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## Johann Baptist Metz's Approach to the Church Secularity: A Theology of Connection

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**Abstract:** *This research examines the changing landscape of Christian life. Today, Christians are at a crossroads where one path offers comfort, a world sheltered from the tumultuous secular world's complexities. The other path invites Christians to engage in the secular world, transcend selfishness, and face its challenges in the public arena. This research aims to strengthen the Church's understanding of divine calling and purpose in secular society. This research uses a qualitative descriptive methodology investigation to explore the theological work of Johann Baptist Metz. This research starts from Metz's existential thought, which views the present as the Church's eschatological time. This study explores Metz's concept of Christian time, its profound implications for eschatological ideas, and reveals its relevance in the modern context. Thematic analysis, the foundation of qualitative research, distills and presents research findings. Research findings show that Metz views the importance of the human-God relationship as the basis for the existence of the Church. The Church is an interconnected entity. This relational dimension becomes the identity of the Church. Just as the Incarnation of Christ marked the entry of the Divine into human history to establish a deep relationship, the Church stands as the eternal embodiment of Christ's presence in the world. It serves as a channel for the ongoing encounter between God and humanity, placing itself at the intersection of the sacred and the secular. The Church's Christian eschatological experience finds expression in grassroots mission work, where compassion for the poor and marginalized is paramount. The Church's willingness to adapt and develop its theological perspective reflects its unwavering commitment to facing the challenges of the contemporary world, thereby becoming a beacon of empowerment and life transformation.*

Keywords: Christian Life; Eschatological Experience; Secularization; Solidarity

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## 1. Introduction

Hermeneutics regarding the life of Christians is exciting these days.<sup>1</sup> It emerges from the dissatisfaction regarding the meaningfulness of Christian life in the present during the post-World War II era. It is concerned with external and internal aspects of Christian daily life. Externally, it relates to secularization and globalization. Internally, it refers to the Church's answer about God and His relevance in modern society. Concerning the problems, religion is one aspect that becomes the motor that drives humans. Religion introduces humans to God when humans are at the limit point of their existence.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, religion as a reality of human life plays a role in significant changes in the world.

The early Christians up to the medieval Church saw that God is the basis of all things (*causa prima et ultima*).<sup>3</sup> God is the epicentrum of humanity, although man is the driving force of history. Over time, technological developments and the development of the human ratio changed this perspective. Man sees himself as the center of the world. This perspective changes human life. Man begins to make plans for himself.<sup>4</sup>

Ideas on human dignity move history.<sup>5</sup> The concept of human dignity has been a potent catalyst throughout history, propelling significant social and political transformations. It has fueled movements such as the abolition of slavery, women's suffrage, and civil rights, underpinning the assertion that everyone possesses inherent worth and fundamental rights. This idea has driven revolutions, social justice campaigns, and international declarations, fundamentally altering how societies perceive and treat their members. The pursuit of human dignity underscores the collective aspiration to create more just, equitable, and inclusive societies, making it a powerful and enduring force shaping the trajectory of human history.

Secularization is a natural consequence of belief in human values that began around the 12<sup>nd</sup> and 13<sup>rd</sup> centuries. At that time, people developed Augustine's thought which stated that the relationship between humans and God is vertical and extrinsic.<sup>6</sup> In this

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Kristriyanto Kristriyanto, 'Yesus Kristus Juru Ruwat Manusia: Sebuah Pendekatan Semiotika Dalam Gereja Kristen Jawa', *Kurios* 4, no. 1 (2018): 39–55; or cf. Matsobane J. Manala, 'Gratitude as a Christian Lifestyle: An Afro-Reformed Theological Perspective', *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 74, no. 4 (2018): 1–8.

<sup>2</sup> Kunawi, 'Titik Temu Agama-Agama Dalam Analisis Interpretatif', *Religio: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 2, no. 2 (2012): 173–192.

<sup>3</sup> Bogdan G. Bucur, 'Theophanies and Vision of God in Augustine's De Trinitate: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective', *St Vladimirs Theological Quarterly* 521 (2008): 67–93.

<sup>4</sup> Hilmar M. Pabel, 'Humanism and Early Modern Catholicism', in *Early Modern Catholicism*, ed. Kathleen M. Comerford (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Reginald Alva, 'The Importance of Christian Faith in the Light of the Teachings Of the Encyclical Lumen Fidei', *Journal of the Nanzan Academic Society Humanities and Natural Sciences* 105, no. 10 (2015): 169–83.

<sup>6</sup> Piotr Kołacz, 'St Augustine's Teaching on the Image of God in Man in the Mystery of Creation', *Studia Theologica Varsaviensia* 34, no. 2 (1996): 83–96; Carol Harrison, 'Augustine and Religious Experience', *Louvain Studies* 27, no. 2 (2002): 99–118.

relationship, humanity is bound by natural law. Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquino reinforced this idea by calling intellect or reason a human peculiarity. This is where the recognition of the understanding of ratios begins. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Robert Bellarmine made a theory regarding the theory of pure nature (*natura pura*) where the supernatural dignity of humans is different from their natural nature.<sup>7</sup> By his nature, man can grasp the idea of God. The views of the Reformation are contrary to the ideas of Robert Bellarmine. The reformers remain convinced of the meaningfulness of supernatural dignity embodied in Christian revelation, not in ratio. Outside of the Protestantism and Catholicism debate, modern thinkers produce an Empiricist approach that aligns more with the development of science and technology. The significance of Christian revelation fades with the development of the empirical sciences.<sup>8</sup>

