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A Fearful Warning: J.B. Metz's *Memoria Passionis* in response to Western Culture's Discomfort with Dying, Death and Grief

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A FEARFUL WAILING:

J.B. Metz's *Memoria Passionis* in response to Western Culture's Discomfort with Dying, Death and Grief

A thesis by

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A FEARFUL WAILING:

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Western Culture's Discomfort with Dying, Death and Grief

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Johannes Baptist Metz's theological focus of the "awakening of memory," and specifically the connection of such awakening to the *memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis Jesu Christi,* as well as the opening to a new *narrative,* leading to *a freedom* for *praxis and mission* and finally, leading to *transformation*. This awakening can be a path that confronts the dysfunction of a death denying and avoidant culture, as well as one that challenges us to confront suffering of so many kinds, especially that of the poor and marginalized. Such a theological focus, in fact, has the potential to bring a freedom that gives *voice* not only to the grieving and all the suffering people of today, but also gives *voice* to the *victims of history,* allows for a new and truthful *narrative* of all of our beloved dead, especially the victims of injustice. In addition, this recovery has the potential to bring healing as well. Metz's theological themes address not only current social injustices but those of history as well and has a personal and individual element that can connect to those dealing with the loss of death. This healing and liberating effect of Metz's theological approach of "awakening of memory," and *memoria passionis* also has a potential freeing effect for the *voice* and *narrative* of the grieving and dying in our cultural landscape of denial and avoidance of the issue of death today.

Paul G. Crowley, S.J. Coordinator

DEDICATION

to

Lorie Ford,

My beloved spouse of almost forty years who has
walked the path of grief, recovery, and transformation with me,
and whose love I treasure above all.

to

Paul Crowley S.J.

My Director, who from the beginning, has shown me
compassion and understanding beyond measure,
unending patience, and has met my
starts and stops, struggles and failures with nothing but loving kindness.

to

Bishop Danny Garcia

My cherished friend and bishop who generously
provided the dedicated time I so needed.

to

Michael

For whom my heart aches and misses,
but who brings his abounding Joy into God's Kingdom,
and in mystery, accompanies me and my family still.

PREFACE

Like many an essay on suffering and death, this essay is rooted in personal experience, much that has inspired and will be reflected in the pages that follow. I will be asserting that the theology of Johannes Baptist Metz can be of help in addressing our personal and societal denial of death, and the constellation of issues that involves our facing its full and brutal reality, the suffering that accompanies and follows it, and the loss and grief it brings in its wake. Metz speaks eloquently of the importance of memory, a *memoria passionis* of the suffering and death of Christ reflected in our own lives and throughout history.

As I read these deeply penetrating texts by Metz, I was brought back to my own *memoria passionis*…

A police officer and Fr. Bernie were running up to my retreat room as I was walking down to the next Conference at the Jesuit Retreat House in Los Altos. It was June 6th, Saturday, about 4:00 p.m. Someone told me, "You must go to Kaiser Hospital in Walnut Creek…it concerns your son!" I had dropped off Michael at his sisters' apartment the day before. I would see him at the end of my retreat on Sunday with my other four children. We planned to celebrate the one-year anniversary of my ordination as a deacon. No one at the retreat center could tell me why I needed to go so hastily to the hospital… It was the longest drive I ever made. I cried and I "cried out" for fear, as I drove. I was scared and felt this strange foreboding that something terrible was on the horizon. I began negotiating with God anticipating the worst…It was difficult to see

through the tears. I arrived and was led at last to a "small room" in the hospital – I was told – I was being brought to the "Quiet Room!" All my treasures – my other four children and my Lorie, my wife, and a boyfriend and girlfriend, were "squeezed" into the "quiet room!" They all looked totally devastated as I began my litany with the same question: "Where is Michael?" "Where is my son?" "Where is Michael?" Then, I demanded – "I want to see Michael!" Finally, Lorie looked up at me and said through tears, and the saddest face I have ever encountered, "He's dead, Dave…." I wailed, I cried out – I violated every norm of the "Quiet Room." It was a cacophony and combination by all of us of the "silent cry" of which the theologian, Dorothy Söelle, speaks, and the verbal wailing that Elie Wiesel describes. And then I was brought in to see my son, Michael…. My life has not been the same since that day.

It is not a coincidence, I believe, that my last course work before undertaking this thesis was in a class offered by Dr. Julia Prinz in which I was first introduced to the work and theology of Johannes Baptist Metz. Metz's biography revived the memories of so many of conversations with my father, James Ford, about his experience of World War II, its suffering on all sides, the tragedy and grief of immense death, and the huge waste that he observed in war as a child of the Depression, his attempt to feed hungry, starving, German children as the mess-sergeant of his company, and finally his own cynicism regarding how nations and political leaders wrap their own agendas and ideology into war as they attempt to instrumentalize and manipulate public opinion. When I read Metz's heart-felt "memory" of such suffering I began to remember and be touched in my heart, not only for my father's suffering and memory, but my own suffering of my son Michael's death at age 19. And when I read Metz's reflection on

Auschwitz, I was brought to this time and place – this memory of "crying out" in a place intended for healing, where the very name of the room was meant to stifle one's cries. Michael's loss, sudden and unexpected and brutal, was followed by a catastrophic fire that took from us our home of twenty years and all that we owned. As if that were not enough, my dear wife suffered an accident that could have brought her near death.

Commencing my studies at the Jesuit School of Theology, I felt wounded beyond repair. Though open, I was unsure how to deal with all of this. My studies there made me quite aware of the important fact that all theology is *contextual* and so the introduction to Metz's thought, my introduction to Paul Crowley's book, *Unwanted Wisdom,* and my other studies began to resonate with the context of my loss and the start of a long journey to attempt to process and articulate those experiences in light of the insights of these theologians. Through loving companions who walked with me along the path of not only my own suffering, but toward what Metz calls "suffering unto God" – bringing all of those questions, cries and wailings to God and the study of God, has brought about an immense transformation in my life: my spirituality, my compassion for others, my sense of social justice, my sensitivity to the voiceless and marginalized, my work for the Church in ways I would have never imagined. It is indeed something I could not have accomplished in the old fashioned "American Way" – "pull yourself up by the bootstraps, set goals, move on, etc." That has not been my experience. It has indeed been the work of God and God's work in the accompaniment of so many professors whom I respect, cherish and admire and fellow students as well.

INTRODUCTION

The following study is divided into three parts with the hopes of moving from analysis of the current context, theological reflection in dialogue with Metz and other theologians and conversation partners to a praxis that poses suggestions for dealing with suffering and death in spirituality, liturgy and ministry.

In **Part One** will provide a review of what can be described as the problematic situation of death in Western contemporary society. While the genesis and for the most part, the writing of this thesis, has occurred in the days previous to our current worldwide pandemic of the novel corona virus, wherein the issue of death has come to the forefront all over the world, it remains to be seen whether anything has in fact really changed regarding the problematic denial, avoidance and overall distinctive discomfort with suffering, dying, death and grieving in contemporary Western culture. Some reflections will be provided in the Postscript on the pandemic and some of the challenges it proposes. Part One, however, addresses evidence from various areas that illustrate cultural shifts in the North American and European contemporary society that have made dying and death a taboo among us. The way we think about death, the rituals we use, how we use them and the ones we avoid because they make us uncomfortable, all point to dramatic challenges and problems in this area. This essay will examine economic, philosophical, and scientific contexts that have changed and altered how we deal with or avoid dealing with suffering, loss and death. Contemporary thinkers in our society such as the sociologist Robert N. Bellah and the philosopher Charles Taylor will be employed

to define the terrain around death and societal attitudes about dealing with it. In addition, exploration of how death and loss intensify the pain and grief of those left behind and the ways many have sought to cope in its wake will be examined.

Part Two will explore how the theological insights and themes of the German theologian, Johann Baptist Metz, address this problematic of death. This section will begin by examining the important and significant personal contexts of Metz's own life that informed and have greatly influenced his thought. Emphasis will be upon how this whole arena of suffering stands at the genesis and origin of the Scriptures of both the Jewish covenant and the Christian faith. This study will also provide an examination of crisis and trauma and select theologians' challenges to "enter into it" with consent. The hope is that this will provide insights and a lens to Metz's approach and the entire subject of the suffering we are examining. Underlying all of Metz's theological work is a sensitivity to the questions of theodicy regarding God's responsibility or involvement in the extensive history of human suffering and particularly death. Metz focuses on the Shoah, and the horrors perpetrated at Auschwitz and other camps as foundational for doing theology. All theology for Metz must be 'theology done in light of Auschwitz.' This essay will explore the key theological themes of Metz: the importance of the 'awakening of memory,' especially what he calls *memoria passionis,* the importance of *narrative,* the *suffering unto God,* his reflections on the *dangerous memory*, and other significant theological insights. These themes from Metz will be examined not only for the benefit of the victims of history, to the Gospel proclamation of social justice, but to the individual liberating force of these concepts for the grieving, who in the death

denying and avoidant environment of Western culture can contribute additional suffering and pain for those socialized to sublimate and ignore their grieving.

In **Part Three** will examine some implications for pastoral practice to which the theological work of Metz might contribute for a more effective pastoral addressing of this problematic denial and avoidance of death and consequent additional pain for the dying and grieving. I examine the reappropriation of the ancient Jewish as well as Christian tradition of lament; a reappropriation of the best in our Liturgical tradition of both the East and West; the examination of the gift of the Resurrection and how Metz addresses this area in his theology and its contribution to a new eschatological imagination; and further how Metz argues against our cultural bias for the 'myth of continued and on-going human progress' vs. an apocalyptic eschatology which Metz connects with the other themes in his systematic theology. Finally, we will explore how all this leads to a more authentic hope. Finally, a brief Postscript will address the issue of this thesis specifically in light of the recent emergence of the worldwide pandemic.

My thesis generally stated is that Metz's theological focus of the "awakening of memory," and specifically the connection of such awakening, to the *memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis Jesu Christi,* as well as the opening to a new *narrative,* leading to *a freedom* for *praxis and mission* and finally, leading to *transformation*, can be a path that confronts the dysfunction of a death denying and avoidant culture, as well as one that tends to confront suffering of so many kinds, especially that of the poor and marginalized. Such a theological focus, in fact, has the potential to bring a freedom that gives *voice* not only to the grieving and all the suffering people of today, but in fact gives *voice* to the *victims of history,* allows for a new and truthful *narrative* of all of our

beloved dead, especially the victims of injustice. In that it has the potential to bring healing as well. It is then, my thesis that Metz's theological themes address not only current social injustices but those of history as well and has a personal and individual element that can connect to those dealing with the loss of death. This healing and liberating effect of Metz's theological approach of "awakening of memory," and *memoria passionis* also has a potential freeing effect for the *voice* and *narrative* of the grieving and dying in our cultural landscape of denial and avoidance of the issue of death today.

PART ONE

The Problematic Situation of Death in Contemporary Society

The underlying problem this thesis attempts to address is the issue of death and dying, and the consequent pain of grieving for so many, that takes on a certain unique "problematic and distinctive discomfort," in the context of contemporary Western culture. Both philosophers and sociologists have studied and commented on how "changed" is the approach to death and grieving in the developed countries of the West, today, as compared with past experiences of death and grieving in earlier Western Christian cultures. This changed situation also spawns an additional form of suffering, understood as both a personal and a cultural phenomenon.[1] It is this particular suffering which will be the driving focus of both the question of a way forward, and how to address effectively this problem which is so very apparent in the contemporary developed western world of the North America and Europe.

For many how one approaches and experiences the death of one's beloved, whether friends or family, is significantly different than in even the immediate past. For example, from my personal recollection at the time of my childhood I recall the frequency with which my mother would gather us children together to go to the church for funeral vigils and liturgies where the bodies of our neighbors, relatives, and beloved

[1] Paul Crowley, *Unwanted Wisdom: Suffering, the Cross, and Hope* (New York: Crossroads, 2005). Crowley describes the natural, psychic, and historical forms of suffering, all of which are interrelated. What they have in common is a sense of irretrievable loss.

deceased were visibly present. It was a painful time where the community surrounded the grieving and shared their loss in the presence of the dead loved one.

In his book, *The American Book of Living and Dying,* Richard Groves, who has done much exploratory work with the stages of care-giving, dying and grieving, succinctly sums up our cultural bias today: "death is the enemy."[2] Margaret Mead, speaking to the "denial" with which our culture treats the subject of death, stated insightfully many years ago:

> *When someone is born, we rejoice,*
> *When someone is married, we celebrate,*
> *But when someone dies, we pretend that nothing happened.*[3]

The problem of death itself is becoming a taboo in contemporary Western culture, and the consequent suffering for all those confronting death – both for the dying and the grieving – brings to the fore the question explored in this thesis: How can elements of hope that are found in some elements of systematic theologies address this discomfort with death that haunts Western humanity and brings with it additional suffering? How can an approach of systematic theology help penetrate the silence and fear, of both those grieving the loss of a loved one, as well as the dying who experience this journey? Specifically, through the exploration of how systematic theology might address this contemporary problem will be to examine the elements of *memoria passionis* and eschatological hope offered in the theology of Johann Baptist Metz and asking how these

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[2] Richard F. Groves and Henriette Anne Klauser, *The American Book of Living and Dying: Lessons in Healing Spiritual Pain.* (Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts, 2009), 17.

