

# The Transcendental or the Political Kingdom?—II

## Reflexions on a theological dispute

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### III. *Political Theology and the Eschatological Kingdom*

Johann Baptist Metz has broken with this Rahnerian programme for a transcendental theology because of what he calls its 'tendency to privatization' (*Privatisierungstendenz*).<sup>1</sup> He denies thereby the *universality* of this transcendental experience from which Rahner builds up his system. This experience can be seen rather as the product of a particular philosophy (which is itself determined by theology) that the individual is always determined by a basic attitude towards 'Being', 'death', etc., always exists in an enduring relationship to God as 'horizon', etc. But these are religious presuppositions and products of a society which assumed man to be ultimately 'religious', the only question being whether he would explicitly accept this or deny it. In a non-religious, secular and pluralistic society, these assumptions can no longer be made.

The transcendental method employed by Rahner is found by Metz to be privatistic, in that it begins with the *individual*, the individual consciousness or the human spirit as related to the horizon of being. The category of the social and the political is excluded. But this exclusion is particularly fateful now, when personal existence is becoming more and more manipulated existence and a political factum, to be understood primarily in terms of the social and political matrix in which it stands and which forms it. A theory which ignored these dimensions of the social, technological and political would result in a private and ultimately harmless individualism.

In a secularized and pluralistic society, a theory which spoke of 'the' transcendental experience, as if this could be known once and for all, would be *uncritical*. For the conditions for the possibility of experiencing something as transcendent are continually changing along with the social conditions and existential situation in that society. A transcendental method which ignored this changing situation would be uncritical in that it would know too much. It would know what 'world', 'subject', 'history', 'future', 'being' and even 'God' are, and how they are experienced as such, without reference to the actual conditions determining that experience. And

<sup>1</sup>J. B. Metz, *Zur Theologie der Welt* (Mainz-München, 1968), *Theology of the World*, Burns and Oates, 1969, gives the most detailed analysis of his project for a political theology. Cf. also his article in *Concilium VI* (1968), 3–11.

this means that history would not be taken seriously in its power to bring forth new situations and possibilities. For history in terms of this transcendental experience would be primarily the historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) of the human consciousness, and future would be the futuricity (*Zukünftigkeit*) of this consciousness, that is, its relationship to an individually projected future, and 'world' would be basically either the 'materia' to which the human spirit is necessarily ordered in its activity of knowing, or the evolutionary world preparing the emergence of the human spirit. Against this, Metz points out that the future is becoming to an ever greater extent the manipulated and projected future of technological planning and political decision, which are determining what 'world' and 'history' shall be. Metz sees in the fact that the categories of past situation and present encounter dominate transcendental philosophy the cause of its helplessness in a world of technology and politics, where all sense of the past, except as a romantic, archaeological past, is disappearing. A transcendental method which ignored these tendencies would lead to a fateful spiritualization of normal human existence and a new spirit-world dualism.

Finally Metz criticizes the project for a transcendental theology for removing the Christian message from the place where it would be a concrete challenge and even a 'skandalon', namely from society as it is formed and experienced today. The question of faith becomes too much a question only of the 'implications' of man's experience, whether he is to accept categorically his enduring transcendental relationship to the holy Mystery and so on. But what happens when man ceases to experience any reference, categorical or transcendental to an Absolute, to the Mystery, to God: when reference to a transcendental subject appears only as the relic of a previous metaphysical age? Then the language of a transcendental kingdom would seem proper to a privatistic religion, irrelevant to any hope of a decisive liberation of man and a changed human condition. (Metz develops this critique of transcendental (and also of personalist and existentialist) theology in parts II and III of his book. The paradox (contradiction?) of part I remaining very 'Rahnerian' will be considered later.)