The process of the development of the empirical sciences places man in a new, living world that is completely different from the world of the Church.<sup>9</sup> The evolution of empirical sciences has immersed humanity in a dynamic, vibrant realm distinct from the Church's traditional worldview. This transformation signifies a profound shift in perspective. Meanwhile, through its universality, the Church continuously adapts to coexist with this evolving world. It navigates the complex interface between faith and science, striving to remain relevant and inclusive within the ever-changing human experience. As man embraces the empirical sciences, the Church seeks to harmonize its timeless teachings with the contemporary context, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a spiritual connection in a rapidly changing world.<sup>10</sup>

The concept of "Post-Pastoral" in the context of reevaluating religion and the reshaping of rural landscapes suggests a profound shift in the relationship between spirituality and modernity.<sup>11</sup> It raises questions about the relevance of traditional pastoral, often rural, religious practices in an era marked by technological advancement and urbanization. As rural spaces evolve and technological planning leads to economic prosperity, the influence of religion and pastoral traditions may be reexamined, potentially giving rise to secularism as rural areas experience profound transformations. This transition reflects the broader societal shift towards secularism, often driven by the changing dynamics of contemporary life and the impacts of technological progress on rural spaces and religious traditions.

Furthermore, science plays an important role in building the world. The world is no

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<sup>7</sup> Gerald O'Collins, 'The Joy of Love (Amoris Laetitia): The Papal Exhortation in Its Context', *Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2016): 905–21.

<sup>8</sup> Edwin Judge, 'The Religion of the Secularists', *Journal of Religious History* 38, no. 3 (2014): 307–19.

<sup>9</sup> Sebastian Kim, 'Mission's Public Engagement: The Conversation of Missiology and Public Theology', *Missiology: An International Review* 45, no. 1 (2017): 7–24.

<sup>10</sup> Jürgen Habermas, Tony Blair, and Régis Debray, 'Notes on Post-secular Society', *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (2008): 17–29.

<sup>11</sup> Rhys D. Jones and Jesse Heley, 'Post-Pastoral? Rethinking Religion and the Reconstruction of Rural Space', *Journal of Rural Studies* 45 (2016): 15–23.

longer centered on the past but on the future. Secularism means the thought that distances people from God. All that man has is the result of human perseverance and intelligence. On the contrary, people ran before God in the past when facing problems. Nowadays, drawing closer to God is not the way out. It is man himself who is the way out. Secularism changes the basis of shared life in society from moral to ethical.<sup>12</sup> The moral assessment uses a religion-based assessment. Ethics uses reason as the basis of human judgment. With these differences, secularism makes humanity an independent entity. Secularism separates religion from various fields of life, such as politics, culture, economics, and society. The main concern of secularism is the concept of domination and mastery. Modern subjects are those who can feel free to break religious authority.

This process of secularization continues to this day. Even today there has been a re-interpretation of Christianity.<sup>13</sup> Two schools of thought emerged, namely groups advocating Christian atheism and advocating the idea of God's Death Movement.<sup>14</sup> The two movements originate from the radical identity of love for God and Christian friendship, the first of which emphasizes love for others and the second emphasizes love for God but forgets about others.<sup>15</sup> The starting point of the two groups is the contextualization of biblical values.

Christian atheism is a philosophical and theological position where individuals identify as atheists, rejecting belief in a personal God, while still finding value in the ethical teachings of Jesus Christ and the Christian tradition. It embodies a paradoxical perspective, emphasizing the moral and philosophical aspects of Christianity, such as love, compassion, and social justice, while denying the existence of a divine being. This stance has been explored by various philosophers and theologians, challenging conventional religious belief and highlighting the significance of Jesus as a moral teacher and symbol of these values rather than a deity.

The Death of God movement, popular in the 1960s, was a theological and philosophical concept emphasizing the decline of traditional religious authority and the idea that belief in God was no longer central to contemporary culture. Influential theologians like Thomas J.J. Altizer argued that the traditional Christian understanding of God had "died" as a meaningful cultural or theological concept. This movement reflected

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<sup>12</sup> Michaela Luger, Katharina Maria Hofer, and Arne Floh, 'Support For Corporate Social Responsibility Among Generation Y Consumers in Advanced Versus Emerging Markets', *International Business Review* 31, no. 2 (2022); Jose Nandhikkara, 'Homo Religiosus At the Service of Ethical Societies', *Journal of Dharma* 45, no. 3 (2020): 305–10; Ionut Untea, 'Contemporary Uses of the Golden Rule of Reciprocity in Abrahamic Interfaith Discourses', *Studies in Religion-Sciences Religieuses* 47, no. 1 (2018): 107–36.

<sup>13</sup> William Franke, 'A Negative Theological Critique of Postmodern Identity Politics', *Religions* 10, no. 8 (2019): 2.

<sup>14</sup> Bryan S. Turner, 'The Political Theology of Covid-19: A Comparative History of Human Responses to Catastrophes', *Pandemic, Politics, and Society*, 2021, 149.

<sup>15</sup> Marit Monteiro, 'The Religious Radicals of '68', *Religion & Theology* 24 (2017): 109–29.

broader societal shifts towards secularism, existentialism, and postmodernism. It challenged conventional religious norms, aiming to reinterpret faith in an era of doubt. The Death of God movement prompted discussions on the role of religion in modern society and the evolving nature of spirituality.