[3] Ibid., 17.

elements of his theology address the suffering entailed in this cultural situation of death's denial.

Moreover, it is my thesis that addressing the pain of this unique suffering in which denial and avoidance play such a large culturally re-enforced part, Metz explores and offers a path and approach that can "break-through" the dysfunction of this extreme cultural discomfort with death. Along with other elements of his theology, Metz offers a way forward in his exploration of the "dangerous memory" of the passion and death of Jesus. The key to confronting the refusal to face death, and the suffering of the grieving, and of the dying, is found in a Christian eschatological hope that affirms the pain of the grieving, giving voice to those so marginalized, in a contemporary society that is afraid to confront death, and that addresses the fears of the dying and others in our society who are facing the reality of death. Historically, the Church offers the benefit of a communal approach so lacking in an individualist-dominated culture that contributes so much to the problem.

The Problematic of Death and the Silent Suffering of Denial in Contemporary Western Society

In his theological anthropology, Australian theologian Neil Ormerod makes the point that the cultural context of death today is very problematic. He speaks about this contemporary cultural phenomenon of how Western culture seeks to eliminate even the notion of death itself by the many euphemisms used instead of the word "death" in polite society. He also lists the many questions one confronts when thinking about one's own

death or experiencing the death of a loved one.[4] In contemporary Western society death is not allowed to be spoken of by name. It is said, he or she "passed away," yet even that phrase strikes some as too much. In fact, we so we often hear, he or she has simply "passed." Our language speaks in a big way of our discomfort with facing and dealing with the reality of death.

If emotional and psychological health advises to "confront reality head-on" – one cannot help but wonder what such "linguistic bromides" do to the hearts of the grieving. One can imagine them asking silently in their hearts, "does anyone recognize my pain and suffering?" And we can fairly ask, do such linguistic euphemisms make grieving even more difficult?

In an insightful book, Dr. Thomas G. Long, a Presbyterian minister and theology professor, and Thomas Lynch, a Catholic funeral director and nationally recognized speaker in his field, have written a very interesting, informative, and insightful book analyzing this denial of death and how it has created a very different and difficult existential reality for those who are grieving.[5] They question and critique this "changed

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[4] Neil Ormerod, *Creation, Grace, and Redemption,* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 174. In this chapter Ormerod explores the multiple questions that inescapably haunt the human heart and mind when we are confronted with the finality of death in beloved friends and family or the immediacy of our own death: Is there life after death?, Do the dead in some fashion relate to the living? How might there be consequences of reward or punishment after a life of virtue or vice, or is the universe "indifferent" to our moral actions or struggles? Ormerod explores as well, the underlying anthropological assumptions that tend to color our responses.

[5] Thomas G. Long and Thomas Lynch, *The Good Funeral; Death, Grief, and the Community of Care* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013).

situation" of the denial of death in contemporary society, showing that it is not only a cultural change in attitudes toward death, but how funerals and rituals have changed or even been eliminated as a result. These changes in our approach to death, they argue, have an impact on the experience of grief and on striving for meaning at that liminal moment when each human encounters either one's own death or that of others.

We all have experiences that validate this change in our cultural evolution in this important area of death. Another personal recollection illustrates this evolution well. In a neighborhood in which we lived for over twenty-five years and raised our five children, I will never forget a most puzzling experience. Neighbors across the street directly from us, Ken and Margaret, were an older retired couple and also our friends. Ken would come over to our home to watch us as we put in a yard, planted plants, painted and improved our new home as the kids grew up. I joked with my wife quietly, as when we might be planting new ivy on the bank of our front yard, quietly chuckling, "Here comes the supervisor." I knew Ken's story. He had been a railroad man. I had met his children and watched he and his wife grow old quietly together. Ken eventually died of cancer. Sadly, and unbelievably when Ken died there was nothing. There was no service, no memorial, no gathering, no prayer, no memorial card, no sharing of stories, and no obituary. Perhaps, in the privacy of their family some of these rituals were performed. But there was no gathering arranged for friends and neighbors to accompany Margaret and their family on this journey of grieving. Ken was the gregarious person while Margaret was extremely private. We all tried to reach out and yet at the same time respect her wishes for privacy. This was a shocking experience for us. But some people almost seemed to "shrug" it off as if to say, that is what people do today. This example

demonstrates the kind of "denial and discomfort" with regard to dealing with the loss of death that I am treating here.

The Economic, Philosophical, and Scientific Contexts to this New Problem of Death

The peoples of the developed West today live in a unique fashion, perhaps different than all the cultures of past history. With the economic development coming from capitalism, even with its many failures, a level of prosperity has arisen, including the development and usage of both preventative and curative medicines, such that peoples of the industrialized West have an average life-span that has out-stripped all of history. It is not uncommon to see both women and men living from their eighties even into the nineties and one-hundreds. Since the end of World War II, war itself has come to seem more distant an experience for most of us, often fought by proxies and incorporated into the normalcy of everyday life in those places where war is not in fact being waged. Thus, the combined life-span and experience (illusion?) of peace in these nations have made death a much less looming occurrence on the life journey compared with ages past.[6] The combination of this phenomenon as well as a very developed secularism, now not only splits the realm of church and state (an overall good development of the Enlightenment), but also aggressively seeks to drive all religious content and faith from the public sphere, as we see in parts of France and now in the Quebec Province of Canada. All the above, combined with a philosophy that might be called scientific positivism (the current epistemological lens) has challenged and in certain ways replaced the cultural support of Christian faith and its tenets that were traditionally found in the

[6] It is important to note that these lines were written before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

West. The ancient faith that has supported the cultural development of the West as its very foundation is now seen as just one of many epistemological options.

In all of the above, along with the dropping numbers of practicing believers (for many and varied reasons) there has been a development in which death—the great final experience humanity has to face, and which, despite our longer lifespan, one never escapes—has been pushed to the sidelines. Secular and atheistic humanity or even those whose faith is tenuous, or who are seekers, do not have comfortable or adequate words with which to deal with death. The word "death" itself is forbidden (as in "he died"), replaced by euphemisms, such as "she passed." And, in the context of scientific knowledge, even some believers of a more fundamentalist bent, struggle with addressing death in traditional terms. Neil Ormerod explores this issue of the scientific knowledge of evolution and how it poses a problem for Christians who cling to a premodern Christian understanding that sees death as tied to punishment for sin, a concept that Paul presents in his Letter to the Romans (Rom 5:12).[7] Obviously modern scientific evolutionary theory clearly sees evidence of death as always being a part of all biological creatures even before sin entered the picture.[8] Thus the scientific context of evolution posits a challenge for both fundamentalists and thinking Christians on how to navigate the linkage between death and sin, if there is one, and knowing it is not one of causality and punishment. Ormerod discusses those possibilities by exploring some of the theological positions of Jesuits Karl Rahner and Ladislaus Boros, as well as in the

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[7]Ormerod, *Creation Grace, and Redemption,* 178-179.

[8] Ibid.

writings of Joseph Ratzinger, explaining that in general, one's attitude toward death can be seen as the definitive response of a human being's orientation toward God, an orientation made as a fundamental option in one's life.

In *Eschatology and Hope*, Australian theologian Anthony Kelly analyzes the multiple cultural contexts regarding death in the modern world. There is the cool, scientific acknowledgement of death as part of the cosmic system, which is how the eco-system operates, renews itself, and continues. He also speaks of the unique contemporary phenomenon wherein death is seen under two guises: (1) The global mega-death experiences or threats by either a natural cause (earthquakes, fires, etc.) or a man-made cause (thermonuclear bombs, biological warfare, tsunamis, forest fires, etc.). (2) There is also the media generated news, continually broadcast, of the death of "others" via the television, cinema, and constant reporting of dramatic and tragic deaths (Columbine, Virginia Tech, and Newtown, etc.), whereby we become "death watchers, voyeurs of what has become obscene."[9] Kelly says, "The cult of death-as-catastrophe buries our sense of common mortality."[10] Kelly's astute analysis concludes that this is what happens when a culture such as ours lacks any public language to speak of death, and thus, "its imagination takes an oddly morbid turn."[11] The cultural context thus does not

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[9]Anthony Kelly C.Ss.R., Eschatology *and Hope,* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 96-97.

[10]Ibid., 97.

[11]Ibid., 96.

leave much comfort for those without faith, and in fact, can make it very difficult even for those who do have a strong faith commitment.

In, his magnum opus, *Religion in Human Evolution,* sociologist Robert N. Bellah speaks to the problem arising from secular humanity's condition and indirectly points the way forward to a robust address of this situation. In his analysis of Bellah's book, Richard L. Wood reviews some insights of Bellah that speak directly to the challenge of the current culture in this scientific age that focuses so much on scientific data, evolution, etc., and how religion speaks to it. Two citations illustrate his analysis of Bellah's insights. First off,

> Bellah begins by exploring "daily life," the world of work, of striving, of meeting needs and providing for the future. Much what we value in human existence occurs here; yet if not relieved by other realities, daily life also represents a "dreadful immanence" which saps the human spirit.[12]

Here in his analysis, Wood correctly points out how Bellah articulates the insight that while many of humanity's occupations are valuable experiences that lead to success in the world of work, profession, and the other elements of daily living, it is in fact, "not enough." Humanity's spirit is longing for the "*magis*" – the "more." One can refer to this more as transcendence. Wood notes that while Bellah addresses elements of art, science, and other creative pursuits, beyond daily living, that open to humanity's "transcendental" desires, he finally arrives at the predominant role of religion in this arena.

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[12] Richard Wood, "From the Beginning: Robert N. Bellah's *Religion in Human Evolution*, *Commonweal,* (October 11, 2011), https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/beginning.

> While showing how art, science, and other pursuits help us transcend the burdens of daily life, Bellah goes on to note that religion represents the predominant way human communities have traditionally escaped this dreadful immanence. "Escaped" is not quite the right word to describe the "very this worldly transcendence" …that religion can promote. At the heart of such transcendence lies the mystical experience of God (or, for secularists, the cosmos). Such experiences permeate not only the consciousness that is rooted in our embodied selves **but the symbols and stories that help us see and find meaning in the world, and, more abstractly, the concepts that help us make sense of it.**[13] (emphasis mine)

Richard Wood, commencing with Bellah's insight, reverberates with the precise point that Johann Baptiste Metz explores at the heart of this problem of death: not only the ***memoria passionis,*** but its deeper meaning i.e., the dangerous memory of Jesus Christ, in his life, death and resurrection captured powerfully in narrative. Bellah also points to sign and symbol and their important retrieval and role in navigating the loss of others in suffering and death. This will be examined later in this when we explore the "Pastoral Implications," of how sign and symbol speak to liturgy—and the possible retrieval of our rich and ancient tradition in ministering in this area to the sick, dying and grieving. This can be a key pastoral implication, leading to a more effective ministry in healing for our people which complements and flows from the insights of Metz that we explore in Part Two.

In *Religion and Human Evolution*, Bellah reflects on the framework of Karl Jaspers and what he called the "Axial Age" (see his text, *The Meaning and Goal of History*) to explore the development of several great traditions of meaning and religion

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[13]Richard Wood, "From the Beginning: Robert N. Bellah's *Religion in Human Evolution*, *Commonweal,* (October 11, 2011), https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/beginning.

that emerged in the first millennium (BCE). While not the direct purpose of his study, his book touches upon and offers insights into other facts that support the "disconnect" with death in our current age in the society of the West, in comparison to the ancient traditions that emerged during this same Axial Age, viz., Ancient Israel, Greece, China and India.[14] In the earlier part of his work, Bellah explores tribal religion and their part in the production of meaning, which he treats in greater depth in the great traditions mentioned above. He focuses on three tribes: from South America, the Kalapalo in central Brazil, the Australian Aborigines (the Walbiri), and from North America, the Navajo.[15] Bellah drew out of his exploration of these tribal religions how many have survived via an adaptability that made it possible for their meaning system to remain alive within the modern age; even when their ceremonial patterns are practiced within the context of newly-held beliefs.[16] While at the beginning of his text he offers a fourfold grounding of religious representation—unitive, enactive, symbolic, and conceptual—he demonstrates how these tribal religions and the cultures they informed were organized around ancient systems that still "speak to modern humanity" today and contain a "wisdom" from which contemporary people can learn much. Bellah's conclusion touches on the dynamics of truth and meaning that reinforce *narrative* in these very ancient and current religions. In his systematic theology, Johann Baptist Metz sees the importance of *narrative,* along with *memory,* in a way that speaks to the problem of death today. Bellah's work supports

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[14] Robert N. Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution,* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).