### *The Way to a Political Theology*

The first step in Metz's attempt to 'deprivatize' (*Entprivatisieren*) transcendental theology lay in rediscovering the primacy of *eschatology*. Rahner's concept of a theological anthropology had its biblical starting-point in the 'anthropocentric' character of the *alliance*, between God and man in Christ. Metz emphasizes the biblical eschatology as the encompassing and prior context for anthropology, asserts the social and political character of salvation in the Gospel over against an individual/private trend; the 'future' reference of the kingdom of God allows him to interpret the transcendental

horizon of understanding (*Verstehen*) from the more original biblical horizon of *promise* (*Verheissung*).<sup>1</sup>

This eschatological orientation is not just an inner-theological development. It brings theology into a new and creative relationship with philosophy, and specifically with the philosophical tradition generally ignored by theologians, that concerned with the *theory-praxis* problem. It is the Kant of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, the left-wing *Hegelian* tradition from Feuerbach over Marx to Adorno and Habermas, the utopian and future-orientated analyses characterizing Ernst Bloch's philosophy of hope and Marcuse's search for the criteria of a non-repressive culture—these are some of the influences behind Metz's later theological investigations. These investigations would concern the relevance of the gospel for the social communitarian world as the context for intercommunication (intersubjectivity) and personal life. Where Rahner began with the evolutionary world, Metz has turned to the world of secularization and technology, as the form evolution is taking, and sought here his theological context of meaning. Where Rahner began with the theoretical reason and the transcendental subject, Metz has turned to the critical reason, and the reference in the theoretical reason to a possible praxis: he starts with *the political subject*. Rahner analysed the relation between faith and reason in terms of a transcendental reflexion, Metz in terms of the relation between theory and praxis (reflexion and revolution).<sup>2</sup> Both were conscious of the gap between religion and society, but Rahner responded to this primarily in terms of an existential interpretation, showing how a valid 'demythologizing' of theological concepts—by showing the preintelligence for these ideas in the knowing subject—could bring out their immense relevance for human existence: Metz, on the other hand, responded to this problem of irrelevance not with a demythologizing of 'heaven' (like Bultmann or Rahner in their different ways),<sup>3</sup> but rather (like Marx, but on behalf of the *Gospel*), with a demythologizing of 'earth', that is, with the aim of unmasking the powers behind the false consciousness of society. This would lead away from an accommodation to society (*Anpassung*), towards a confrontation with society, through articulating the eschatological challenge of the Gospel to society, on behalf of a universal kingdom of freedom, justice and peace (*Zur Theologie der Welt*, 75-89).

<sup>1</sup>No attempt will be made here to decide which position, Rahner's or Metz's, is the more biblical. The future promise of Old Testament prophecy would seem to coincide neither with the absolute future of transcendental theology, nor with the formal future of political theology.

<sup>2</sup>Metz has retraced his steps philosophically. Previously identified with Rahner's assimilation of transcendental philosophy—e.g. from Kant the question of the *a priori* (*K. der R.V.* B25), from Hegel the question of the accessibility of the *an sich* to consciousness (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Meiner s.73), through Husserl's transcendental reduction to Heidegger's existential ontology (cf. *Sein und Zeit* 146, 329)—Metz has gone back to another 'political' tradition developing from Kant.

<sup>3</sup>There is a unity of intention between Rahner and Bultmann, but radical differences in the method and end-result of their theologies.