Both Christian atheism and the Death of God movement call themselves the post-Christian society where they emphasize the relevance of Christian life in a changing society.<sup>16</sup> The consequence of this thought is the emergence of dialogic awareness. The emergence of dialogic awareness signifies the development of an individual's capacity to engage in meaningful, open, and empathetic conversations with others.<sup>17</sup> It involves listening actively, considering diverse viewpoints, and engaging in respectful discourse. This awareness promotes effective communication, deeper understanding, and a more inclusive perspective. It often arises through education, social experiences, and personal growth, fostering tolerance and cooperation in diverse, interconnected societies. Dialogic awareness contributes to constructive dialogue, conflict resolution, and exchanging ideas, ultimately fostering more harmonious and progressive communities. It is seen as a crucial skill for building bridges across differences and promoting social cohesion.

The basic assumption of a dialogue frame of mind is that there is always a solution for every problem. Relativism is a logical consequence of this assumption. A dialogue frame of mind operates on the fundamental belief that every problem inherently contains a solution.<sup>18</sup> This perspective, rooted in optimism and problem-solving, fosters an open and inclusive approach to discussions and conflict resolution. Relativism naturally arises from this mindset as it acknowledges that solutions can be context-dependent and multifaceted. In other words, what works as a solution in one context may not be applicable in another. This relativistic view promotes flexibility, adaptability, and a recognition that problem-solving methods should be tailored to specific situations. It underscores the importance of considering various perspectives and adapting solutions to fit the nuances of each unique problem.

The Christians are aware that Christian truth is not found in a common dialogue. Christian truth is a divine disclosure through events.<sup>19</sup> J.B. Metz's concept of Christian secularity, emphasizing the intersection of Christian faith with the secular world, raises a compelling theological challenge for scholars. The problem lies in reconciling the traditional religious constructs with the evolving dynamics of contemporary secular society. As secularism continues to shape modern life, theologians must grapple with the question of how to preserve the core tenets of the Christian faith, including concepts of

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<sup>16</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, 'The Future of Theology', *Ecumenical Review* 68, no. 1 (2016): 3–13.

<sup>17</sup> Liam Mac Gabhann and Simon Dunne, 'Dialogue Meetings: Engaging Citizens and Fostering Communities of Wellbeing through Collective Dialogue', *Frontiers in Psychology* 12, no. 744681 (2021): 5.

<sup>18</sup> Scott F. Aikin and John P. Casey, 'Bothsiderism', *Argumentation* 36, no. 2 (2022): 249–268.

<sup>19</sup> Anna Cho, 'Revelation as a Discourse of Language through Speech Act Theory', *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021): 2.

salvation, redemption, and spiritual identity, while remaining relevant and meaningful in a secular context.<sup>20</sup> This research problem necessitates a deep exploration of the theological implications, practical applications, and the evolving role of the Church in a rapidly changing secular world, offering insights into how faith can continue to resonate and address the profound questions of human existence within this context.

The theological thinking of J.B. Metz emphasized the significance of addressing social and political issues from a Christian perspective, mainly focusing on the suffering and marginalized. His theology of "dangerous memory" stressed remembering historical atrocities and the call for social justice. Metz's ideas have influenced the theological approach to engaging with contemporary challenges and promoting solidarity, justice, and compassion. He highlights the moral responsibility of faith communities to confront social injustices and engage in meaningful dialogue, making his work crucial in bridging theology and social issues in today's world.

J.B. Metz's poignant reminder underscores the pervasive presence of injustice and inequality in our world, starkly contrasting the message of equality conveyed through Christ's incarnation. Despite the profound theological assertion of Christ's equality with humanity and the intrinsic equality among individuals, the reality is marked by stark disparities. Metz's call serves as a powerful plea for action and empathy toward those who endure the brunt of societal injustices. It challenges us to recognize that the Christian imperative extends to addressing these disparities, embracing a commitment to social justice and human dignity to pursue a more equitable and compassionate world.

The Christian needs to express compassion towards the world.<sup>21</sup> *Compassion* is not just a feeling of compassion for someone who is suffering. More than that, compassion is an obligation to be open and perceive the suffering of others, an active movement towards what other people are suffering. *Compassion* is the ability to feel what others are suffering and express it.

This research article seeks answers to the question of the meaningfulness of the Christian faith according to J.B. Metz. Metz's contribution is important with his proposal on how the Catholic Church adapts and relates to modern society, "the history of a religion is always a history of humanity".<sup>22</sup> In problem research, the researcher has three questions. What is Metz's concept of the Christian eschatological experience? What is Metz's concept

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<sup>20</sup> Travis Lacouter, 'Competing Accounts of Progress: The Redemptive Purpose of Memory in J.B. Metz and Theodor Adorno', *Heythrop Journal - Quarterly Review of Philosophy and Theology* 59, no. 3 (2018): 544–60; Matthew T. Eggemeier, 'A Post-Secular Modernity? Jurgen Habermas, Joseph Ratzinger, and Johann Baptist Metz on Religion, Reason, and Politics', *Heythrop Journal - Quarterly Review of Philosophy and Theology* 53, no. 3 (2012): 453–66.

<sup>21</sup> Katherine Allen Smith, 'Discipline, Compassion and Monastic Ideals of Community, c.950-1250', *Journal of Medieval History* 35, no. 4 (2009): 326–39.

<sup>22</sup> Johann Baptist Metz and J. Matthew Ashley, 'Suffering Unto God', *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 4 (1994): 611–622.

of Christian time? What are the consequences of this concept for Christian eschatological ideas? Johann Baptist Metz's thinking on time and eschatology is very important in theological discourse. Metz emphasized the idea of "dangerous memory," urging us to remember the suffering and injustices of the past. He connected this memory to eschatology, the theological concept of the end times or ultimate fulfillment. Metz's work highlights the urgency of addressing contemporary social and political issues through a lens of eschatological hope, where the memory of suffering serves as a catalyst for justice and change.<sup>23</sup> His ideas challenge theologians and believers to engage with the world's problems, emphasizing that eschatology is not a distant future but a call to action in the present, making his thinking highly relevant and transformative.

