine participation in the liturgy entails the people’s entrance into the very memory and life of Christ, a recollection of “both the past and the future as living in us, as given to us, as transformed into our life and making it life in God.” Schmemann’s (liturgical) theology of memory is utterly Christological in focus. Christ stands at the juncture of the divine and human capacity for memory.870

This memory is efficacious. It is ontological insofar as God’s memory is tantamount to God’s creation and giving life in the beginning.871 Human memory, therefore, becomes a part of redemption or salvation because it joins itself with God’s life-giving memory.

Morrill’s explanation of this, in conjunction with Schmemann, warrants reproduction in full.

God’s memory, like all else “in” God, is reality itself; thus, God’s activity of remembrance is the source of humanity’s creation and sustenance….Sin is nothing other than human forgetfulness or “obliviousness” of God, an ontological state of fallenness from God. Through the incarnation, Christ—“perfect God and perfect man”—saves humanity by bestowing divine remembrance of all the created order and offering, in turn to God, “perfect human remembrance of God,” exercised as “love, self-sacrifice, and communion with the father.” The very essence of faith, therefore, consists in believers’ memory of Christ….Rather than being mere knowledge about Christ, such remembrance is a participation in life everlasting.872


870 Morrill, Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory. 142. Schmemann, The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom. 130.

871 Morrill, Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory. 144. Schmemann, The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom. 126. “Schmemann explicitly labels his understanding of memory as both ‘biblical’ and ‘ontological.’ The latter term basically indicates his conviction that memory is “lifecreating,” that memory is the means by which God creates and sustains life in humanity.”
Metz provides the vital explanation of the praxis that ought to overflow from our participation in God’s memory. He holds the mystical and political in necessary tension. Because God is not bound by space and time, as people are, God’s “memory” is distinctive. All are alive to God, all things are present. By participating in liturgical remembrance and allowing our memories to be swept up into God’s, we encounter the “dead” as alive still. Their claims are not claims of the dead, who are no longer present, but the claims of those who have suffering and died, but are still present. This is an eschatological meeting. Here again is the idea of the Communion of Saints that Johnson speaks about, albeit with a slightly different vocabulary.

4.4 Assessing Metz and Others’ Usage of Metz

After considering the distinct ways that scholars like Johnson, Copeland, Vento, Keshgegian, and Morrill have drawn on Metz to formulate their theologies, it is helpful to assess what impact (if any) their usage could have upon Metz’s own theology of memory. First, I think that Johnson and Copeland already assume in their theologies an analogical use of God’s memory. Memory is not just an anthropological category, which is one of the reasons that they both slide so easily between dangerous memories and narratives, while Metz keeps them distinct anthropological categories. Perhaps an exploration by Metz of the exact relationship between memory and narrative, highlighting if and why it is important to keep them distinct, is in order to make clear whether or not these two scholars’ usage is faithful to his. If, as I propose, Metz draws upon the work of Gutiérrez on God’s memory, then perhaps this distinction is not crucial after all. It seems to me that none of these scholars are attempting to speak about memory without drawing upon

872 Morrill, Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory. 143. Schmemann, The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom. 125, 128.
narratives—even if the narratives are being expressed in different genres, such as liturgical action, poetry, and songs. It is not clear to me in the end why a distinction between the two matters, especially if one draws analogically on God’s memory.

Another element that Johnson and Copeland, as well as Morrill, introduce to Metz’s discussion of memory might be a challenge to the traditional definition itself. Instead of memory being a “making present of the past,” these scholars suggest a reciprocal form of presence between the past and present. The past is present, but the present also participates in the past. This is not something that Metz has, to this point, explored, partly due to his reticence to encourage people to dwell in bygone eras instead of dealing with the troubles of the moment. But reciprocity can lead to change and not just pacification. If one is to embrace an analogical notion of God’s memory, then this reciprocity makes much sense. God, outside of the confines of time, yet still engaged with it, encounters all things as present. If we participate in God’s memory, then we too are “present” to things past and can, in some sense, join our hope and prayers with the pasts’. I think this is crucial for any efficacious relationship to exist between the living and the dead. Friendships are not healthy if they do not operate in both directions: support cannot flow only towards one party. This is in keeping with Johnson’s recovery of the Communion of Saints.