For political theology in Metz's sense is not just another form of political Christianity, as this has been known in the past, with a sacral or theological sanction being given to some kind of society, usually a reactionary or conservative kind. Political theology is the opposite of a canonization for some particular form of society. It stands in a critical non-identification with established orders. It is concerned to place every society under the eschatological criterion, namely to show how far the society fails to realize what the Gospel affirms as total salvation. But political theology in the way Metz envisages it realizes that its message of a coming salvation cannot be spoken directly into a secularized world with its technological planning process, but only through those problems within this planning process which can be grasped as *political* problems—or rather, since the *whole* process of technological planning is profoundly political, religion must contact the world of future technological planning in its social-political *dimension*. This contact would involve a critique of technological planning in its *repressive* aims and effects—its tendency to create a manipulated, repressed human being without phantasy, reflexion, or hope of a decisive liberation. Religion, in Metz's theological concept, would employ its utopian hope of a total liberation of man to help free political thinking to be critical of technological planning. And this critique would be in principle an inextinguishable one, for it would partake of the eschatological hope—the hope for a reign of justice, peace, freedom and reconciliation which can never be attained by particular technological projects or political dispensations. Metz sees in this scheme the way out of a privatistic religious thinking. The Christian revelation as a historical and developing reality would be brought to bear on the world we live in, not, as so often in the past, through the Church trying to catch up on events in secular history and adjust itself to them, but through a positive and critical translation by the Church of the eschatological promise into terms recognizable within contemporary society, in the struggle with technology and politics for the future of mankind. The universal categories of the Church's hope for salvation (freedom, peace, justice, etc.), could be critically brought to bear as social and political realities only in the modus of a determined negation in concrete situations—as an opposition to injustice, or to the sacrifice of human values and human beings on behalf of a technological, rationalist future. (Metz, *op. cit.*, 132-146, 'Christliche Verantwortung für die Zukunftsplanung in einer weltlichen Welt.')

#### *Elements of a political theology*<sup>1</sup>

Apart from this 'programme', Metz has given only slight indications as to how he would express the *theological* elements in the strict sense—God, Christ, Church, etc.—within his political theology.

<sup>1</sup>The following section is largely a summary of various lectures by Metz in the University of Münster.

This may be because he considers political theology not as a new discipline among other theological disciplines but rather as a formal principle in theological consciousness as such, working as a critical corrective to a theological privatization and abstraction from the social and political. Metz, like Rahner, is trying to provide a hermeneutic for the encounter between Church and world: whereas Rahner sought this hermeneutic in a theological *anthropology* developing out of the transcendental experience of the subject, Metz seeks his hermeneutic in a theological *eschatology* corresponding to the reference to the *future* given in the tension between political experience and the hope of total salvation. (Cf. also Metz, *op. cit.*, 99-116, 'Kirche und Welt im Lichte einer "politischen Theologie".')

Some elements in Metz's scheme for a political theology: *God* will not be considered primarily in Rahnerian terms of self-communication, but rather in terms of the eschatological promise. He will be seen as the coming God, the God of the future kingdom, *Gott vor uns*. (Cf. Metz, J. B., 'Der zukünftige Mensch und der kommende Gott' in *Wer ist das eigentlich-Gott?* ed. H. J. Schultz (1969), 260-275.) *Man* will not be seen primarily as the being of transcendence, but rather as the being of hope—and therefore the subject of a revolutionary praxis. The question of how *Christ* can be and be seen to be the meaning and bearer of history, will not be a retrospective question, to be answered in terms of a transcendental christology as the ultimate interpretation of history, but will rather become a prospective question, where the future Christ and his coming kingdom—that is, an eschatological christology—become the goal of a political theology and a revolutionary Christian praxis. The *Church* will not be regarded first of all via Rahner's concept of the primordial sacrament (*Ursakrament*) of Christ, himself eschatological sacrament of the Father (cf. Rahner, *Kirche und Sakramente* (QD 10), 1960; cf. also *Schriften zur Theologie* II, 7-94, 'Die Gliedschaft in der Kirche'): the Church in Metz's programme would be envisaged as the 'Institution of social-critical freedom' (*Institution gesellschaftskritischer Freiheit*), that is, qua *institution*—since institutions are more necessary than ever to preserve tradition, memories and hopes in a world where these become increasingly repressed or forgotten with the disappearance from consciousness of the sense of the historical past—but as an institution which keeps alive a *revolutionary* hope and applies this hope, via a liberating critique of society within society, on behalf of the repressed, persecuted and 'manipulated'. *Dogmas* and *Sacraments* would not be seen first of all as a self-interpretation and self-realization (*Selbstvollzug*) of the Church in a real symbol (*Realsymbol*) manifesting God's gift of himself to man (cf. Rahner's various essays on dogmatic development, e.g. in *Schriften* 1, 49-90: IV, 11-50. On *Dogma*, cf. V, 54-81. On the *Sacraments*, cf. IV, 275-311 'Zur Theologie des Symbols'): they would be regarded by Metz as the concretization of the salvation hope which appeared in