## **2. Method of Research**

This study employed a qualitative research method through literature study. We collected data from primary literature sources. The descriptive literary material became the object material of the research. We used a content analysis approach for analyzing data.<sup>24</sup> We examined the emerging themes. Typically employed in qualitative exploratory and descriptive research, this approach thoroughly analyzes collected textual content data. We engaged in an in-depth exploration of concepts. By scrutinizing these emerging themes, we gained insights into the underlying dynamics or narratives within the dataset. This method allows for a nuanced understanding of complex phenomena, offering a comprehensive overview of the subject matter while uncovering latent connections and novel perspectives that may guide subsequent research inquiries or inform practical applications. Then, we processed it in the discussion as an interpretative effort to comprehend the research's

## **3. Result and Discussion**

The idea of "separateness," which is the basis of the concept of secularism, comes from Metz's experience during the Second World War. War is a painful human experience that causes separation. Conflict causes separation both physically and mentally. This is an existential separation when a person feels alienated from the opposing party. Separation is also an experience of faith when war separates believers. His experience as a prisoner of war prompted Metz to think about the meaning of Christian revelation.

Metz examined that the contemporary secular world had forced biblical data into alien categories by people who read it with an agenda.<sup>25</sup> According to him, the dogmatic, experientialist, and historicist approaches are improper ways to understand the Christian

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<sup>23</sup> Young Hoon Kim, 'Theodicy, Undeserved Suffering, and Compassionate Solidarity', *Religions* 11, no. 9 (2020): 2.

<sup>24</sup> Britt Marie Lindgren, Berit Lundman, and Ulla H. Graneheim, 'Abstraction and Interpretation during the Qualitative Content Analysis Process', *International Journal of Nursing Studies* 108 (2020).

<sup>25</sup> Avery Dulles, *Craft of Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1992): 81.

community. From the Catholic side, Metz insisted that Christianity is a community that cherished the “narrative and evocative memory of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The *logos* of the cross and resurrection have a narrative structure”.<sup>26</sup> As a narration, Metz believes that theology must have a practical aspect that connects persons and events. The examples of Jesus Christ during His temporary life become a guideline for understanding what it is to be a Christian. The story of Jesus is a history of a passion for humanity.

J.B. Metz feels the kindness of those around him even though he is a war prisoner. He spent his time from 1945 to 1948 in a war camp in Maryland and then Virginia. Articulating others' suffering is the main characteristic of Metz's thinking. The human suffering becomes the *locus theologicus*, “The New Testament background of compassion is important that the messianic gaze of Jesus is directed first place not to sin, but to the suffering of others”.<sup>27</sup> Emerging from this context, faith becomes an act of compassion. Belief in God means acknowledging Him who works through people. Behaving as a Christian means an involvement with life as it goes on. Metz believes faith also means participating in all economic, social, and political activities. These three fields color the picture of today's human life. The Church exists for everyone because everyone is a subject of the Church.

Johann Baptist Metz's perspective, which underscores the intersection of faith with economic, social, and political dimensions of life, calls for a comprehensive implementation within the Church. Faith is not confined to the spiritual realm but should actively guide and participate in these domains, as they significantly shape the human experience. The Church must evolve into an inclusive and proactive agent, embracing individuals from all walks of life and recognizing that each person is a subject of its care and influence.

To put this into practice, the Church can begin by engaging in ethical and moral teachings that extend into economic activities. Promoting responsible and compassionate financial practices can be achieved through educational programs and guidance for its members. Social involvement can be actualized by championing social justice initiatives and outreach programs that address issues like poverty, inequality, and human rights. As a mediator of faith, the Church can create spaces for dialogue and reconciliation in times of social or political conflict, promoting understanding and peace.

In the political arena, the Church can encourage responsible civic engagement, emphasizing the moral imperatives in political decisions. This should not involve endorsing specific parties or candidates but rather promoting ethical decision-making and civic participation guided by faith. By integrating faith with these spheres, the Church can nurture a sense of community, where members collectively support one another and find

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<sup>26</sup> Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society* (New York: Seabury, 1980), 212.

<sup>27</sup> Johann Metz, ‘Il Cristianesimo Nel Pluralismo Delle Religioni e Delle Culture’, *Studia Patavina: Rivista Di Scienze Religiose* 48, no. 2 (2001): 40.



strength in their shared beliefs, effectively painting a richer and more holistic picture of faith in action in today's complex world.

Johann Baptist Metz was significantly influenced by the existentialist philosophy of Martin Heidegger and the theological contributions of Jürgen Moltmann.<sup>28</sup> Heidegger's work on existentialism and phenomenology profoundly impacted Metz's theological thinking. Heidegger's emphasis on the individual's authentic existence, the significance of being towards death, and the idea of "thrownness" into the world resonated with Metz. Metz incorporated Heidegger's existential ideas into his theological reflections, especially in his engagement with the suffering and precariousness of human existence. He recognized that existential anxiety and a sense of estrangement were essential aspects of human life, which could provide a profound starting point for theological exploration. Jürgen Moltmann's contributions to theology, mainly his focus on hope and eschatology, also shaped Metz's thinking. Moltmann's theological ideas, centered on the hope for a better future, resonated with Metz's commitment to addressing social and political injustices. Moltmann's eschatological emphasis on the "coming kingdom of God" provided Metz with a framework for understanding how theological concepts, such as hope and redemption, could be applied to contemporary suffering and human rights issues.