[15] Ibid., pp. 159-174.

[16] Ibid., pp. 173-174.

Metz's insight in his systematic theology that focuses on memory, specifically *memoria passionis,* and *narrative* as the focus and fundamental grounding of what he calls the "cultural capacities" that underscore the development of religion and religious expression overall, and in the great "axial religions." Among many topics, he gives fundamental place to the issue of death.

We can also see in Bellah's insight the importance of ritual, particularly musical ritual, and the value he ascribes to it for modernity, thus providing a backdrop to what we will explore in the third section of this thesis, Pastoral Implications.

The philosopher Charles Taylor, in his magnum opus*, A Secular Age,* takes up the large issue of our secular society in the West, and among many issues in that regard, he addresses the changes religion has taken in this society and culture over the last few centuries. Taylor takes a deep historical approach, and he notes that while contemporary Western secular society has developed new departures, changes, in which older forms of religion have been eliminated or destabilized, newer forms have arisen. Like Bellah, Taylor recognizes in religion, a way in which humanity grapples with not only transcendence but death as well. Taylor recognizes how religion offers an often strong connection of death with meaning, even if the culture struggles with a theocentrism. He recognizes that the modern secular culture in the West has seen the collapse of the sense of the eternal for various reasons. His statement below is very revealing:

> We don't know how to deal with death, and so we ignore it as much and for as long as possible. We concentrate on life. The dying don't want to impose their plight on the people they love, even though they may be eager, even aching to talk about what it means to them now that they face it. Doctors and others fail to pick up on this desire because they project their own reluctance to deal with death onto the patient. Sometimes the dying will ask that their loved ones make

> no fuss over them, hold no ceremony, just cremate them and move on; as though they were doing the bereaved a favor in colluding in their aversion to death.[17]

Taylor captures very well how contemporary Western culture, in response to its aversion to death, seeks to avoid and ignore it all together – or as much as possible. As one example, most would agree, that death is a conversation stopper at cocktail parties. In the same citation, Taylor's insight into how the dying deal with this issue is most revealing. It is quite startling to read his insight that in fact, the dying, their doctor, and their loved ones often all – are "colluding"- in their separate but nevertheless "common attempt" to avoid the issue, the painful reality and the emotional, spiritual, and other consequences of death. Then Taylor addresses the goal and costs of such collusion and avoidance.

> The aim can be to glide through the whole affair, smoothly and as much as possible painlessly, for both dying and bereaved, an ideal portrayed (with some ambivalence) in the film *Les Invasions Barbares.* The cost is a denial of the issue of meaning itself, something which can never be totally suppressed in any case. In this very embarrassed, confused avoidance, the deep link of death and meaning is nevertheless exhibited.[18]

Here we can perhaps see the motivation among other challenging items in contemporary culture, simply to avoid at all costs the pain involved in recognizing one's impending death or the death of others. Taylor also mentions the cost of the de-linkage of death with meaning. In addition, there is an added meaninglessness that comes with the haunting realization that one has been complicit in explicit and implicit ways in

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[17] Taylor, Charles, *A Secular Age,* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknapp Press of Harvard University Press, 2007) p. 723.

[18] Ibid., p. 723.

colluding with avoidance and denial of death and accompanying those that are experiencing it.

But now we turn to the work of Johann Baptist Metz, who offers a theological corrective to the problematic situation discussed above.

PART TWO

The Personal Context of Johann Baptist Metz's Theological Insight

Preamble: The experience of trauma and the time it takes to assimilate

In reading the great insights of Metz in terms of the focus of this thesis, it is important to note Metz's experience of deep trauma in his early years, as well as the largely unspoken and silenced "national trauma" that brought the wisdom and insights of his theological reflection to fruition. It took many years for Metz simply to name, assimilate, and reflect in his writings on this trauma, both personal and national— an experience that was shared by so many others. Throughout Metz's writings we find a thread of what Paul Crowley calls the "unwanted wisdom" that comes from suffering, trauma and the Cross.[19] This unwanted wisdom is confirmed by the not surprising thesis, that even the normative heart of the Judeo-Christian faith tradition, the Scriptures, were born in trauma and suffering. In *Holy Resilience,* David M. Carr tells the story of

> …how the Jewish and Christian Bibles both emerged as responses to suffering, particularly group suffering. Both Judaism and Christianity offer visions of religious life that emphasize religious community, whether the people of Israel or the Church.[20]

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[19] Crowley, *Unwanted Wisdom, Suffering, the Cross and Hope*.

[20] David M. Carr, *Holy Resilience, The Bible's Traumatic Origins* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 3. The author here notes that Islam too represents a closely related world religion that also focuses on community and suffering, but he does not discuss it because he lacks any particular expertise in this area.

Carr goes on to analyze how suffering was part of the genesis of both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, indeed, illustrating how suffering and crisis can suggest way forward:

> …. Perhaps most important, the scriptures of Judaism and Christianity, written in part as a response to communal suffering, present suffering as part of a broader story of redemption. In complicated ways, each tradition depicts catastrophe as a path forward.[21]"

Throughout this insightful book, Carr reviews the traumatic events throughout the story of the Jewish and Christian people (including the thread of suffering and trauma in the very birth of monotheism, Judah's survival, Jerusalem's destruction and the Babylonian Exile, Abraham and exile, Moses, the founding trauma of Christianity in Jesus's passion and Resurrection, etc.) and indicates how these texts, because they arose out of and speak to humanity's experience of suffering and trauma, achieved a stature and resonance so much greater than the narratives of other nations that surrounded Israel.

Carr's work locates the insight of Metz's early experience of trauma and suffering that rest at the heart of his theological work, following in much the same pattern and dynamic of the very formation of the Scriptures. It is no surprise then, that this experience, when approached in a reflective way, and even giving "consent to it," results in what Carr calls a "way forward," and that suffering, as Crowley describes it, "forces on us a wisdom that is not asked for, (and is) not even wanted.[22] And further, as Crowley states, this wisdom becomes "a key to a joyful freedom, where one discovers, all of a

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[21] Ibid., p. 3.

[22]Crowley, p. 147.

sudden, as if awakened from a long trance, that what once seemed very important simply no longer has any power over us."[23]

In her book, *Experiencing God in a Time of Crisis,* Sarah Bachelard, an honorary research fellow at the Australian Catholic University, explores this sense of suffering as "crisis" in which our former frames of reference collapse and no longer enable us to see meaning in overwhelming events of suffering.[24] She writes about how often we do not "choose" the suffering that confronts us, and most often would avoid it if we were able.[25] She calls us to reflect on a critical and dramatic moment in the Gospel in which Jesus, facing the "abyss" to which he is headed, is in the garden, and the……

> community he had called into fellowship was in the process of collapse, (and) he had to choose whether to give himself to the abyss or resist. But by the time the soldiers came for him, he could go to meet them: "See, the hour is at hand…Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand." (Matt 26:45b-46)

Bachelard suggests in fact, that with the sufferings that she terms *crisis,* there is a difference between "giving ourselves" into the crisis or suffering, which is not the same thing as "resigning ourselves to the inevitable."[26] Bachelard draws us deeper into that same Gospel of Holy Week, to the institution of the Eucharist. Quoting the Dominican theologian, Timothy Radcliffe, she builds her argument that the acknowledging of and "giving of oneself" to the suffering, with our active "consent," provides the possibility of

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[23] Ibid., p. 147.

[24] Sarah Bachelard, *Experiencing God in a Time of Crisis,* (Miami, Florida: Convivium Press, 2012).

[25] Ibid., p. 62.

[26] Ibid., p. 62.

transformation. This, she argues, follows the example set by Jesus, who in "giving himself" to the crisis of his suffering and death, leads to transformation. It is helpful to reflect on the words of Radcliffe as he writes about the institution of the Eucharist on that fateful evening, for it is another example of Jesus' active giving of himself to the suffering that came and is coming to him in a palpable way that night:

> Jesus did not just make any sign. It was a creative and transforming act. He was to be handed over into the hands of his enemies. He would be entrusted by one of his own disciples into the brutal power of the Empire. He did not just passively accept this: he transformed it into a moment of grace. He made his betrayal into a moment of gift. He said, "so you will hand me over and run away; I grasp this infidelity and make of it a gift of myself to you."[27]

Bachelard asks two appropriate questions that resonate with this study and that take us beyond this situation of where Jesus may have been aware of the crisis that was coming. She speaks about a different kind of event or crisis by which suffering, even the suffering of death itself, comes to us unexpectedly: "What about those crises that befall us utterly unawares – the sudden death of a loved one, a violent assault, the annihilating force of a tsunami? In what sense might we consent to these appalling ruptures in our lives?"[28] She makes the obvious point explicit – that these types of events have happened whether we consent or not. So, what does "consent" have to do with it? She draws out the distinction:

> But there is still a question about whether we consent to be in the place it leaves us, or whether we resist. As long as we resist, we may have the illusion of maintaining some control. We may have the illusion that we can go back to

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[27] Timothy Radcliffe, O.P., *What is the Point of Being a Christian?* (London: Burns & Oates, 2005), p. 20.

[28] Bachelard, p. 63.

> where we were. Yet as long as we resist, then we cannot begin the **journey *through.*** (emphasis added) We can only start the journey of integrating the catastrophe that has befallen us from where we now are, from the place of being overwhelmed and stripped of what formerly had held the story of our lives together.[29]

Bachelard's insights speak directly to the question, the problem, if you will, of death, identified in the first section of this thesis, viz. *denial,* as well as to the insights Metz provides in his systematic theology to this problem. Bachelard's insight on consent to facing a crisis or the suffering of death can serve as a good preamble, leading into the personal context and history of Metz's insights into suffering and death. It reaffirms a way forward, a "journey forward" past the problem described in Part One of this thesis, and a possible way of addressing the "denial" of death and its avoidance in today's Western culture.

In his article, "Wieichmichgeanderthabe"("How I Have Changed"), Metz's words offer the geographic context of a life-changing moment of suffering and death with which he was confronted: "I was snatched out of school and conscripted into the army (…). I arrived at the front, which by that time had already advanced over the Rhine into Bavaria. My company consisted solely of young people, well over a hundred of them."[30] Elsewhere he has described this important context for his later work in theology, and its critically important role in that theological development. Because of the centrality of this experience for Metz, for both his nascent faith and his later theology, it is very much

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[29] Ibid., p. 64.

[30]Quote by Julia D.E. Prinz in *Endangering Hunger for God, Johann Baptist Metz and Dorothee Sölle at the Interface of Biblical Hermeneutic and Christian Spirituality,* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, Rutgers University, 2007), p. 53.

worth reading his telling of this experience of great suffering, and unbelievable massive death, that imprinted itself on his soul:

> Toward the end of the Second World War, when I was sixteen years old, I was taken out of school and forced into the army. After a brief period of training at a base in Wurzburg, I arrived at the front, which by that time had already crossed the Rhine into Germany. There were well over a hundred in my company, all of whom were very young. One evening the company commander sent me with a message to battalion headquarters. I wandered all night long through destroyed burning villages and farms, and when in the morning I returned to my company I found only the dead, nothing but the dead, overrun by a combined bomber and tank assault. I could see only dead and empty faces, where the day before I had shared childhood fears and youthful laughter. I remember nothing but a wordless cry. Thus, I see myself to this very day, and behind this memory all my childhood dreams crumble away. A fissure had opened in my powerful Bavarian-Catholic socialization, with its impregnable confidence. What would happen if one took this sort of 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?
> This biographical background shines through all my theological work, even to this day. In it, for example the category of memory plays a central role; my work does not want to let go of the apocalyptic metaphors of the history of faith, and it mistrusts an idealistically smoothed out eschatology. Above all, the whole of my theological work is attuned by a sensitivity for theodicy, the question of God in the face of the history of suffering in the world, in "his" world. What would later come to be called *political theology* has its roots in this speaking about God within the *conversion ad passionem.* Whoever talks about God in Jesus' sense will always take into account the way one's own preformulated certainties are wounded by the misfortune of others.[31]

The seminal shattering experience of the suffering of death which Metz writes about as quoted above, was written for a broader audience in various pieces between 1996 and 1998. The War experience occurred in the years 1944–45 so one can observe

[31]Metz, Johann Baptist, *A Passion for God, the Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity,* translated by J. Matthew Ashley, (New York/Mahwah, N.J: Paulist Press, 1998) pp. 1–2.

that while the reflection on this experience began as a young boy, it took many years more for him to go deeply into it, to simply allow the *memoria passionis* of this event to come forth in its totality, to allow it to give forth the *unwanted wisdom,* that Crowley describes. Sarah Bachelard's phrase of *giving full consent* to such suffering is truly hard work. Her small book feeds the soul and opens the heart to new insights and provides a helpful lens in reading Metz' works. She helps readers understand how Metz has grappled with such a memory of untold suffering and then allowed his thought to connect it to so many other theological insights in such a powerful and challenging way. Before moving forward no understanding of Metz can occur without a deep understanding of a fundamental experience of theological reflection for him: his reflections on Auschwitz and the Shoah.