Christ, Baptism, for example, being 'politically' expressed as the placing of the human person within the community under the protection of the triune God, protected namely from the 'powers' behind the repression and false consciousness of society. Finally, *Faith* would not be regarded preeminently in the Rahnerian sense of the implicit or explicit acceptance of God's self-communication in Christ, but rather as the religious response to this message of hope. Faith, as *memoria*, is the subversive recall of a salvation promised in the past, a salvation which is still to be awaited in its fullness: as *memoria*, faith breaks through the repressive *status quo* of the present situation and opens this up to the future hope. Christian hope, for Rahner, is the reference to and dynamism towards God as 'absolute future', and the sacrament of the encounter with God and indeed the key to the religious reality as such is, for the man of today, *brotherly love* (On 'Hope' in Rahner's writings, esp. *Schriften* VIII, 561-579: on love (*Nächstenliebe*), V, 494-517: VII, 277-298/Metz, *ibid.* (n. 25).) Metz aligns hope, as an eschatological reality, in the struggle of the Christian community (in co-operation with all men who can share in some way this hope) with the political dispensations planning a world without the promise of salvation—this hope would translate itself into a revolutionary love, for the 'least of the brethren'.

This, in the briefest outline, is Metz's scheme for a political theology. Its justification, and the echo it has produced, at least in Germany, can be expressed simply: it brings to explicit awareness a diffuse yet omnipresent 'sense of an epoch'. It expresses a political awareness within the Church, a fear that the Christian message is becoming existentially irrelevant at the beginning of a new age in the history of mankind—irrelevant because not being heard by men, not being heard because not being convincingly preached, not being preached because not being understood—except in a theological and ecclesial ivory tower. Political theology also appears to correspond to a sense many have that the time has come for the Gospel to be taken *literally* again, that we need to go back somehow to this historical Jesus and forwards to the future revelation ('second coming') of Christ—and that this dual movement must end not only in a new theological insight but in a new Christian praxis. For there is a widespread sense, expressed in revolutionary movements outside and inside the Church, that society is sick and must be changed: for Christians there is the further conviction that the Gospel should be in conflict with this society, but that theology cannot express this conflict. Metz's programme expresses for many both the critique of an other-worldly religion and the immense possible relevance of religion: it seems to hold out hope for a reform of the Church, and to provide an instrument for this reform through the mediation it gives for the encounter between Church and world, between gospel and life.



#### IV. *Theology and the total revolution*

The Rahner-Metz dispute, which of course has been conducted eirenicly and within an enduring personal friendship, has been confined largely to university circles. Their coming together as professors at the same university has coincided with the new direction Metz's theology has taken and with it the disagreement with transcendental theology, the critique and the positive alternative to it. But the dispute would seem to have significance for theology as such, and this not simply because Rahner's theological anthropology has become so dominant in post-conciliar speculative theology.<sup>1</sup> *Theology, it seems, is being forced to spell out what Christianity would mean for men today, and this not in a static society, but in a society undergoing a profound and convulsive upheaval.* If theologians believe that in Christianity a total revelation of God is concentrated, and with this a total redemption of man, then they should be able to speak to this revolutionary upheaval taking place in human relationships and societies. They would have to show how Christianity, as a message, a life and a praxis, implies a revolution, not only in our relationships with each other, but also in our relationship with God. Christianity would demand an overcoming of alienation at every level of man's being, a 'total revolution'. This total revolution would have its origin, centre and future hope in Christ, and the Church would have to become an instrument of this change in the world. No one theology can exhaustively or even adequately articulate this total revolution. The point of such a theological dispute as has been discussed here, would be to indicate, via a complementarity and a disagreement, the extent of this total revolution. These concluding remarks are dedicated to that proposition.