In essence, Metz's theology bridges the existential insights of Heidegger with Moltmann's eschatological hope. His work represents a synthesis of these influences, emphasizing the need for theology to engage with the existential realities of human existence while holding onto a vision of hope and justice for the future. This blend of existential and eschatological thinking has been instrumental in shaping theological discussions about memory, suffering, and social engagement.

### **Secularization in Metz's Perspective**

Metz believes that secularization is the process of rationalizing Christian values so that Christianity is relevant to modern society. Metz's views come from questions regarding the relevance of the Church to human life today. This question invites the Church to give its role in dealing with humanitarian issues, for example, issues of corruption, social injustice, suppression of the social rights of the poor, attitude of tolerance, or mutual respect for the differences in society. Christians also face many social inequalities that occur in society.

The Church does not entirely have solutions to various world problems, but it needs to involve itself in the efforts of those who seek the common good (*bonum commune*). Participation in striving for the goodness of living together is based on the belief that God also sows the seeds of the Kingdom of God in that struggle. It raises the meaning of the Church as a Sacrament in

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<sup>28</sup> J. Matthew Ashley, 'Johann Baptist Metz', in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. William T. Cavanaugh and Peter Manley Scott, 2nd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2019), 236–249.

Christ, namely the sign and means of the intimate union between God and humans and the unity of all humankind. "Sin for Jesus was above all a refusal to participate in the pain of the other, it was a renunciation of thinking beyond the dark horizon of the history of one's suffering, it was, as Augustine defined it, 'the withdrawal of the heart into itself', a delivery to the latent narcissism of the creature. And this is how Christianity began, as a community of narration and memory, the following of Jesus, whose first gaze was dedicated to the suffering of others".<sup>29</sup>

Christian secularity is the Church's effort to involve itself in humanitarian issues. In this context, according to Metz, Christian secularity is the remembrance of other's suffering.<sup>30</sup> Christian secularity is involvement in world issues, compassion, and contribution to creating the common good. Christian secularity concerns everyday concrete life. Christian secularity originates from Christological and Christian soteriological experiences.

Soteriological aspects of Christian secularity have emerged from an anthropological perspective. The Christian anthropological concept states that man is the image and likeness of God.<sup>31</sup> God bestowed upon man reason, will, and love, as well as sanctifying grace which enables him to participate in the divine nature.<sup>32</sup> The experience of sin diminishes the human ability to remain in a relationship with God. Because of sin, man is unable to find the way to God. The history of sin is a continuous rejection on the part of man against God's plan, which longs for man's return to union with Him. Only God can draw people back into a genuine relationship with Him.

God's love and mercy show His will to restore His relationship with humans. God does not carry out His love plan in one fell swoop. God's plan is an invitation that expects an answer from humans. The invitation is in the form of God's inclusion in the life history of those who listen to him. The history of salvation is the history of those who acknowledge others, "it can not only be a matter of the relation of one to the other as partners in the discursive process but — more fundamentally — it is a matter of the relation of one to the other who are oppressed and excluded".<sup>33</sup>

The history of salvation is the history of personal relationships. This history is in the form of a series of covenants between God and humanity. Covenant after covenant expanded in scope, starting from Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David and reaching its climax in the presence of Christ in the New Testament. The passion and death of Jesus Christ is for the sake of human salvation, as a ransom sacrifice for human sins and transgressions.

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<sup>29</sup> Metz, *Cristianesimo*, 42.

<sup>30</sup> Johann Baptist Metz, 'Facing the World: A Theological and Biographical Inquiry', *Theological Studies* 75, no. 1 (2014): 31.

<sup>31</sup> Genesis 1:27.

<sup>32</sup> 2 Peter 1:4.

<sup>33</sup> Metz, *Cristianesimo*, 44.

Secularity has its Christological perspective. It describes God's commitment to human beings, which is seen in the experience of faith in Jesus Christ. Salvation is an objective fact for Christians, thanks to the work of Jesus through the Easter event. The subjectivity of salvation is felt by Christians in different forms of expression, for example: "life in the hands of God," "inner calm knowing the final direction of life's journey," and "joy and patience in living everyday life." This aspect of subjectivity makes Christians aware that they must always be aware because what is experienced in daily life is not complete (totally comprehensive). What is experienced in life is only a glimpse of what will be experienced in full when they welcome the arrival of Jesus as their King, "Christianity imposes not a religiosity almost candidly folded in on itself, without a face, but a 'mystic with open eyes', which calls for responsibility, who seeks the face of God through the suffering of others".<sup>34</sup>

As a group of Christ's disciples, the Church believes that unity with Christ is the core of a safe life. By fixing her eyes on Christ, the Church manifests salvation by entering reality. The central values contained in people's lives are raised so that they can be imbued with the values of Christ so that everyone can personally experience the embodiment of these values as an experience of salvation.

The Church is invited to be radical in its work and mission. It invites all believers to be involved in its work so that people can feel the presence of Christ through its presence for everyone.<sup>35</sup> The presence of the Church is inseparable from the presence of the surrounding community. The Church is part of society. The mission of the Church in the world must be adapted to the context of the society in which the Church is located. The Church is present in society to be a pioneer of love so that everyone can experience salvation from God. The involvement of the Church in social life is obvious from the efforts made by the Church to promote a better everyday life.

The Church and the world are one unified whole that cannot be separated. Talking about the Church means not being separated from the world in which the Church exists and lives. Hans Kung said the essence of the Church is inseparable from the history of the Church itself. Where the Church grows and develops in the world so that the Church experiences development by the development of the world, Metz said the Church belongs to the world because the Church cannot be separated from the history of world civilization.