The "national problem" Germany struggled with and suffered with in the post-World War II days, can be said to be similar to what individuals often experience after a crisis of untold suffering…..they "bury it," they "avoid it," they allow a "numbness" to cover the necessary eventual reflection which brings one to walking "through it." It is the same problem that Timothy Radcliffe identified, quoted earlier: "As long as we resist, then we cannot begin the **journey through**." (emphasis mine) It highlights a similar dynamic described in Part One in terms of the "denial of" and "resistance to" death often prevalent in Western culture.

Prinz describes this time in Germany which became a "door of awareness" that opened for Professor Metz in such a way that he experienced a process of "awakening" that was something very new and that forever changed his theology. Prinz describes this time in Germany thus:

> It took the next generation to shake the war generation out of their evasion and flight after Auschwitz...No questions or reflections about the coalitions and cooperation that had been at work in Germany throughout the Third Reich and that had finally led to Auschwitz were asked. Academia had been in the numb state of a self-sustained ivory tower, which continued as if nothing had happened.[32]

Prinz goes on to state very succinctly the "takeaway" for Metz on finally seeing and reflecting on this national denial: "It is this context that made Johann Baptist Metz ask how it had been possible that with all the historicity of theology Auschwitz had not been reflected on, and why theology paid so little attention to human suffering and catastrophe."[33] In his book, *A Passion for God,* Metz writes a most powerful chapter entitled, "The Church After Auschwitz," which chronicles his "awakening" to the difficult questions that arose and were largely avoided regarding untold suffering, Christians' complicity in the horror, the confessions and avoidance of guilt….He asked the most powerful questions that came from his reflection: "Has the memory of Auschwitz transformed us in our existence a Christians?....As Christian theologians do

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[32] Julia Prinz, *Endangering Hunger for God,* p. 54. Julia Prinz notes in her text that the *Nuernberger Prozesse* after the war had a "scapegoat character" that allowed the possibility of "personal evasion." She also notes that the Holocaust Memorial Center in Michigan conducted a research project that concluded that while many details of the Holocaust had been thoroughly documented, what happened (or didn't happen) in the aftermath had neither been well researched nor studied. She also notes that in the aftermath it's important to say that in a sense, the inhabitants of *academia*, the academic world, were more "unchallenged" in their personal lives than "everyday people who, scared, confused and ashamed, burned in their coal ovens their uniforms, flags, photos, awards and any other indications of having been involved with …..the party, the military...the Third Reich." The greater the suffering, the greater the crisis... perhaps the greater the "internal push" toward *denial, resistance, and avoidance* of the reflection and embracing the hard work of discovering the *unwanted wisdom*!

[33] Ibid., cited in the above, p. 54, Johann Baptist Metz, "Johann Baptist Metz: How I Have Changed," p. 33.

we speak the same way today we spoke yesterday, before Auschwitz?[34] So, Metz explored not only the questions of the "our Christian faith and the Church after Auschwitz" but also the lens through which we see "God, after Auschwitz." Here in his reflection on the horror of the Shoah, combined with his reflection on his own personal horror and suffering of the annihilation of the "brothers" he had come to know as a young sixteen year old boy forced into the ravages of war – his own brutal encounter with death—we are able to discover the treasures that emerged from his theological and personal reflection and transformation. One can see the development of his own thoughts on *memory* (specifically, what he calls the *memoria passionis*), the *authority of the suffering,* the importance of *narrative,* the *dangerous* nature of *memory,* the centrality of the *interruptive experience,* and ultimately, insight into the suffering of Christ in humanity, the simultaneous *crying out of humanity who suffers,* and *God's very crying out for humanity* in its suffering. We will move toward "breaking open" these hermeneutical keys of Metz's thought in the next section. At this juncture it is good to note that the most well-known Scripture passage utilized by Metz is Matthew 25:40. *And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who members of my family, you did it to me"* NRSV. This Gospel for Metz is key to understanding his coming to awareness and discovery of the "denial/ignorance/avoidance, etc." of suffering that has often characterized human relationships, and that can even be seen through the history of Christianity; and the obvious revelation in the heart of the Gospel to place the suffering….the hungry, the

[34] Johann Baptist Metz, *A Passion for God, the Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity,* translated by J. Matthew Ashley, (New York/Mahwah, N.J: Paulist Press, 1998), 124.

thirsting, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned…..at the "center." Prinz indicates that for Metz, this is clearly the central passage of his life.[35]

Metz's Theological Journey

To understand the delay over the years that it took for Metz, As Sarah Bachelard says, to *consent* to or reflect and articulate his experiences of crisis and death, personal and national, is to understand the context from which he came: Catholic Bavaria. He was born in 1928 in Auerbach, Oberpfalz in the rural part of southern Germany. Prinz indicates that Metz himself noted that to understand the length of time he took to grapple with the question of the horror of Auschwitz in his writing, one has to understand his biographical and Roman Catholic, cultural Bavarian background of those southern villages. Prinz states that the Bavarian Catholic faith from which he comes was central to his earliest Christian formation and the unique lens through which he learned to see the world: "Coming from this background which was "leak-proof" through the centuries against questions, historical developments or social unrest, Metz went to war during his last high school years."[36] So, to come from a formation for which the faith had all the answers, which as Prinz says, "was "leak-proof" through the centuries against questions," one can see the tremendous efforts, reach and growth it took for Metz to confront the question of God amidst such tremendous suffering and eventual catastrophe. Even more, Metz went on in the 1960s to further confront the question of suffering in dialogue with Marxism. For Metz, the locus of this grappling was the always the question of theodicy:

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[35] Julia Prinz, *Endangering Hunger for God,* p. 157.

[36] Ibid., p. 54-55.

the suffering of "the Other" in the face of God's justice (the "least" mentioned in Matthew 25:40 above, his central scriptural reference point).

It is important to note the key resonances for our study from the theology of Metz: the importance of memory and the reluctance to confront the pain, the "unjust suffering" of whatever nature, the ever-present questions of theodicy. One also realizes that perhaps for Metz there had to be a pre-journey to this journey, recalling the narrative, naming the feelings, reflecting on the pain, reflecting on the place of God in all this. This "pre-journey" had to be an experience of what could be called "Ignatian freedom" over and against the preset categories of understanding into which he was born. One must have such a profound respect for this man, Johann Baptist Metz, knowing the rigid, (certainly there must be great wealth in such a formative faith as well) character of his childhood faith – a faith perhaps "not free" to ask difficult questions– to see the great gift, the huge efforts he must have gone through to arrive at major insights after walking through the path to greater freedom. Freedom to "feel feelings" can be the path "through" as Timothy Radcliffe said. Another author, Marc Brackett said, focuses ways that not dealing with feelings and emotions inhibits freedom.

> Our lives are saturated with emotions – sadness, disappointment, anxiety, irritation, enthusiasm, and even tranquility. Sometime – often – those feelings are inconvenient. They get in the way…We've all heard the message: Get over it. Stop focusing on yourself…Don't be so sensitive. Time to move on…. The irony, though, is that when we ignore our feelings, or suppress them, they only become stronger. If we don't express our emotions, they pile up like a debt that will eventually come due.[37]

[37] Marc Brackett, Ph.D., *Permission to Feel, Unlocking the Power of Emotions to Help Our Kids, Ourselves, and Our Society Thrive,* (New York: Celadon Books, 2019), x.

In this text, the author also discusses how feelings are connected to *memory, attentiveness, and learning.* While Metz does not write about feelings *per se,* knowing the great crises of suffering that he reflected on, it would be reasonable to assume that there were struggles with the very *freedom* to *encounter and give consent to* the memory of suffering, and that the eventual "internal" *permission to feel* the feelings in order to draw from the memory, the eventual insights and wisdom, would have been a daunting task. The takeaway from this theological investigation is not only the theological insights that Metz has discovered that are universal and in fact part of his systematic theology. But his **journey itself** is part of the discovered wisdom, with its attentiveness to freedom and feelings and memory - an insight and gift to all who journey in this life as Christians and confront suffering both personal and social and deal with personal pain and social injustice. Metz's journey offers an example of the struggle from early formative experiences with their limitations, to the freedom to question and the courage to confront suffering, to give consent to facing suffering, and prayerfully, painfully, and ever-so-slowly to receive the gift of unwanted wisdom.

The primary question Metz discovered in all his reflection, is "why has theology paid so little attention to human suffering, catastrophe and death?" And the depths from which he drew out new insights about humanity and God are remarkable. Whole books in general explore this question of suffering and a loving God – viz., theodicy. The first general overview I explored in a class led by Professor George Griener on "The Theology of Suffering," resulted in the exploration of suffering in multiple texts, and various readings and reflections, that encouraged students to reflect deeply on their own

experience of suffering and death and that of their loved ones.[38] Studying Metz, and his openness and freedom to raise the most challenging and disquieting questions opened the door to a possible way through that was often discussed. In the midst of his many questions, Metz offers a conclusive insight:

> In my view there is one authority recognized by all great cultures and religions: the *authority* of those who suffer. Respecting the suffering of strangers is a precondition for every culture; articulating others' suffering is the presupposition of all claims to truth. Even those made by theology……there is no suffering in the world that does not concern us.[39]

He says in other words, when we refuse to enter into the suffering of society and others, we risk avoiding the truth which God seeks to give us; we risk avoiding the transformation which can come from exploring such suffering. In exploring various systematic theologies in their overview, and reviewing Metz's insights, Francis Fiorenza and John Galvin share that Metz's focus on the apophatic nature of the hidden-revealed God reveals the God who is in fact "transforming, not eliminating tragedy."[40]

One of the questions that emerges from Metz's reflections on the catastrophic suffering of Auschwitz is the exploration of how the Christian, how the Church, sees the people of Israel and Israel's God, after Auschwitz. His penetrating questions and reflections include: "…how must I understand and value Israel's election by God, by the

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[38]An excellent example is Daniel Harrington, S.J., *A Scriptural Approach to the Human Condition* (New York: Sheed& Ward, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000).

[39] Metz, *A Passion for God*, p. 134., The last sentence of the above quote, Metz acknowledges that he "owes this phrase to Peter Rottlander."

[40] Francis Schussler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, eds., *Systematic Theology*: *Roman Catholic Perspectives,* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), p. 126.

one God of Jews and Christians?" "What is it then… that makes even us Christians see Israel as unsurpassable and irreplaceable?" He asks "What distinguishes this small, culturally rather unremarkable and politically insignificant desert people from the glittering high cultures of its time, from Egypt, Persia or Greece?[41] Metz goes on to state that Israel does not allow itself any "mythical or ideational riches in spirit with which it could transcend or console itself when it faced its own fears, the alienation of its exile, the history of suffering continually breaking out in its midst."[42] Metz's "discovery" of the God of Israel, and Israel's faith, in exploring what Auschwitz taught humanity, is both challenging and consoling. Israel, he notes, did not have the philosophical and idealized concepts of the "glittering high cultures" of its neighbors but rather what Metz called a true "poverty of spirit" – knowing its suffering, expressing its cries to God. Throughout its scriptures he describes an eschatological "landscape of cries," and a "landscape of expectation." In Israel's songs he sees the "freedom to express difficult feelings before God…." Brueggemann shares that contemporary believers in the West have allowed idolatry and "…ideology to turn pain into denial…False selves generated by idolatry and ideology live in conformity, and denial of pain ultimately disregard issues of injustice.[43] Brueggemann thus circles back to the insight that the God of Israel and Jesus Christ is about the transformation of suffering and pain, if it is "entered into," if one "consents" to it, and reflects on it. Brueggemann again, confirms Metz's insight saying:

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[41] Metz, *A Passion for God,* p. 125

[42] Ibid., p. 125.

[43] Walter Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise, Doxology against Idolatry and Ideology,* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), p. 133.

"Thus I propose that *access into life is mostly through the resistant door of pain.*" It would seem that such *access into life* is the transformation we are speaking about."[44] It seems so consistent with his attention to and sensitivity to the *memoria passionis* that Metz sees in the post-Auschwitz insights of the People of Israel, a poor desert people whose foundation is a passion for the God of Israel, a passion that "cries out" its suffering through history, and indeed a "crying out" that should, according to Metz, be part of the Christian landscape and experience in its call to justice and service of the poor and marginalized. He in fact states that Israel's "passionate interrogation of God" must also be the Church's cry. Metz's words are haunting:

> Could it be that there is too much singing and not enough crying out in our Christianity? Too much jubilation and too little mourning, too much approval and too little sense for what is absent, too much comfort and too little hunger for consolation?...In its moral teachings, is the church too often on the side of Job's friends and too little on the side of Job himself, who thought faith could include even insistently questioning God?.....I am reminded of Jesus cry from the cross. From the very beginning the Christian community has found it difficult to deal with the fact that at the center of Christian faith there is that cry of the Son, abandoned by God.[45]

In centering these thoughts on the insights from a post-Auschwitz reflection on the God and People of Israel, who is our inheritance, he gives a warning, most appropriate I believe, that Christianity is always tempted to go down the path of avoidance (and often compromise) with regard to the denial of and resistance to the cries of the suffering, poor, marginalized, and the voiceless. It is always tempted to present a "consumer Catholicism" that has no sense of mission to the suffering, let alone seeing in

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[44] Ibid.