#### *The weakness in Metz's political theology*

In this context of a 'theology of the total revolution', the weakness of Metz's programme becomes evident. His political theology, in its present form, is *encapsulated*. This is not to deny the right of a theologian to develop one aspect of theology to the exclusion of others. But when this one aspect is developed outside any creative dialogue with other theologies, it becomes encapsulated because rootless, *déraciné*. And the reason for this encapsulation and rootlessness is, to my mind, the neglect in Metz's theology of the dimension of the 'present'. The Christian future must be looked on as being in some way already present, already at work in the world, because already communicated, as eschatological gift, by God to the world in Christ.

His theology risks becoming *biblically* rootless. Apart from some, very sketchy, indications that salvation in the Old and New Testaments is always social, political, never confined to the merely

<sup>1</sup>An indication of the dominance of Rahner's thought is given from theological *publications*. Whole series are instigated by him and/or dominated speculatively by his thought or that of his disciples: e.g. *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, *Sacramentum Mundi*, *Handbuch für Pastoraltheologie*, *Questiones Disputatae*, and to some extent, *Mysterium Salutis*.

private and individual levels, future orientated, etc.—this position being supported by reference to biblical prophecy, anthropology, the social relevance of the parables of Jesus, the political nature of his death and so on—Metz gives no *detailed* biblical basis to his theology. And it is hard to see how this will be possible given his theological option for a salvation hope which is both totally eschatological and yet also radically immanent. This schema cannot express the biblical tension between the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’, the present and the future in the realization of salvation. Christ, for example, is the eschatological event of salvation, through and in his historical saving act, which he further makes present in the Church, in the sacraments, the word of preaching and in world history. The hope of a future salvation in Christ’s coming rests on the consciousness of faith that salvation has in a radical sense already been achieved in Christ: faith is therefore not only *memoria*, but also *decision* in the present for Christ, and *assent* to the message of the redemption accomplished in him. A political theology which failed to integrate this dimension of creation, tradition, history within itself, would become a new flight from the world (against its intentions)—but this time a flight, not into the ‘beyond’, but into an equally abstract ‘future’.<sup>1</sup>

Metz’s theology risks becoming *philosophically* rootless. It is committed to philosophical options, which are not self-evident, but rather highly questionable: the assumption, for example, that metaphysics has come to an end.<sup>2</sup> Philosophical positions in the Frankfurt School on the theory-praxis question, on negative dialectic, etc., are taken over by Metz for his theology, although these positions were in fact highly precarious and now no unity exists in this school on their meaning and possible application.<sup>3</sup> Encapsulating for Metz’s political theology is also his constant and undifferentiated polemic against existentialist, personalist and transcendental philosophy. Not only are there forms of these philosophies which are open to an explicit political application—Mounier’s communitarian personalism and Sartre’s later attempt at a critical existentialism come to mind<sup>4</sup>—but also the most ‘private’ developments in this philo-

<sup>1</sup>It would seem that a theological anthropology, because its proper theme is the relation between history and historicity, would be more open than any other speculative theology to the problems of exegesis, i.e. to the problems arising from the gradual assimilation in a changing, growing self-interpretation by individuals and groups and a people of a historical, evolving, spatio-temporal Revelation. Certainly Von Rad’s Old Testament work seems eminently accessible to a theologian precisely in his transcendental method. Whether it is equally accessible for the political theologian remains to be seen.

<sup>2</sup>cf. Max Müller, *Existenzphilosophie im geistigen Leben der Gegenwart*. (1964). c.v. Ende des Metaphysik.

<sup>3</sup>On the present crisis within the Frankfurter Schule, compare the discussion in the Suhrkamp series by Albrecht Wellmer, *Kritische Gesellschaftstheorie und Positivismus* (1969): also by Bernhard Schäfers (ed.), *Thesen zur Kritik der Soziologie* (1969).