The Church, as God's people, is part of the world.<sup>36</sup> The Church was born in the world and developed according to the times. Jesus Christ, the head of the Church, came to the world and lived like an ordinary human. He came to earth to bring the message of God's

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<sup>34</sup> Metz, *Facing the World*, 33.

<sup>35</sup> Willem Leonardus Turpijn, William Cahyawan, and Benny Suwito, 'Towards the Spirit of Renewal and Openness: The Roman Catholic Church Reforms and the Global South', *Global South Review* 1, no. 2 (2019): 49-63.

<sup>36</sup> Amanda C. Osheim, 'Stepping toward a Synodal Church', *Theological Studies* 80, no. 2 (2019): 370-92.

kingdom. Thus, the Church is also required to pass on the teachings of Jesus to the world. This preaching task involves all members of the Church, including the laity. Christians, especially the laity, are called to participate in sanctifying the world by practicing the teachings of Christ in their concrete lives. The building of a new world in Christ requires an all-encompassing effort. Christians, in this case, the laity, want to shape their personalities, hearts, and mental attitudes to follow their conscience in carrying out their ministry tasks in the social, economic, and political fields.

The Church also lives in a plural society.<sup>37</sup> They have neighbors with people of other faiths or other religions. The Church, especially the laity, is called to be the Church's emissary in spreading love. They proclaim safety in the community through their ministry. The task of safety is an inspiration in community service. Involvement in society is one manifestation of the relationship between the Church and the world. Their presence is needed to help people who need help.

Metz believes that all citizens and community groups must work together. They cannot discriminate against each other. The Church is called to be a witness of Christ who is in the world, therefore the Church must be open. The Church is called not only for itself but is called out.<sup>38</sup> The Church must look outward, not inward; the Church is to be the light of the world. Those involved in politics or otherwise should present themselves as Christians who act justly and honestly. One of the characteristics and privileges of the laity is their worldly nature. Therefore, as the light and leaven of society, the lay people purify the world from within. Involvement in social, economic, and political fields is a sacred obligation.

### **The Meaning of "Time" in Metz's Perspective**

Jesus gave the message, "The time is fulfilled; The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the Gospel!" (Mark 1:15). The message refers to the "time" stated by Jesus, namely God as the owner of time. The message about "time" is in the framework of the Kingdom of God that is near (cf. Mark 1:14-15) and by the news of heavenly figures that Jesus who was crucified has been raised by God (cf. Mark 16:1-8). According to Metz, "Israel thinks about God not as beyond time but as the limiting end of time. Time has a limit, and within this limitation, God is coming; time indicates the placement of God in the world. The Abrahamic traditions in which God promises, 'I will be with you' (Ex. 3:12) are a clear example of this experience of God. The words of revelation in the Bible 'are not primarily words of statement or information, nor are they mainly words of appeal; or of personal self-

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<sup>37</sup> Brian P. Flanagan, 'A Church with Open Doors: Catholic Ecclesiology for the Third Millennium', *Horizons* 43, no. 2 (2016): 414-16.

<sup>38</sup> Anh Q. Tran, 'The Catholic Church: Nature, Reality and Mission', *Theological Studies* 77, no. 2 (2016): 505-7.

communication by God, but they are words of promise."<sup>39</sup>

Christian time is the time when God carries out His plan of salvation.<sup>40</sup> The suffering of Jesus that preceded His resurrection is the beginning and first manifestation of God's reign. Mark stated that Jesus' death was an eschatological event. This is indicated by two events, namely: a) "darkness" (cf. Mark 15:33) throughout the land refers to the "darkness" that accompanies the "Day of the Lord" (Amos 5:18-20; 8:9.10b). The "Day of the Lord" ended the "old covenant" and b) the torn veil of the Temple marked the end of the "old rituals" (Mark 15:38). By resurrecting Jesus after His suffering, God confirmed Jesus' hope. God also stated that His suffering was not the suffering, passion, or death of the lawless (cf. Deut. 21:23; cf. Wis. 2:12-20; 5:1 -7). The death of Jesus was the death of the "righteous" who were persecuted and tortured by the wicked and lawless. He went through His suffering because of obedience to the will of the Father.

The news about the resurrection of Jesus is the main part of the proclamation about the passion and death of Jesus on the cross as the "King of the Jews". News about the Resurrected is the theology of the suffering of the righteous glorified in Jesus of Nazareth. Only the resurrection allows the Christian to believe that the King of the Jews who was rejected and killed by the leaders of the Israelites was the awaited Messiah as in the preaching of Acts 2:36 and Acts 13:33.<sup>41</sup>

The peculiarity of the Christian faith is that salvation has been accomplished in Christ. It is a moment of being "already" and "not yet". According to St. Paul, hope is not only directed toward the future because in that hope at the same time, the reality of salvation is recognized and experienced now: "... I am pursuing it, lest I also catch it, for I have been caught by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:12). The situation of hope as Paul refers to is the situation of a human being who because of his union with Christ has been saved; and, he will experience its fullness through his authentic unity with God. St. Paul meant that the person who is facing difficulties is made aware that he cannot believe in himself. If in that awareness he does not despair but perseveres in holding on to God and His promises, that is hope.

Christian hope is not wishful thinking about the future precisely. This hope means participation in the dynamics of God's work of salvation. Hope concerns first of all the present life which gives the ability to take up the cross now. Hope is an elaboration of faith so faith is not just an abstract concept. It is very important that Paul's explanation of hope does not first describe what is expected, but mainly emphasizes its relation to the present: the future can be experienced now, namely as an experience of faith, because of hearing the good news, in the Spirit. Thus, the living of Christian hope has the following three aspects:

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<sup>39</sup> Metz, *Faith in History and Society*; J.B. Metz, *Theology of the World* (London: Herder and Herder, 1969).