Furthermore, the connections between memory, pneumatology, and sacramentality that Johnson and Morrill make are also very valuable for Metz. Metz discusses the church as a bearer of dangerous memories, but introducing the Holy Spirit and the role of the Sacraments—especially the Eucharist—gives him a much-needed concretization for this discussion. Especially when faced with the reality of the church as
an institution that resists reform and change, even suppressing harmful memories of abuse by clergy that stand in willful opposition to the freedom and healing offered by the dangerous memory of Jesus Christ, there needs to be a way of speaking about the eruption of radical change and discontinuity of which Metz is such a proponent. The freedom of the Holy Spirit and the performative/transformative power of the Eucharist provide the opening for disruption that Metz holds to as the apocalyptic sting of the gospel.

Both Vento and Keshgegian (although in ways that vary in the degree of faithfulness to Metz) also provide means by which Metz’s concern for public and political change, inspired by dangerous memories of suffering, can gain traction. Public acknowledgement of abuse and suffering is vital, not only to preventing it from happening again, punishing wrongdoers, and changing the structures that enabled it in the first place, but also to allowing the survivors to flourish in the present. The dead and victims must not be forgotten or incorporated too smoothly into an account of progress or healing, but, if the living and the dead are held in reciprocal relationship by God’s memory, then healing now need not be a sign of forgetfulness but the reclamation or reorganization of the identity of victims who continue to live with scars of abuse. Metz can begin a dialogue with psychology while still bringing memories of suffering “to the church.” Metz, although concerned with preserving the subjectivity of the dead before God and humans, is not unconcerned with the living. After all, the living are the ones empowered to affect change now.

Finally, both Gutiérrez and Morrill’s theologies help Metz address the main objection made by Miroslav Volf, that human memories are not reliable. Gutiérrez helps
by linking human memory to God’s, which is absolutely reliable because that which is “remembered” analogically is actually absolutely present to God. There is no room for misrepresentation or forgetting when the memory is immediate. Human memory that participates in the divine memory is aided in accuracy by its awareness that it need not bear the full burden of accurate and exhaustive remembrance. Human memory only needs do its utmost to be faithful and fair, knowing that God is also aware of it all.

Morrill, in a different way, challenges the individual nature of memory and reliability. Memories’ accuracy actually lies with the entire community and not just one individual; therefore, the fallibility of any one person’s recollection need not discredit dangerous memories. In the end, communal memory merges with the divine memory through participation and transformation in the Sacraments.
Johann Metz’s theology of memory has given me a vocabulary to speak about my personal experience of evil. His work on memory resonates deeply with my conviction that, although someone has died before his or her time, that does not mean that he or she has ceased to exercise a claim upon the living. The fact that Metz’s own theology begins with a personal experience of loss and the death of his friends convinces me that we are trying to grapple with similar issues. In formulating a theology inspired by a major autobiographical experience, there is much that I retain from him.

First, I maintain an interest in affirming the subjectivity of all people before God, especially the dead. I agree with his analysis, inspired by Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt School, that history is often told by the victors. I also concur that people in modern (or postmodern) societies want to smooth out that which is disturbing. Loss and evil are downplayed because they make the young, healthy, fast-paced people uncomfortable. There is little public space for mourning or remembering that does not try and prematurely heal the wounds of injustice. Dangerous memories are narratives from those on the underside of history that interrupt and intentionally ruin the myth that all is exactly as it should be. Public, political action to change the structures of injustice presupposes that what is, is not necessarily the way things have to or should be.