[45]Metz, *A Passion for God,* p. 124–125.

the suffering the voice of God. Metz takes us back to the very beginning of the kerygma with this warning: "Whoever hears the message of the resurrection of Christ in such a way that in it the cry of the crucified has become inaudible, hears not the Gospel but a myth of the victors."[46]

Metz goes on in his reflection to discuss an encounter of much emotion when Elie Wiesel reported walking into camp of Auschwitz to the place of the gas chambers and crematoria and despite every wish to wail, to cry out, to weep, was suppressed…but then after some time of silence the group began ***to cry out***, (my emphasis) first very softly, then louder and louder, as if wailing, the *Shema Israel* ("Hear O Israel, God is our God…") one, two, five times.[47] Metz reports that Wiesel further asks the question, "Did we do this because the victims, who sensed the end was near, began to speak the same prayer?...because, in the end, on the threshold of death, all words turn into prayers, and all prayers come down to that one?" Indeed, "crying out."

Thanks to Metz, listening and acknowledging the cries of those whose voice is not heard in our society, including the grieving, has become an awareness that informs so many that minister to those who suffer. Many who minister to those who suffer share the experience of transformation and ironically a source of joy accompanying those crying out in their suffering. The following quotation is a fitting conclusion to this review of the

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[46] Ibid., p. 126

[47] Ibid., reporting the experience of Elie Wiesel in Auschwitz, p. 126.

insights on the role of Auschwitz in Metz's theological and personal journey and the unwanted wisdom it came to yield for him:

> But if it is God and prayer that are at stake, then Israel is indispensable, not only for the Jews but also for us Christians. Israel, rejected and persecuted, is and continues to be the root for us Christians, and also for Islam. And thus, Auschwitz is and continues to be an attack on everything that must be holy to us.[48]

Theology after Auschwitz: the rise of Political Theology

In the ferment of the 1960s – in addition to the transformations in the areas of culture, economics, politics, and so many others, even theology did not go untouched. Metz explores the political-cultural context of those days and the emergence of a new political theology. He indicated that it began "as a corrective to situation-less theologies, to all theologies that are idealistically closed-off systems or that continually barricade themselves behind theological systems."[49]Here we see the courage of Metz in asking questions regarding the new "context" of theology with the many changes of the 1960s and the "new life" that emerged out of his exploration. It has led to a foundational understanding today that in effect "all theology is contextual." Political theology was developed in Europe in response to the horrors and devastation of World Wars I and II. In essence the political theology as Metz explored it, responded to three "irruptions or interruptions, three experiences of nonidentity at the roots of theology."[50] There is first of all, the confrontation of systematic theology with the reality of the Enlightenment with

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[48] Ibid., p. 127.

[49] Metz, *A Passion for God,* p. 23.

[50] Ibid., p. 24.

its new questions and the "primacy of practical reason in treating metaphysical questions."[51] Metz, thus ties this new engagement with Enlightenment questions with not only the grappling with "practical reason" but also how this leads to the questions of "justice." "Faith must justify and convey itself to a reason that, for its part, wants to become practical and come into its own as a freedom of a subject, and always also as freedom of the other, which means as justice."[52] It is in this arena that leads Metz to stress a "primacy of a reason" "endowed with memory, that is, an anamnestic reason."[53] The "non-identity" of which Metz speaks, again, is coming out of the devastation of world wars, articulating a faith for the *polis.* And here Metz is not talking about "politics" per se, but rather the *polis,* as one writer has described, as "the city or body of citizens, especially those whose lives are pervaded with suffering or destroyed by massive public violence. To rescue the identity of such vanquished non-persons theology turns to the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There it finds a pledge of future life for all the defeated and the dead. The categories of memory, narrative, and solidarity…provide strong conceptual tools for interpretation. Remembering the dead, telling their stories of struggle and sometime victory, and walking in solidarity with their unfinished projects, set up a vital community between the living and the dead in face of the power of evil."[54] In this summary, while we get ahead of ourselves a bit, one can see

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[51] Ibid., p. 24.

[52] Ibid., p. 24–25.

[53] Ibid., p. 25.

[54]Fiorenza and Galvin, *Systematic Theology*: *Roman Catholic Perspectives*, pp. 448–449.

how Metz's political theology emerges from both the new questions of the Enlightenment with its focus on practical reason, and the disasters of the War, and then how Metz crafts an "anamnestic reason" which combined with memory, raises up and brings to the surface as it were, the voices and narratives of the victims of history. It is the paschal mystery of the memory of Jesus Christ, another victim of history, crucified and risen who provides the datum of faith that via memory, narrative and solidarity, addresses the questions of justice that confront evil.

The second interruption or irruption and experience of non-identity that lies at the root of Metz's political theology is that it must be "a theology after Auschwitz, that this catastrophe belongs to the inner situation of Christian discourse about God."[55]

The above section discussed Auschwitz at length however Metz summarizes well the importance for theology that it be one that embraces the memory of suffering from Auschwitz.

> This remembrancing cannot repress and forget, or idealistically overcome *[aufheben]* humanity's history of suffering. A new sensitivity for theodicy…. belongs on the agenda for theological discourse. I might even say that political theology here in Germany wants to make the cries of the victims from Auschwitz unforgettable in Christian theology, in theology itself. This would signify a farewell to every theology that closes itself off idealistically, and a farewell to the forgetfulness of the forgotten, hidden, as I see it, in concepts of truth and of God.[56]

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[55] Metz, *A Passion for God,* p. 25.

[56] Ibid., p. 26.

As discussed in some detail in the previous section, this theology after Auschwitz, says Metz, importantly implies a new relationship in Christianity to its Jewish heritage as well as an ownership in various strata of anti-Semitism through history and complicity in varied ways with the unbelievable tragedy of the Shoah.

The third experience of "interruptive or irruptive" experience found in the roots of political theology that Metz has embraced, is that of the "third world" or "non-European world", which challenges our discourse about God. Here Metz talks about this dynamic and reality of inequality, massive poverty, gross income-inequality that he says directs "our theological attention to a social and economic fault line in our world that cuts across the church itself: the so-called North South conflict, which has certainly not come to an end with the cessation of the East-West conflict."[57] Metz explores the depths of this irruption as exposing things that are in direct contradiction to the heart of the Gospel and must be confronted by theology: "the degradation of peoples, oppression, racism" that call for new categories of Christian discourse about God such as "resistance and transformation."[58] Here Metz makes the important connection of transformation with *liberation,* exposing his great influence on Liberation Theology. In this Metz speaks in his text of the capacity for guilt and conversion of all "historical subjects," while avoiding romanticizing, but nevertheless "removing from the processes of political change any basis for hatred and violence."[59] Interestingly as we look backward, woven

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[57] Ibid., p. 27.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid.

all through these insights that emerged from a time of such social change and unrest, Metz situates them in the context and "transition" from a culturally European church to a culturally polycentric world church.[60]

In all his discussions and examinations of political theology and its genesis and new insights that are necessary to address the new situation of post-modernity, Metz mentions that such a theology is nurtured by a "shock!" He speaks of this "shock" – a signally significant insight from his own important questioning and emerging new awareness, of "realizing how little in Christian discourse about God one usually hears of a history of suffering in creation that cries out to the heavens. No hint that there is something unreconciled to be found in theology! No experience of nonidentity, in which the oh-so-certain discourse about God collapses into helpless discourse with God."[61] And so, Metz's theological "shock" leads to his drawing our attention to the important category of "absence" that lies at the heart of the suffering of the victims of history and then ties to that new category, the grounding in "anamnestic reason" and memory which becomes a liberative path for both past and future. In the exploration of the writings of Metz it has been fascinating to discover not only new insights that address so many struggles, the question of those who suffer, whose voices are quieted, the question of justice which absolutely permeates not only the "third" world but the "first" world more than ever before, but also the threads together these connections with liberation theology,

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[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid. p. 28

and something that we will explore in the coming pages, its connection with mission or *praxis,* and its grounding in a lost eschatology.

Central Aspects of Metz's Systematic Theology

The Centrality of Memory and specifically, *Memoria Passionis*

The key theological concept that Metz utilizes to build his systematic theology is that of memory. He calls memory (and narrative) "fundamental categories of salvation" – not simply a "derived or purely categorical significance." They are the fundamental categories for getting a firm grip on one's understanding of identity and for saving it in the midst of the historical struggles and dangers in which persons experience and constitute themselves as subjects.[62] They should never serve as a "filling out or embellishment of a preconceived "idea" of the human person.[63]

Metz goes on to give some background thought on memory. He states that remembering is a category for saving threatened identity. He mentions that the destruction of memory in fact serves to prevent people from becoming the subjects they are meant to be in history.[64] One sees this phenomenon in conquered peoples. Oppressors quite often seek to separate the conquered victims from their social memories. Metz mentions in this text the case of slaves who are often uprooted and deported, which reinforces their new identity as slaves, replacing their true identities and

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[62] Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society, Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology,* trans., J. Matthew Ashley, (New York: Crossroad, 2007) p. 74–75.

[63] Ibid., p. 75.

[64] Ibid.

solidifying their oppression.[65] On the other hand, Metz reminds us that the formation of identity always begins with the "awakening of memory."[66] Metz calls this a category of liberation, for becoming a subject is to become a subject in God's presence. *What* we remember and *how* we remember shapes not only our narratives of the past and who we were, but who we are now and where we are headed."[67] The philosopher Walter Benjamin, part of the Frankfurt School, affirmed that history is "written by the victors."[68] Thus it is that the victors of history are the ones who carry the "dominant narrative." And it follows that the "dominant narrative" reinforces the *status quo.* And, in this way the on-going claim that this is "the way things should be" is a way that bolsters the status of the privileged and those that have vested power, the victors and their successors, keep the system in place that benefits them.[69] McLean, who reviews Metz's thought, asks the question: "But what about all those whose interests are not represented by the current system? …. What about the countless people who have died prematurely and unjustly, on the underside of history?[70] We look for something further – something that reflects human dignity – for all is not just in such a situation. Then, what comes into play is the

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[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Candace McLean, *Theology 101: Dangerous Memories*, published in "Daily Theology," guest post, University of Portland, December 11, 2015, p. 1, https://dailytheology.org/2015/12/11/theology-101-dangerous-memories//.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

concept of *dangerous memory*, a category of the secular philosopher Herbert Marcus, also of the Frankfurt School.

Dangerous Memories

This concept of *dangerous memories* was initiated into the theological context by Metz. They are considered the "subversive memories" of the victims of history. Kept alive by the narrative retelling of communities who witnessed the lives, struggles, and deaths of the defeated, these unofficial memories keep the possibility open that reality, institutions, and societies could be other than they are. They are dangerous to those in positions of power because they are seeds of resistance and change, and markers of identity, personhood, agency, and hope to the marginalized."[71]

Metz takes this concept of the *dangerous memories* of all of history's victims and ties them further into the *dangerous memory* of Jesus Christ, his life, death and resurrection. Thus, Metz "theologizes" the very valid concept offered by Walter Benjamin and others of the Frankfurt School. As Metz goes deeper one sees that this *memoria passionis, mortis, et resurrectionis Jesu Christi* becomes the paradigmatic and dangerous memory of resistance and hope and thus offers more than just a purely philosophical concept does. As Candace McLean shares, "Before a God to whom all are alive, even those who die prematurely and, unjustly are not lost permanently. The dead, in this case, are not just reminders of how things in the present and future could be

[71] Ibid., p. 2.

different, they also have intrinsic value of their own – a promise yet unrealized, hope for a healing and restoration that "eye has not seen, nor ear heard."[72]

Metz indeed speaks of a *memoria passionis* not as a traditionalistic counter-figure to hope, but rather understood as *dangerous memory*; that form of eschatological hope that we shall address in the coming pages.[73]

Metz continues to thread this insight of the importance of the memories of those who have suffered, and of the beloved dead, and the foundational thought of the *memoria passionis* – or more fully stated, the *dangerous and subversive memory of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ,* as connected to the Church's key dogmas of faith.[74]

Dogma as *Dangerous Memory*

Metz juxtaposes dogmas of faith that are expressed in ways that he calls "inadequate," because they insufficiently show their *dangerous* (and thus, *liberative*) power.[75] Here, I sense Metz is tying Christian doctrine to its necessary core and call, the *memoria passionis* inherent in our Christological, Trinitarian and other doctrinal formulations, When it is not tied to our core doctrines of faith, they become more *empty,* providing too often a cover for institutional self-preservation of the religion that is

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[72] Ibid., p. 2.