<sup>40</sup> Tamar Aptsiauri et al., "Transcendence Time and Eternity in Gregory of Nyssa", *Vigilae Christianae* 34, no. 2 (2012): 180-192.

<sup>41</sup> George Pattison, 'Hope', *Political Theology* 17:2, no. June (2016): 199-205.

longing - because it is radically directed towards fullness; trust - without anxiety or worry because it trusts in God who "will fulfill it" (1 Thess. 5:24); perseverance - because of this belief, fulfillment by God can be awaited with great perseverance.

The tension between "already" and "not yet" is the essence of the feeling of hope. From one side, there is a longing for those who "have not" because they "already" experience God's work in faith. From another perspective, a Christian comes out of what is "already" and directs himself with confidence to what is "not yet". There is an eschatological tension between "already" and "not yet", so it is in "truth", all this finds its fulfillment when "the Lord Himself will come down from heaven" (1Thess. 4:16; cf. Phil. 3:20).

God's salvation, actualized through the redemptive work of Christ, signifies a pivotal moment where the sacred and the secular meet. The Church's role in this narrative of salvation is central, as it serves as a bridge between the spiritual and the earthly. The Church's secularity acknowledges the need to engage with the complexities of the secular world while remaining rooted in the sacred message of Christ's salvation. In this context, the Church becomes a vessel for the ongoing revelation of salvation in the lives of believers. It represents a dynamic intersection where faith and daily existence merge, allowing the redemptive message to manifest in tangible ways. This underscores the notion that the Church, in its secularity, becomes a living embodiment of God's grace, striving to actualize salvation within the concrete realities of the world.

The continuous revelation of salvation within the lives of believers mirrors the Church's journey in navigating secularity. It reminds us that the redemptive message is not confined to the walls of the sacred but is meant to be lived out in the public sphere. The Church's secularity, therefore, emphasizes the need to transcend self-centeredness, confront societal challenges, and engage in acts of empathy and solidarity.<sup>42</sup> It underscores the Church's pivotal role in fostering a connection between the sacred and the secular, working to ensure that God's salvation in Christ is not merely a historical event but a living, transformative reality experienced within the fabric of human existence.

### **The Christian as An Eschatological Being**

Johann Baptist Metz's concept of "The Christian as An Eschatological Being" is rooted in his theological framework, emphasizing the eschatological nature of Christian faith. Metz asserts that Christian believers are inherently eschatological beings, meaning that they live in anticipation of the eschaton, or the final culmination of God's plan for the world. This concept underscores that Christian life is not limited to the present, but is oriented towards the future realization of God's kingdom. Metz's perspective emphasizes the tension

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<sup>42</sup> A.A. Bykov, 'The Origin of Christian Charity', *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 166 (2015): 609-15.

between the "already" and the "not yet," signifying that while salvation has been initiated through Christ's redemptive work, its ultimate fulfillment is still to come. Christians, therefore, exist in a state of longing and expectation, living out their faith in response to the promise of God's ultimate kingdom.

Metz's concept carries important implications for the practical expression of Christian faith. It encourages believers to engage actively in the world, addressing the social, ethical, and moral challenges of the present while simultaneously maintaining a forward-looking hope in the eschatological fulfillment of God's reign. This perspective also highlights the importance of solidarity and empathy with those who suffer in the world, as the Christian faith is deeply intertwined with the reality of human existence. Ultimately, Metz's concept serves as a theological framework that enriches the Christian's understanding of their role in the world and their commitment to embody the hope of God's future in their actions and relationships.

Metz's thinking places humans as subjects who are eschatological beings. Eschatology according to Metz is living as though it is the end of time.<sup>43</sup> Eschatology is an openness to the future. He interprets the eschaton as a way to regard the present from the perspective of the end of time. The act of serving those who are sick, in need, and suffering that is done by Christians is a statement of faith that shows their heart's desire for the day when they "receive the Kingdom that has been prepared" for themselves. Their faith is made real and alive through their daily actions. In this context, "receiving the Kingdom" means living with Jesus in the glory of God who is the source of life. The Christian is an eschatological being because Christ's salvation is an eschatological event, but the fullness of its eschatological existence still moves forward toward fulfillment in God's fullness of times.<sup>44</sup>

Jesus as the Source of life revealed his existence through his action for serving those who are sick, sad, and suffering. The Christians continue His examples because Jesus equated Himself with those who are in trouble, sick, and suffering.<sup>45</sup> Metz reminded us that the suffering that occurs in the world is not only caused by the subject itself but also by other subjects. Concerning the matter, Metz proposed solidarity as a model for being together with others. Christianity becomes meaningful in active participation in history which is believed to be a gift from God. Metz attempts to translate the Johannine statement "God is Love" as a call for solidarity.

Relational encounter means that the Christian is a person who recuperates the subject's responsibility to the other who suffers. They hope that human history will truly become a history of salvation that brings goodness to all people. The new concept of God,

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<sup>43</sup> Manuel Losada-Sierra and John Mandalios, 'A Time for the Marginal: Levinas and Metz on Biblical Time', *The Heythrop Journal* 56 (2015): 411.

<sup>44</sup> Edward Howells, 'From Human Desire to Divine Desire in John of the Cross', ed. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson, *Religious Studies*, 2018, 1–13.