<sup>4</sup>There is a bitterness in Adorno’s criticism of Heidegger (Lukács’s also) which is inseparably linked to Heidegger’s political past: a similar tendency is observable in left-wing distaste for the ‘fascist’ potentialities of Nietzsche’s thought. But the latter is now being rehabilitated among Marxist’s—perhaps Heidegger will also help towards the revolution, when it comes.



sophical tradition can be taken up by other movements in other contexts which themselves become of real political importance. One thinks, for example, of the use to which existentialist philosophy has been put to articulate key concepts in psychoanalysis and in Zen Buddhist spirituality, and the political significance both these are beginning to assume.<sup>1</sup> A political theology must be rooted in a critically assimilated *culture*: Metz's philosophical basis seems too narrow to exploit the political potential in modern literature, art and other communications media.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, in the *inner-theological* dimension, Metz's theology has been seriously weakened by his apparent need to differentiate it sharply from his own immediate past and from other theological movements today. His constant emphasis on deprivatizing other theologies, his reiteration that the required theological attitude of Church to society must be one of 'critical distance', negation on behalf of the eschatological hope, and so on, means that he hardly arrives at a description of the 'event of faith in itself' . . . which would 'express the problem of existence from faith in today's world' (*Zur Theologie der Welt*, 107). For it never becomes clear in Metz's theology what *content* belongs to faith and the preaching of the gospel. Concepts of God, Christ, Grace, salvation, kingdom and so on are used by Metz almost exclusively in terms of a future hope and a 'permanent social protest'—thereby they become functionalized and, in a fatal development, could easily become mere slogans and cyphers for an unspecified future liberation.<sup>3</sup> The elements of a political theology given already above were enumerated in the form of a contrast or opposition to corresponding elements in Rahner's theological anthropology. As a *contrast*, they seem to me to be fully acceptable, bringing out another politically orientated aspect. But as a replacement—and it sometimes seems in Metz's system that they are this—they would be seriously inadequate even as 'a' theological project. It is significant in this respect that the first half of Metz's programmatic work, *Zur Theologie der Welt*, develops a Christology and an Anthropology which is essentially derived from that of Rahner, and indeed represents articles written basically before the 'turning-point' in Metz's thought. (For this turning-point, compare Metz's articles 'Mitsein' and 'Theologie' in L.Th.K.) In the second part of the book and in the third part (pp. 75–146), he rejects as privatistic the position he has used as the starting-point and basis for his political theology.

<sup>1</sup>One thinks especially of the works of R. D. Laing in this context ('political psychoanalysis')—e.g. the *organic* advance in his thought from the existential ontology of neurosis/schizophrenia in *The Divided Self* (Pelican 1965) to the grasp of the revolutionary significance of these in *The Politics of Experience* (Penguin 1967). On the existential movement in Zen, see the bibliographical reference in Thomas Merton's *Zen Masters and Christian Mystics*.

<sup>2</sup>The political theology of the Catholic 'New Left' in Britain, with its connexion to a tradition of literary criticism, could help to overcome the formal abstractness of Metz's theology.

<sup>3</sup>This criticism of 'lack of content' is made by Fergus Kerr, O.P., in 'Politics and Theology: Retrospect and Agenda', *New Blackfriars*, August 1968, 572–582 (esp. 577).

This is not development, it is contradiction. Or it can be considered development in the sense of cutting off the branch one happens to be sitting on.