[73]Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society, Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology,* p. 169.

[74] Ibid., pp. 182 – 185.

[75] Ibid., p. 184

handing them on and which sometimes does not hold itself accountable to the *dangerous memoria passionis* that has the ability to transform lives, opening the wounds and pain of the past, especially of the dead who have suffered, thus providing a more liberative and just path forward for humanity.

The Fruits of *Memoria Passionis* to the Grieving

How does Metz's focus on *memoria passionis* address the denial of death we are examining? First, it is important to recall that Metz's preamble to the call to *memoria passionis* marked by the experience of irruption, interruption even dislocation that the suffering of death always seems to bring even if it is expected. In fact, besides death and loss, the pain of such interruption and irruption of suffering almost always leads to tremendous experiences of "dislocation," all of which add to the pain of the loss of death itself. The denial becomes significant in the west, precisely because the denial entails the "silencing" of the pain of the grieving. We as a culture want to silence even the "signs of death" – thus the reason for the continuing trend that everyone is at the funeral except the body of dead person. The silencing of the grieving which adds to their pain, is another denial of these "signs" of death. And so here is where Metz's concept of recalling the memory, implying the speaking of the memory, including the painful *memoria passionis,* becomes a liberating way forward for the grieving. Metz's *memoria passionis* lends itself to addressing social injustice in terms of opening up the voice and experience of the suffering of the poor, oppressed and marginalized. One could also identify in the experiences of the grieving an added suffering evident in the injustice of stifling one's own experience and suffering of loss. In this sense, Metz's *memoria passionis* opens the grieving to their voice and their memory and thus this "awakening of

memory" of their beloved dead, and consequent suffering truly does become for them a category of liberation. They now are free to move from a place of "non-identity" to the "new identity" and "new normal" that they must "work through" – which most often, with faith-filled reflection, leads to praxis. This praxis can often be "new service" to others who also struggle with loss.

Without Metz's focus on *memoria passionis,* narrative, *dangerous memory* that speaks the liberating truth of one's situation and suffering, the grieving are stifled and boxed in. This can lead, as is so often the case, to dysfunction, covered over pain with addictions of all kinds, broken relationships, etc. Finally, as Metz has stated, "remembering the dead…telling their stories…walking with their unfinished projects, set(s) up a vital community between the living and dead in the face of the power of evil."[76] In other words the remembering, the telling of the stories of the beloved dead, the reflection and articulation, even and often in the midst of great tears, brings one closer to a "community" or union between the grieving and their dead.

Metz summarizes this insightful tie of *memoria passionis* to the doctrines and dogma of faith by a telling phrase used by one of the great witnesses to Christian faith during the time of the Shoah:

> Dogmatic or confessional faith means being bound to doctrines that can and must be understood as formulas for remembering one of humanity's repressed, unrequited, subversive, and dangerous memories. The criterion of its genuine Christian character is the critically liberative but also redemptively

[76]Fiorenza and Galvin, *Systematic Theology*: *Roman Catholic Perspectives*, pp. 448–449.

> dangerous way that it introduces the remembered message into the present, so that it will shock people and yet overcome them by its power.[77]

In the connection made by Metz between the *memoria passions* and the doctrines of faith, a truly liberating aspect of his systematic theology addresses not only the "denial of death," but also addresses a constant thread and temptation throughout the history of our Church: The dangerous temptation for the Church in its pastoral approach and the focus of its mission in the local community to make of Christianity a happy club, that as Pope Francis states, is far too *self-referential.*[78] It is a Church for the *bourgeois* and one that supports the *status quo* and the power of those that *write the narratives* that seem to keep the poor oppressed; that robs immigrants of their human dignity; that justifies gross inequality of wealth and income; that desires the tireless work of farmworkers to keep our abundance of food on our tables, but refuses to address their and countless others' needs for basic medical care; that justifies the *shock and awe* of our military power to impose our agenda on countries around the world justifying what has become the phenomenon of *endless war*, etc. It has been instructive to see how Metz has combined the great central themes of his theology and integrated them with the tradition we pass on of a dogmatic faith that takes the dogmatic content to beyond dogmatism to *praxis* and *mission.* Indeed,

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[77] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison,* enlarged ed., ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 300, quoted in Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* p. 184.

[78] Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel* (*Evangelii Gaudium*), Apostolic Exhortation, (Vatican City, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013).

as he states: "In this sense dogmatic faith and the praxis of following remain indissolubly related to one another: dogma as practical memory."[79]

PART THREE

IMPLICATIONS IN PASTORAL PRACTICE

Appropriation of the Tradition of Lament

The implication of Metz in his *memoria passionis* is not only the remembering of the suffering – and thus, the "giving voice" to the suffering peoples of the past, but to also give voice to the suffering of the grieving today in a society that is in denial of the reality and signs of death (certainly evident in the most recent pandemic).

Considering the above perhaps it would be helpful to reappropriate the tradition of "lament" that is so strong in both our Jewish and Christian traditions. In the above sections I referred to the experience of the "crying out" which is so strong in both traditions. Jesus on the Cross gives us the example of a real and healthy "struggle" with God and grieving losses that he experienced both in real time (the story of weeping at Lazarus's grave), in anticipatory suffering (in the Garden of Gethsemane), and at the moment of much pain on the Cross ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34 NRSV) Kathleen M. O'Connor opens up the tremendous value of the Book of Lamentations as it expresses the human experiences of abandonment and suffering with full force. This book, which I "consumed," literally changed my life in terms of

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[79] J.B. Metz, *Followers of Christ* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1978), quoted in Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society, Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology,* p. 185.

grounding Metz's theological insights with scripture. Ironically, in this book in our shared canonical Scriptures the voice of God is silent! But because God never "speaks in the text, O'Connor makes the point that "the book honors voices of pain. Lamentations is a house for sorrow because there is no speech for God."[80]

O'Connor notes that "giving voice" is such a liberating experience for all those who suffer and even struggle with God in their suffering. It allows one to speak the truth of their experience. She indicates that the voices of those who suffer and "lament," who "cry out," is a metaphor for the emergence of the "human capacity to act in the world by bringing pain to speech."[81] And, as I have discovered by experience, such crying out is indeed liberating. Lamentations opens, as O'Connor indicates, on a "universe of sorrow." Not only my own experience, but that of so many whom my wife and I have discovered in ministry indeed often carry "a universe of sorrow" in their heart. One can have the most joyful life full of great gifts – and then "life sends immense and often unbelievable sorrow." As Metz points out – we struggle with interruption and dislocation of enormous size…..the shock, the "size" of the loss, the inability to "square" such loss with what one has been taught about a loving God, not only threatens the peace, and even seeming viability of continued living, but threatens the contours and answers faith had provided.

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[80] Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Lamentations & The Tears of the World,* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), p. 15.
[81] E. Scarry, *The Body in Pain,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 33, quoted in Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Lamentations & The Tears of the World,* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), p. 83.

As a powerful pastoral example I recall a woman coming to me for a short twenty minute "spiritual accompaniment" session during a women's retreat in Sacramento in which all the Retreat Leaders (Passionist priest, brother, my wife and myself) were part of the team. I listened to her story. She thanked me and the team for inviting the retreatants (via our talks) to "risk" being "real" with God – and sharing all our feelings – anger, desperation, sorrow, worry, anxiety, etc. She related that she had not been to Mass for eleven years – though she was a life-long Catholic. I asked how she ended up at this retreat and she shared that her children had highly encouraged her – saying they worried about her. She then shared that she had "closed the door" to God eleven years earlier because her precious son had died unexpectedly. She was angry with God. But she felt the faith as she "received it" in her younger years, as well as her culture, would not allow for her to express her anger at God and her all-consuming pain. Her strong feelings, had she "expressed" them to God, she felt would have been "blasphemous" and therefore, unallowable. So, she did the next best thing – she "closed the door" to God and prayer, personally and communally. Amid buckets of tears and wailing she expressed how the retreat had brought her to a door of freedom which she chose to walk through. She walked also through the acreage of the retreat center and in the silence of nature, she screamed her pain and tears and they "were received" by God and God's creation. She felt she could finally move forward. I shared with her it was not me or the team, but God's Spirit who helped her open her heart. What a powerful experience of the "power of Lamentation" on the "universe of sorrow" in this woman's heart this was.

How can we bring such a new ecclesial culture that honors lament and pain? It deserves further exploration. Perhaps our retreats, our homilies, our spiritual exercises, our catechumenate and catechesis can be a start.

In this time of the disruption of the Worldwide Pandemic I was asked to lead a "Zoom" Video Conference Call for a "Shared Prayer and Meditation" Session, for all the Pastoral Center employees – both those in pastoral departments and administrative departments. I used a text from Lamentations explaining of course the context of the book and how it was written during the time of the Exile when Daughter Zion was so suffering. We proclaimed and prayed the text. We listened meditatively. I offered two meditative questions for their reflection: How might God be calling me to trust God during this pandemic? Where might God be calling me to serve God in this new circumstance? We provided much silence. The sharing was powerful and I was touched how lamentations provided many of them the courage to lament their own fears at this time…..fears of loss and death, fears of economic pain and collapse, fears of losing not only their employment but those they love and their current losses of "connection" with co-workers and family.

Bringing the permission of "lament" to our pastoral practice in creative new ways might help people move forward instead of getting stuck. O'Connor writes:

"Lamentations marks out the place of ruptured life, when the old story fails and a new one has yet to appear, as well it might."[82] "Only because God's voice is missing can

[82] A. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body Illness and Ethics,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, pp. 169 – 185.) as quoted in O'Connor, *Lamentations & The Tears of the World,* p. 85.

the book symbolize this vacuum of meaning, this liminal world of impasse, this time when the old life has ended and no new imaginings are yet possible."[83] Lamentations, in a kind of counterintuitive manner, provides a "way forward" in freedom thanks to an approach that syncchronizes with what is most healthy and holy in human communications.

O'Connor also richly explores the issue of "denying pain," the family as the "school of denial," and social mechanisms of denying pain.[84] The pages are dense with the wisdom of what contributes to the problem I explored in Part One regarding the denial of death in our consumerist Western culture. In light of these insights, our pastoral approach to individuals and families can be not only the addressing of the denial of pain as a spiritual "dead end" and human dysfunction when loss appears, but can also be an impetus for the Church to take pre-emptive measures in our service to families, to those in ministry formation, and in the formation of our ministers to become aware of the dynamic of denial in our society and in our families, such that more can be opened to the path of freedom and healing that a spirituality of "lament" and "crying out" can bring, when it is encouraged and supported.

Ministry to the Grieving in our Parishes

Another area in which we can pastorally apply the retrieved tradition of Lament could be in the area of the parish which is where we deal with death and the grieving.

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[83]O'Connor, *Lamentations & The Tears of the World,* p. 85.

[84] Ibid., pp. 86–95.

Many have observed that often there are "grieving ministries" so named in our parishes, which if one 'digs into their reality,' are in fact "funeral ministries." Funeral ministries are most helpful at the very time of death. People in these ministries can be helpful in planning the Vigil, the Funeral Mass, the Committal Service at the grave. They can help organize the deliverance of food to the grieving family. They can help with the selection of music and readings, dealing with the mortuary, cemetery, etc. While all very helpful, they are not "Grieving Ministry."

Grieving ministry is one of accompaniment. It is one of listening. It is one of allowing the grieving their own "sacred space" where their own stories/narratives are heard, honored and patiently affirmed. It is a quiet ministry of encouragement and one that offers prayer and meditative experiences. It is a ministry where the ministers are comfortable with tears, with wailing, with anger and every kind of feeling. It is a ministry that is often communal. It is a ministry of discernment. It is one in which the ministers encourage "the awakening of memories" and allow, as Metz called them, *dangerous memories*, no matter the direction they take. It is a ministry in which ministers are trained for these skills, and where they are trained to make referrals to professionals (therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists, etc.) should that appear to be needed.

This kind of ministry is often helpful to be a communal approach where several grieving people would gather for an evening of prayer, discussion, sharing, etc. It should be a space in which all voices can be heard but none should dominate. It is one which must be guided and led but allow for free discussion and affirmation of feelings without judgement. Those involved should be discerned to have the gifts to serve those who are

in pain, and the capability to learn skills necessary to serve effectively. This kind of 'group ministry' could be very much like RCIA…. a journey of companions and Metz's themes would be helpful: "awakening of memory," the importance of "story and narrative," the affirmation of one's voice, etc. It is also one area where a discernment methodology could be helpful to assist the grieving with questions, including when to be moving forward joining the 'group' and when they need to move away from the grieving community to a "new normal" in their daily life,

This kind of ministry could also utilize one-on-one companioning with those who are grieving. Often simply helping connect some who have lots in the common can be so helpful, parents of children who have died, spouses who have lost a spouse to death, those who are connected to suicides, etc. Peer support is helpful, but it is amazing how there are commonalities in all kinds of grief.