<sup>45</sup> Cyril O Regan, 'Two Forms of Catholic Apocalyptic Theology', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 20, no. 1 (2018): 31–64.

namely faith in Him who is to come, comes in a completely new state. It allows Christians to turn the history of this world into the history of salvation.

This new concept of God, who is the Now and the Future, makes man in contact with God here and now through its surrounding world. That hope for the future is based on the certainty of faith in a present relationship with God. The basis of hope is faith in God who claims to be God who lives in the community. This eschatological hope is not passively waiting, but an effort to play a role against all forms of science and technology that make human beings as objects or things instead of bringing the fullness of their existence. Christians must be committed to planning for the building of a human community that is motivated by a constant search for human values. And they no longer look to God as a witness when they face problems within their community.

The Church carries a mission to the world to proclaim the work of salvation for all people. The long history of the Church has made the Church aware of herself and the purpose of her presence in the world. The Church seeks to raise awareness in society to create peace and justice in mutual life. The Church is increasingly aware that the Church is a place for the poor to obtain justice and a peaceful life. For the Church, the dignity of all people must be upheld. The Church defends the dignity of the poor who are often ignored by the people around them. The Church must be a light and a home for the poor who are excluded from common life.

The Church exists not only to save certain people, but the calling of the Church is to direct all mankind to God's work of salvation. The Church must respond to the challenges of a world that is constantly developing, so the role of the Church, especially in society, must be contextual to what the people need today. The Church must not isolate herself, but the Church must be involved and the Church as a community which in its duties and ministries involves God's people as an intimate communion between God and man. The Church and humanity must work together to achieve the goal of the work of salvation itself. The calling of the Church is to bring everyone to God himself, so the Church must actively participate in building a harmonious fellowship. The Church only becomes a real Church when it is involved in carrying out God's mission in the world

The Church cares about the weak and the marginalized. The Church invites all human beings to care and be in solidarity with those who are neglected and marginalized in society. The Church is invited to be involved and to be a light for the problems faced by its people. The Church must show the face of God's mercy by taking sides with the poor who are often oppressed.

The Church must be able to hear the screams of its people. The attitude of listening indicates that the Church cares about the circumstances and conditions of its people. The Church that listens wants to show the Church's participation to be selfless, but the Church also has to save and care for souls. The Church that listens wants to invite all human beings



to be involved in the work of salvation and the mission of the Church in the world.<sup>46</sup> The Church opens its ears to everyone and opens its eyes to the existence of human beings. The Church that listens wants to descend to the lowest reality and address the weak and marginalized.

The presence of the Church in the world must also pay attention to those who are weak and marginalized,<sup>47</sup> "In this world of the world church, there is a history of suffering in society, the suffering of the poor, the oppressed, and the wretched. And there is also a cultural history of suffering in that world, the suffering of otherness and endangered dignity. The conditions experienced in such a world that directly contradict the gospel—such as degradation, exploitation, racism—demand the formulation of the biblical word of God as dangerous memory, in categories of resistance and liberating transformation."<sup>48</sup>

The Church's alignment with the poor wants to show the face of the Church that is compassionate and cares about human suffering. The Church is on the side of the poor who are often excluded and ignored by others. The spirit of the Church to defend the poor is inspired by the story of the good Samaritan.<sup>49</sup> "The well-known parable of the 'merciful Samaritan' is not only the remembrance of Christianity but also the remembrance of humanity".<sup>50</sup> The Samaritans who incidentally are people who are ostracized among the Jews with humility willing to help people who are robbed in the middle of the road. The attitude of the Samaritans who care about the equality of others wants to be the basis for the Church to show its side with the poor.

The Church not only cares but also has to live with the poor. The point is that the Church is present with the poor, listening to their concerns. The choice of the Church's alignment with the poor flows from faith in a merciful God. The Church is the foundation of protection for the poor.

The Church has to contextualize the teachings of its faith following the conditions experienced by its people. A Church that begins its preaching work from "below" wants to show that the Church serves everyone without exception. The Church is also required to answer all world problems, including social problems that often occur among mankind. The Church is invited to open its eyes and take action to tackle all the problems that exist in humanity. The Church must come out of itself, see the situation around it, and act on it.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The situation has influenced modern theologians in their theological reflection on human beings in their relationship with God. First. The talk of eschatology is the talk of

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<sup>46</sup> Losada-Sierra and Mandalios, *A Time for the Marginal*, .

<sup>47</sup> John Marsden, 'The Political Theology of Johannes Baptist Metz', *Heythrop Journal - Quarterly Review of Philosophy and Theology* 53, no. 3 (2012): 440-52.

<sup>48</sup> Metz, 'Facing the World: A Theological and Biographical Inquiry'.

<sup>49</sup> Roberto Paura, 'L'Ermeneutica Delle Epidemie Nel Pensiero Cristiano e L'Idea Del Dio Punitore', *Orbis Idearum* 8, no. 1 (2020): 41-67.

<sup>50</sup> Metz, *Facing the World*, 33.

human existence, value, and meaning. To the extent that eschatology is related to various forms of human experience, eschatology is anthropological. Eschatology is a human experience that looks at him and his future in his relationship with God. This Christian hope is the opposite of all bad things that are established today. Christianity hopes to encourage individuals to engage in personal reflection and prayer to contemplate their relationship with God and their future in light of eschatological beliefs. This can be a time for introspection, seeking a deeper connection with the divine, and considering one's ultimate destiny. Christian hopes to create spaces for group discussions or communal prayer where individuals can share their personal experiences with eschatology. This can foster a sense of community and support in understanding one's relationship with God and the future.

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