And how could this theology be, in a concrete *pastoral* sense, political? 'Political' would imply the capacity to take concrete political decisions in the service of the eschatological hope. But this would demand a political calculation or a prophetic insight which are in no permanent sense the property of theologians or of theology as a science: the complex and increasingly changing relationship between politics and technology could not be effectively 'supervised' and so 'criticized' by theology (or by religion), unless it wedded itself to a permanent sociological critique of this relationship—and would this not mean *becoming* sociology? (or losing its own critical distance from and relationship to sociology?). Finally the attempt to make the Church an institution of social-critical freedom, in some effective (and therefore constant and total) sense, would increasingly break down against the pluralism of society and of the Church community—or would demand a differentiated analysis of that Church community and so once again a theological anthropology of person and group in the Church.<sup>1</sup>

#### *The prophetic element in Metz's programme*

The preceding critical remarks would seem to indicate that the Rahner/Metz positions are complementary rather than contradictory. Without a prior theological anthropology, Metz's programme would involve a fatal discontinuity with theological tradition, a reduction in Christian meaning within the Church's own self-understanding and an inability to capitalize the resources of this self-understanding within society today.

But a complementarity is not a deadening compromise. Each theology could fructify the other. The critique by Metz could help Rahner not so much to grasp the new situation facing theology through the 'knowledge explosion', the application of scientific method and technological processes to shape ever wider sectors of human life and society, the pluralism and therefore relativity of *Weltanschauungen*, etc. (in fact, with his usual genius for seeing the right questions, Rahner has given a profound analysis of this new situation: v. *Schriften zur Theologie VIII* (1967))—Metz's critique could help Rahner to *reshape* his theology to meet this new situation. This would demand in fact from Rahner a *phenomenological* approach to the situations and questions created by the natural and human sciences, and the working out of a theory *out of the praxis* and thence to a metatheory. This dialectic between theory and praxis, praxis and theory, seems to me in no contradiction to Rahner's transcendental method as such. In fact, on hundreds of questions, the

<sup>1</sup>This unrealistic 'overtaxing' of the Church in Metz's programme is criticized by H. Maier, 'Politische Theologie?', in *Stimmen der Zeit*, Heft 2, February 1969, pp. 93–91: also by Karl Lehmann in *Essener Gespräche zum Thema Staat und Kirche* (4).

power of his questioning mind has driven him in this direction, without his seeming to find it necessary to integrate the implications of his praxis in his actual theory. In fact, Rahner's writings express this continual tension between history and historicity, essence and existence, person and community, present and future. Metz's challenge could inspire Rahner, or his disciples, to a critical and future-orientated discussion with the forces and processes forming society, world history and human consciousness today. (Rahner has always emphasized the circle in the transcendental method in theology—God and grace as *a priori* precondition are also the *a posteriori* historically revealed and discovered. It remains only to bring out the historical *novum*, e.g. Christ 'before Pilate' and not only *Sein zum Tode*). In his turn, Metz could find in the theological anthropology of Rahner a much wider basis for his political theology than any he himself has given. Questions in theological tradition and scholastic theses have a potential explosive power when the neoscholastic *Ueberbau* (*super-structure*) has been dismantled—Rahner's ability to develop the meaning of tradition for today could be of immense service within a broader political theology. In this respect, the connexion between politics and mysticism must be thought through. Metz's remarks on the need for a mysticism which is open to the world and fraternal (*op. cit.* 92–95) never get beyond an abstract formality. Rahner's use of the existential in man known as 'being in a situation' (cf. *Sein und Zeit*, H. 113–H. 180) and his concept of the varying existential depth in human acts would be an important clue in articulating the historical and eschatological significance of sanctity and mysticism (cf. *Theological Investigations* vol. 3, 3–23).<sup>1</sup> Marcel's reflexions on a metaphysic of sanctity, Mounier's writings on the personalist revolution, the central importance of *conversion* in thinking, in art, in the game, in religion—these and many other scattered insights converge and point towards what Brian Wicker has called a 'new kind of political awareness' . . . based on the 'interconnectedness of all the levels of experience from the theological to the immediately practical. . .' (*From Culture to Revolution*, 295). It is, as he says, vital for the Church to become closely involved in the creation of this new kind of politics. The prophetic element in Metz's programme is lastly, perhaps, that he is bringing to the notice of theologians that their speculations must seek to bring about, within the Church, a political awareness at once moral, responsible and revolutionary. This programme would become theologically effective, and disturbing, if it were rooted in Rahner's programme for a theological anthropology. There is, it seems to me, a revolutionary implication in Rahner's central thesis: God's self-communication is man's self-transcendence: man's self-realization is

<sup>1</sup>Another example of this complementarity would be in eschatology. Without Rahner's hermeneutic for eschatological statements (given in *Schriften* IV, 401–428), Metz's dependence on Christian apocalyptic for a necessary 'utopian' dimension to theology would be uncritical. Demythologizing and deprivatization go together.