My wife and I were friends with another couple who had lost a son to suicide a few years before losing our son. They were supportive to us and led a "Compassionate Friends" group that supported men and women who had lost loved ones to suicide. When our friends noticed that I had dealt with lots of anger they asked us to come and give a presentation to their group. Suicide-survivors (parents or siblings or friends of those who suicide) often deal with lots of anger evidently and they wanted them to see that many who have lost loved ones to other kinds of unexpected death also dealt with this and could work through it. Michael died unexpectedly of an undiagnosed genetic heart disease, HCM. So, the combination of "sudden" and "unexpected" made for lots of anger. Sharing is the key factor in these group ministries, and it would be important to recognize it is not for everyone. Thus, there is great importance in being attentive to the

needs of different individuals or families that are suffering loss, and their particular needs.

I must add that this Ministry to the Grieving must also include proper selection of resources that meet the standards of the Church's proclamation of the Gospel of Mercy and Love. I recall a parish grieving experience my wife and I joined at a neighboring parish upon the death of our son. We went to six or eight sessions. It was a wonderful group of people with all kinds of losses: loss of a spouse, a couple parents of suicides, loss of children, of parents, etc.

The parish group began each session with a segment from a video series. It was one which was developed by a Protestant group. They were selective in choosing segments that best fit with our faith tradition. One evening a "mistake" was made and the segment had to do with suicide and the video interviewed a couple that expressed their view that brought up "questions" as to whether persons committing suicide would be 'saved.' I felt terrible for the parents of the children who had committed suicide and were there. This was an ecumenical group and it happened the parents were not Catholic. I risked it, and spoke of our Catholic tradition recognizing the insights of modern psychology that suicide victims often were dealing with deep depression that most likely limited or perhaps completely minimized their ability to make a moral decision for which they were responsible. I ventured my own thought (they knew I was Catholic deacon) that these victims were immediately embraced by a loving God that took them into God's very embrace knowing all the pain they must have been feeling to bring them to suicide. At break time, the two parents who were in the group came up to thank me for the comforting message. The importance of reviewing resources can't be overstated.

Ministry to those who Suffer Many Kinds of Loss

Metz's theology is one which includes the memory of the suffering of all kinds – and so while we have focused on the unique suffering of the loss due to death as well as the dying, Metz's theological principles can help us address many other types of loss. How do we serve people in these situations? There could be many ways….one would be one-to-one companionship; another could be as my wife Lorie and I did. We held a Retreat for those who suffer loss of any kind. We were amazed at the turnout! Some were suffering the loss of death, others broken relationship, others the loss of a long-time co-worker and pastor. Another the loss of health…. another the loss of discovering his father was not his real father. It was a powerful weekend of sharing, memory, narrative and healing.

The Reappropriation of the Best in our Liturgical Tradition Supporting those Grieving the Loss of Death

It strikes me that what was affirmed in the text I mentioned earlier in this thesis, is very true but that in fact, our Tradition in this area of liturgical accompanying of the dead and the grieving is not often implemented in such a way that its best fruits can come forth and challenge the "denial of death" that bring additional hurt to those grieving. In *The Good Funeral,* the Presbyterian minister and professor, Dr. Thomas G. Long, mentions that the Catholic Ritual for funerals (*Order of Christian Funerals)* in his estimation, does the "best job" among all the Christian traditions of accompanying and praying with the grieving and their dead in the various funeral rites, in terms of addressing the real pain of

loss and suffering of death, and also affirming the hope of the Gospel.[85] Part of the problem pastorally is that we don't "activate" all the pastoral recommendations of our Rites so wonderfully recognized by Long. For example, in the rites it is encouraged to have the body present for the funeral liturgy, even if burial is done via cremation for convenience, cost, etc. These two insightful authors talk about the huge trend in all the traditions to move toward "the Unbearable lightness of Memorial Services," wherein the one thing that modern Western culture cannot tolerate in its denial of death, is the body! Their description is enlightening:

> So if the task of the memorial service is to become disembodied – to be inspired, to feel lifted up, above the sheer facts of death, to become spiritually centered, to have my memory activated and my grief soothed with laughter and upbeat sentiments – then, for God's sake, don't roll a heavy dead body onto the set. So, we stopped bringing our dead to funerals because they get in the way of our spiritual reverie, and we stopped accompanying the dead to the grave because, frankly, they nowhere to go."[86]

I recall how our dear friend and former pastor who presided at Michael's funeral, as we planned, encouraged highly the inclusion of his body at the funeral Mass for as he said "Dave and Lorie, you loved Michael as an embodied person!"[87] I recalled how I rubbed Michael's back and tired legs and feet after the pounding he took at Jesuit basketball games where he the varsity team for three years. I recall cradling this large baby (who grew to 6'5"), thanking God for this gift as I did for all our five children, and

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[85] Thomas G. Long and Thomas Lynch, *Death, Grief, and the Community of Care,* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013).

[86] Ibid., p. 105

[87] Fr. Peter J. Bosque, priest of San Diego.

wondering what he would become in life. In a short nineteen years he touched so many lives with love, leadership, compassion, etc. How comforting in an unforeseen sort of way, it was to have his body next to mine during the funeral liturgy. I know of another pastor that refused to even suggest such a thing to families because of the "money issue."

This is an area where we can simply do a better job in serving our people. I find it difficult to hear people talk or pray using the phrase…. "for the soul of…." For is it not true that the Lord saves us, his "people," not simply souls? And so, our liturgical expression should reflect that and can help us move forward in this path of grieving and transformation, even amid a society that denies death and avoids it all costs.

David Power writes,

> Christian attitudes towards the future meant that with death there was no definitive separation between the living and the dead. All belonged to the one communion, the one body of Christ, and shared together in the expectation of final salvation in the reign of God and in the hope of the resurrection of the body. This was already bolstered in the understanding that the body and blood of Christ was nourishment for immortality, a strong note in early Christian writings….[88]

How helpful it would be to saturate our catechesis, sacramental preparation and homilies, with this sense that the Communion of Saints is real and a connection for all the baptized. If we have *died with Christ in Baptism, we shall rise with Him*…..We can bring this awareness beginning with the parents of new babies coming for baptismal preparation, bring it into our RCIA, our marriage preparation, young and older children coming for catechesis, etc. It is important that we bring this sense of an eschatological

[88] David N. Power, O.M.I., *The Eucharistic Mystery, Revitalizing the Tradition,* (New York: Crossroad, 1997) p. 77.

hope and a sense that one belongs to the family of those alive on earth in Christ and those alive in the Kingdom, but present yet to us.

Liturgically Mediated Signs and Symbols Helpful to the Grieving

Earlier in this thesis, I referred to Robert N. Bellah who spoke of signs and symbols and language that are so deeply imbedded in our human psyche as transporters of memory and narrative and meaning. We certainly have such wonderful signs and symbols in this confrontation with death and accompaniment of the grieving in our Church…….in our sacraments, and powerful signs and symbols in our funeral rites and Christian funerals which as Louis-Marie Chauvet states are "replete with sacramentality."[89]

As a foundational principle, the Order of Christian Funerals (OCF) states that "the celebration of the Christian funeral brings hope and consolation to the living."[90] So it is that the Church like a good mother, tends to the grieving with a desire to recognize the pain of loss and so comfort and console the grieving, and to proclaim the hope that the

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[89] Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments, The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body,* trans. by Madeleine Beaumont, (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2001) p. 30.

[90] *Order of Christian Funerals,* from the Roman Ritual, revised by decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and published by authority of Pope Paul VI, approved for use in the dioceses of the U.S.A. by the USCCB and confirmed by the Apostolic See, (New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Corp., 1998) #7. Notated further in this thesis as (OCF #_)

Gospel offers us. The Paschal Mystery is proclaimed by not only Word but by symbol first in sprinkling with holy water, and then in the white garment, the Pall.

But first, the priest sprinkles holy water on the coffin he says:

In the waters of baptism, N. died with Christ and rose with him to new life. May he now share with him eternal glory. (OCF #160)

The placing of the Pall on the coffin at the entrance of the church calls to mind the white garment of Baptism...we have "put on Christ" in Baptism and "died with him" – therefore we shall be raised with him. It is powerful to assist the grieving parties to "clothe" the coffin with this white garment, the symbol of Christ. It was at the deceased's baptism that these words were said:

...you have become a new creation and have clothed yourself in Christ. May this white garment be a sign to you of your Christian dignity. With your family and friends to help you by word and example, bring it unstained into eternal life. Amen. (The Order of Baptism of Children #99).

One of the most powerful symbols and signs during the Christian funeral happens after placing the pall on the casket, when the family walks down the aisle into the packed church following the coffin, in my situation, with Michael in it, surrounded by love – lots of love, and faith and hope. The Assembly of the Eucharist is the primary symbol of Christ at that moment, who reaches out, embraces with love, meets ones' eyes with tenderness and gives one a foretaste of the hopeful accompaniment to come during the days of grieving. And it gives one a foretaste and hope of the coming Kingdom where God is preparing a place for all. Then we experience the beautiful symbol of Word: The words of the Opening Collect and then the Word of God in Scripture.

The large Paschal Candle is a reminder of the deceased's hope in Christ who offers his light to guide us in all our endeavors, all our days. Standing at the head of the coffin, the large Paschal Candle is a wonderful reminder of the hope-filled words proclaimed at the deceased's baptism when the celebrant says, holding the paschal candle, "Receive the light of Christ," and then the parent or godparent lights the child's candle from the paschal candle as the priest or deacon says:

> *Parents and godparents, this light is*
> *entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly,*
> *so that your child, enlightened by Christ,*
> *may walk always as a child of the light*
> *and, persevering in the faith,*
> *may run to meet the Lord when he comes*
> *with all the Saints in the heavenly court.*
> (Order of Baptism of Children [OBC} #100)

We read in the General Introduction of the *Order of Christian Funerals* of the Church's intention with this rich symbol of the Paschal Candle:

> The Easter candle reminds the faithful of Christ's undying presence among them, of his victory over sin and death, and of their share in that victory by virtue of their initiation. It recalls the Easter Vigil, the night when the Church awaits the Lord's resurrection and when new light for the living and the dead is kindled. During the funeral liturgy and also during the Vigil service, celebrated in the church, the Easter candle may be placed beforehand near the position the coffin will occupy at the conclusion of the procession. (OCF #35)

Another beautiful symbol used in the funeral rites at various times, and always in the Final Commendation, is that of incense. At the time after such prayer, or, during or after the Song of Farewell, the body is incensed with dignity and quiet solemnity. As the General Introduction of the ritual states: "Incense is used during the funeral rites as a sign of honor to the body of the deceased, which through baptism became the temple of the

Holy Spirit. (It) is also used as a sign of the community's prayers for the deceased rising to…God and as a sign of farewell." (OCF 147)

Words prayed at the Song of Farewell are particularly moving and they are usually sung:

> *Saints of God come to his/her aid!*
> *Hasten to meet him/her, angels of the Lord!*
>
> *R. Receive his/her soul and present him/her to God the Most High*
>
> *May Christ, who called you, take you to himself;*
> *may angels lead you to the bosom of Abraham.*
>
> *R. Receive his/her soul and present him/her to God the Most High*
>
> *Eternal rest grant unto him/her, O Lord,*
> *and let perpetual light shine upon him/her.*
>
> *R. Receive her/her soul and present him/her to God the Most High.*

The General Instruction of the *Order of Christian Funerals* in terms of the Final Commendation and Farewell speaks to the beauty of the message in this sung Farewell.

> The final commendation is a final farewell by the members of the community, an act of respect for one of their members whom they entrust to the tender and merciful embrace of God. This act of last farewell also acknowledges the reality of separation and affirms that the community and the deceased, baptized into the one Body, share the same destiny, resurrection on the last day. On that day the one Shepherd will call each by name and gather the faithful together in the new and eternal Jerusalem. (OCF #146)

I wish to point out that the "awakening of memory" which is a big focus of Metz's theology, leads to the *memoria passionis* and to the important factor of *narrative.* The review of these liturgical symbols and signs in regard to the suffering and pain of death, please recall at the end of this thesis, is how ***narrative*** is thus ***liturgically mediated***. The reappropriation of the richness of these liturgical signs in our celebrations can revitalize and help apply pastorally in an effective way, Metz's insights and wisdom from his

systematic theology – to address the problematic of the denial and avoidance of death and grieving in contemporary society. In all these matters, it is important to see the Church and her ministers' role in forming our people and guiding them through the riches of the funeral rites, lovingly and patiently that they might enter into the fullest expression of these rites which indeed liturgically mediate all of these important theological gifts of *memory, narrative, voice, lament* and *transformation,* all via examples of sign, symbol and word.

This area of the remembering of the dead in our Eucharistic celebrations is also a great strength in our Catholic liturgical life. But could we encourage it in new and creative ways? Can we look at new liturgical "practices of memory and hope" perhaps during the season of All Saints/All Souls?