I also embrace Metz’s affirmation that the church is a community that is capable of preserving and passing on dangerous memories, as well as aiding in the praxis that
arises from them. A community is necessary to preserving a memory, both because an individual’s memory is so fallible and fragile and because change is promoted by numbers. The notions of “public” and “political” presuppose a community. But with a community also comes the need to negotiate how decisions are made—as Jürgen Habermas indicates—but I share Metz’s concern for preserving more than procedure in making such decisions. Anamnestic reason, as the ongoing weight or influence of past experiences of suffering on our present choices, is something that I definitely live with and plan to incorporate into my theology.

Third, I embrace narrative and particularity as vital to allowing past suffering to remain authoritative. Experience and naming the actual people involved in their stories is key to solidarity with them and those who still live in situations in need of transformation. Although Metz is clearly and indisputably concerned with changing the present in light of the suffering of the past, what I find lacking in Metz is the explicit affirmation of life and hope now. This positive emphasis does not have to lead to escapism, forgetting, or being lulled into accepting the status quo. To live is disturbing too. That life and flourishing are still possible for the dead should inspire and impel the living to continue to work.

This is where the work of Elizabeth Johnson and Shawn Copeland are so important to my formulation of a theology of memory. Remembering those who have died as dynamic people, agents of change themselves, as well as victims, and capable of continued relationships with the living allows one to live now with energy and urgency. There is a reciprocal relationship between the present and the past, not just the past being present now. This is particularly important to me in light of Kate’s situation. She was
utterly alone as she died—without a kind word or warm hand to hold. But from the beginning, I felt that every time I remember her in the present, my love and concern for her could transcend time. I believe the love and efforts I make now in memory of her transcend time. I am with her in her suffering, as she is with me in my joys and sufferings. This is similar to Copeland’s description of the slaves feeling Jesus’ pain, just as they knew he shared theirs. Our stories are interwoven. We want to pick up where they left off because, ultimately, we all win or lose the race together.

In light of this, I hope to pursue a soteriology of memory, or perhaps what I can call an anamnestic soteriology. Vital to this is combining Metz’s theology of anthropological memory with a theology of God’s memory, such as that offered by Gustavo Gutiérrez. The analogical nature of speaking about memory in God is key here too, because human memory is obviously not enough. God, as Creator, is fundamentally outside of time and creation, just as God remains in relationship with them. So God cannot be said to “remember” in the same way that humans do. However, there is ample theological and biblical precedent for speaking about God’s memory. Although I cannot give an adequate account of the divine memory, I propose that it is life-giving and sustaining, and this is demonstrated in the resurrection. To be remembered by God means not only that one retains one’s history—will all the relationships that entails—but that one is given new possibilities and relationships. One lives truly: not as a static being (which is not really life at all, but death) but as a dynamic, evolving, person. To be remembered by God is to begin to live the resurrection.

Given the ontological status that being remembered by God entails, I want to explore what it might mean that the Father and Jesus never forgot one another. Although
there was no sign of God the Father’s presence to Jesus on the cross, Jesus’ final cries make it clear that he never for a moment forgot God. The resurrection itself suggests that God the Father never forgot Jesus either. That memory carried him through death into life. Jesus also never forgot us either. Whether it is in the promising of life to the thief on the cross next to him or asking for pardon for his executioners, Jesus remembered people. And the disciples and apostles, even down to the present, have not forgotten Jesus. Is it possible to speak about the Spirit as a form of memory, the connection between the divine and human that gives life? And if this is the case, is there a sense in which our memory of the dead holds them in life? Can our memory, sustained through the Eucharist, make the dead truly present to us and us to them? Is remembering in a thick and palpable way how we join in God’s work of salvation? What would this mean for how we live and act? Could the language of memory be used to reclaim and reconfigure problematic statements about sacrifice and atonement? The power, so to speak, need not be in the blood but in the unbroken communion.
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