God's self-gift. This primal statement, with its translation into an anthropological Christology, would give the horizon for the 'total revolution' and an eschatological presence of the Church in society and a new kind of politics.

*The total revolution*

McLuhan has pointed to the prophetic role of the artist today: as a man of 'integral awareness', the artist is able to understand, in advance of his time, the forms and structures created by electric technology, and to shape and control these forms. It seems that the theologian is being forced to become aware of a pluralism of experiences determining human existence, and the pluralism of meanings this gives rise to. And, inevitably, the theologian is having to grapple with the central problem of language, as he faces the many languages structuring human existence and determining his own work as theologian, from questions of exegesis up to communication with the philosophies, the sciences, the technologies and myths of today. This denotes an entirely new situation, and a new crisis, for the theologian. He must in his work assimilate the movement to interiority, to historical consciousness, to self-appropriation. If the question yesterday was: What is the meaning of man?, the question today has become: How is man the creator of meaning? And, corresponding to this, How is man the creator of language and of symbol? Where is the unifying point from which this pluralism of languages can be understood, and the many meanings coordinated? Is it, in Ricoeur's sense, the viewpoint of the 'meta-language' which will unify the various human significations: is the unifying factor to be found in Heidegger's notion of a conversion to an 'existential thinking' and its appropriate language; in Marcel's 'second reflexion'; in Rahner's 'transcendental experience'; or in Lonergan's analysis of intellectual and existential 'self-appropriation'?

Whatever particular answer is given to this question, the way forward for theology seems to me to lie in the direction of the interplay between person, language and meaning. In its future development, theology will have to articulate its doctrines in the context of God as 'the Meaning of meanings' (Cornelius Ernst, O.P.). How to do this without losing touch with its historical origins—Jesus of Nazareth, Cross and Resurrection—that will be an immense problem for theology. Or would it not be better to say: unless theology makes this step forward to the question of an encompassing ontological meaning, it will certainly lose touch with its origins? No one is going to be faced with the 'scandal of the cross' and the 'readiness for martyrdom', unless the cross is grasped as a reality in his life, and seen to be a reality in the world today. Lastly, it seems to me, von Balthasar's polemic against the theological 'system' which makes meaningless both cross and martyrdom (*Cordula*, passim) derives from his failure (despite his genius) to face this question of theological

meaning in its last implications. He knows too well (and therefore too little), where the cross is to be found in the world today (which is the martyr?—he who dies for a corrupt Church in a revolutionary situation, or he who dies for the revolution against this Church?). There are painful implications in von Balthasar's rhetoric about the cross (rhetoric is not, *eo ipso*, witness), and the self-evident way in which he ranges himself with the prophets and saints against the 'neo-Catholic modernizers'. Perhaps they are the ones who are struggling to make the message of the cross heard in a revolutionary and deeply conformist society.

Certainly, that seems to me the intention of Rahner and Metz, for all their disagreement. They are committed, each in his way, to the creation of a new kind of political awareness arising from a lived and understood encounter between the gospel and the world of today. Each in his way seeks a total revolution in the name of Christ—one that would be personal and social, political and transcendental, human and religious. For all Rahner's ideas about the transcendental kingdom stem lastly from the simple conviction of faith, that God is in the world and the world is in God: and Metz's whole theological labour on behalf of the political kingdom derives its power ultimately from the Christian hope, that God's eschatological promises be manifested in this same world.