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, relationships among the communion of saints have the effect of encouraging faithful discipleship. In the companionship model, with its lively sense of mutuality, those who are alive today understand their relationship with those who have gone before in dynamic term: they walk with the community, accompany us, relate to us as fellow travelers on the road of discipleship.[91] Elizabeth Johnson explores this important dynamic and mentions that a "key practice" in this dynamic of "remembering the dead" is done in the *dangerous sense* explored by Metz. She mentions a powerful example in El Salvador where in villages and towns throughout

[91]Fiorenza and Galvin, *Systematic Theology, Roman Catholic Perspectives,* pp. 454–455.

the country, the *Litany of the Saints* is prayed by the people and they add the names of their own martyrs and witnesses to the faith that does justice:

> To each name, the people respond *Presente!* (Here). Oscar Romero: *Presente!* Ignacio Ellacuria: *Presente!* Celina Ramos: *Presente!* Young catechists, community workers, and religious leaders of the pueblos: *Presente!* This prayer summons the memory of these martyrs as a strong, enduring presence that commits the community to emulate their lives. The fire of each martyred life kindles a new spark, releasing the power of their witness into the next generation. Empowered by their memory, we become partners in hope."[92]

As I read this "pastoral practice" I wept because of the power of such liturgical prayer and words. I imagined the power of such a Litany using the simple quiet "witnesses" – not necessarily martyrs for the faith, but the witness of our family members, our neighbors, our co-workers: Michael Ford: *Presente!* David Crowley: *Presente!* Sheila Crowley: *Presente!*

I imagine the power to comfort those in the immediacy of grief, with the liturgical, Christological and ecclesial faith of the Church Catholic, that their beloved who are dead, in fact have died with Christ in baptism and so in a real but mystical sense, they are alive and they remain – *Presente!* (Here and with us).

The Liturgy and Metz's Eschatological Imagination and *Memoria Passionis*

We live in a time now similar to that of Metz, a time when there is not only an extreme discomfort and even denial and avoidance of all things related to death, but also a time in which there is much 'silence' even in the Church regarding the eschatological reality on which our hope is based. And so the absence, largely, of the *eschatological*

[92] Ibid., pp. 454–455.

word which brings hope in the face of death, pastorally, can be a real problem when combined with a culture which cannot deal with death and has no patience in its philosophical presuppositions for even the possibility of eternal life. We have addressed above the beauty and gifts of the liturgy in the face of this problematic and suggested a reclaiming of the great liturgical tradition and reappropriation of its power and fullness in terms of its eschatological riches in word, sign and symbol. We have highlighted elements of that in the above funeral rites. We have alluded to the fact every Eucharistic liturgy has a remembrance of our beloved dead – which alone pierces the whole 'discomfort with death' culture. But it is important to note, beyond that remembrance, every Eucharistic celebration has a strong eschatological orientation that opens up what many writers have termed the eschatological imagination. It is very much worth noting that in his book[93], Thomas P. Rausch SJ, listed and summarized the evidence in the new Roman Missal of 2010 the many eschatological elements which include:

- The Creed……. He will come in glory
- The Creed……. I look forward to the resurrection of the dead
- Preface……. frequent references to Christ's coming in glory
- Benedictus…. Blessed is he who comes
- Eucharistic Prayers…. expectations of Christ's second coming are found throughout them
- Lord's Prayer…. the petition "your Kingdom come!"
- Libera nos….in response to the Lord's Prayer the presider prays…."as we await the blessed hope…. the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

It is also important to note that imbedded in the Eucharistic Prayers for Funeral Masses, there are special remembrances for the dead for the presider to use. Its appeal to the 'communion with the Lord in his Resurrection' is more evidence of the eschatological

[93] Rausch, S.J., Thomas P., *Eschatology, Liturgy, and Christology, Toward Recovering an Eschatological Imagination,* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2012) p. 134.

character found in the Eucharistic Liturgies. The first word reflects the focus of Metz's theological focus…. on **memory!**

Remember your servant N.,
whom you have called (today)
from this world to yourself.
Grant that he/she who was united with your Son in a death like his,
may also be one with him in his Resurrection.

The Liturgical Synergy of Metz's Thought and the Eucharistic Consecration

It is perhaps too easy to miss the many connections of the Sacred Liturgy with the locus of Johann Baptist Metz's theological positions. When we realize that the very center of the Eucharistic Prayer has the Presider praying, **"**Do this in memory of me**"** we can hear the resonance with Metz's focus on memory. When we realize our exploration has been among other themes, the central theme of his – *memoria passionis* – the memory of suffering, specifically the memory of the suffering of the dead victims of history, one immediately realizes that in the Eucharist, the words of consecration, "do this in memory of me," is a remembrance of the victim Jesus, who embraces in a sense all the victims of history…all the victims of oppression, all the marginalized and voiceless, and those whose narratives are suppressed, whose thirst for justice has never been realized. It is a powerful consideration when much of Metz's thought inspires a kind of liturgical synergy that celebrates who we are, what we are called to, our mission and praxis, indeed, motivated by the very dangerous memory of Jesus, who suffered, died and rose. The various strands of Metz's theology can be seen to come together to form a narrative and liturgical structure that tends to those suffering loss, grief, and death and moves them through memory and liturgical celebration toward the eschatological hope.

Metz's Apocalyptic Eschatology, *Memoria Resurrectionis* and Hope

To comprehend Johann Baptist Metz's apocalyptic eschatology, one has to understand his major critique. Metz aims at what he calls the ideology of the "myth of evolutionary progress. This is a cultural myth that posits imagines that evolution has become the paradigm for how humanity is in a state of constant 'forward motion' and progress. This culturally accepted myth has become the new ideological norm. It looks at things in a way quite differently, from Metz's point of view than the Christian Tradition. Time takes on a certain characteristic, as does the process of change as well as history. In this cultural paradigm of "evolutionary progress," change is seen as evolutionary or evolving However it can also take on an impersonal mode or quality. For instance, this myth is married to the heightened awareness and expectation of technology, and it takes on a decidedly impersonal aspect not grounded in personal human decisions. What fits with this myth is kind of a certain social Darwinism and survival of the fittest. It seems fair to say this is particularly pronounced in the developed West in a free-market environment that valorizes wealth and its accumulation as the paramount value. We see this supported and lionized in the media, in board rooms and in popular culture. It engenders a type of individualism that overlooks the plight of the suffering, the poor and the oppressed.

Metz sees this 'evolutionary progress myth' as having robbed the Christian tradition of the apocalyptic element in eschatology. The traditional "end-time," which Metz promotes as a more authentic Christian approach, is co-opted by an ideology of unending progress fueled by technology and capital. Neil Omerod explains in his text[94]

[94] Ormerod, Neil, *Introducing Contemporary Theologies, The What and the Who of Theology Today,* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997, pp. 127 – 131.

that Metz suggests that under this paradigm of "endless, evolutionary progression" theology has been caught between an immanentist eschatology whereby the focus is on the "here and now," God is present now, with the focus being often on devotional life, charismatic movement, etc. in a way that deflects from the current problems of the historical moment. Or secondly, the focus is on a "futurist eschatology" that sees the reward in an other-worldly heaven and thus also not much focused on present needs. As Omerod states, "for both, history is endlessly open to revision so that the urgency for change is never acutely felt.[95]

For Metz, he posits an "apocalyptic eschatology" that takes the demands of justice seriously, that come from a reflection on *dangerous memory* that we have reviewed, and which takes time seriously and the challenges, injustices and problems that we are called to address in history. This approach takes evil seriously and our call to praxis and mission. As Omerod states so powerfully and succinctly: "The middle-class subject is challenged to recognize the authority of Jesus' suffering and the tradition which keeps that memory alive."[96]

This apocalyptic eschatology is part of our ancient tradition but has been smothered by the myth of never ending modern evolutionary progress. How does the *memoria passionis* act as a "path forward" to praxis? Brian D. Robinette in his text on

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[95] Ibid., p. 128.

[96] Ibid., p. 130.

the resurrection answers this question: "The memory of suffering continues to resist the cynics of modern political power."[97] He goes on to say:

> The memory of suffering, like the 'time" of apocalyptic, is interruptive. It disorients and motivates. It challenges us to consider alternatives to prevailing attitudes and practices. It cannot be included in our narrations of history without provoking questions about how we continue to make it.[98]

Robinette quotes JB Metz in the following lengthy but worthwhile quote regarding how the *memory of suffering* determines how we handle "history:"

> We tend, consciously or unconsciously, to define history as the history of what has prevailed, as the history of the successful and the established. There is hardly any reference in history as we know it to the conquered and defeated or to the forgotten or suppressed hopes of our historical existence. In history, a kind of Darwinism in the sense of the principle of selection tends to prevail. [But] it is of decisive importance that a kind of anti-history should develop out of the memory of suffering – an understanding of history in which the vanquished and destroyed alternatives would also be taken into account: an understanding of history *ex memoria passionis* as a history of the vanquished.[99].

Metz explains that the,

> "*Resurrection is mediated by the memory of suffering.* He specifies that *the dead, those already vanquished and forgotten, have a meaning which is as yet unrealized*."[100] Robinette explains further that Jesus' resurrection according to Metz, cannot be dismissed as "unworldly" hope. He is not speaking about hope

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[97] Robinette, Brian D., *Grammars of Resurrection, A Christian Theology of Presence and Absence,* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2009) p. 223. The author refers to Paul D. Hanson who suggests we can distinguish between *apocalyptic* as a literary genre, *apocalyptic theology* as a theological worldview (I would suggest this is how Metz uses the term), and *apocalypticism* as a sociological phenomenon.

[98] Ibid., 223.

[99] Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* p. 111, in Robinette, Brian D., *Grammars of Resurrection, A Christian Theology of Presence and Absence,* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2009) p. 223.

[100] Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, p. 113, in Robinette, Brian D., *Grammars of Resurrection, A Christian Theology of Presence and Absence,* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2009) p. 223.

> for a future that forgets about history – or even splits it between sacred and secular. In fact, the Resurrection faith of apocalyptic eschatology looks for definitive justice for the good of all of society!"[101]

Metz reclaims from early Christian times the view that the Resurrection is a "vindication" of the victims of history, and Jesus as victim as well as *divine judgement* against all those who wreak havoc in the world.[102]

So, in truth, JB Metz's theological focus is one that can best be termed *memoria passionis mortis, et resurrectionis Jesu Christi.* The Resurrection is not simply a distant reward, but is the vindication of the victims of history, the victims of suffering, past and present, for whom God has a special option and love. It is an apocalyptic theology that begins by looking back at the *memoria passionis but* looks forward in hope that "My Vindicator lives."

This is the hope that drives a Christian discipleship and ministry that responds to the strong demands coming from a dangerous memory, the ***memoria passionis!***

What J. Matthew Ashley calls an *anamnestic memory* that drives our call and dares to invite us into the *memoria passionis,* is also one that is matched by a God, as Gustavo Gutierrez says, is rich in memory, and underpinning this is what one could call a subversive eschatology in which the Resurrection of Jesus is a sign of the God who vindicates the dead of history. It is a sign God wants us to remember not only the dead martyr-victims of history, but also all the dead, the dead who are, dare we say – simply ordinary witnesses - our spouses, neighbors, co-workers, and children – all our beloved

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[101] Ibid.

[102] Robinette, Brian D., *Grammars of Resurrection, A Christian Theology of Presence and Absence,* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2009) p. 78.

dead, for they too are heirs to the promise of God. Their narratives must be told as well. God's memory never forgets the least. This theological work of Metz challenges us to integrate it into our mission, such that we desire ever more to labor with him who labors for us. It is the prayer of lament that drives us onward, it is the silent cry as well as the fearful wailing of all those who are victim of life's pain of all kinds of losses. God's memory never forgets them, never. Ultimately, besides the hope that this thesis motivates those who read it to listen to the *memoria passionis* and work for justice, it is hoped that it also speaks to the liberation of those who grieve, and invites them to God's transformation through and out of suffering into the work of love and justice, and compassion for all who suffer. Our hidden/revealed Cross-saturated God, is nevertheless the God who never forgets the cry of the poor, the cry of the earth, and pain of those whose only response is a fearful wailing.

POSTSCRIPT

It is ironic that the problem I have chosen to address with this thesis, the denial of death and suffering, comes to its fruition precisely during a worldwide Pandemic and Shut-In-Place – a time infused with death every day on the television, a time of threat and fear. And so, one might be tempted to say that the problem I addressed has been solved!

I think not. Every evening we see statistics and more statistics – I'm reminded of Vietnam days – every day the body count. And yet we don't often see the bodies, we are not having funerals, but at least the topic has opened up!

I'm grateful for the insights of Metz that I think can still bring back a more holistic and holy practice and awareness of the dead, the grieving, the need to come together to support and comfort and be transformed in the loss and pain. In such a manner one hopes for a new "eschatological imagination" of which Metz speaks that can be an engine for praxis and mission to work for the Kingdom, wherein justice for the poor and oppressed reigns and Christ can again, "Make all things new!"

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