

# Passionate Theology - Desire, Passion and Politics in the Theology of J B Metz<sup>1</sup> - Part I

H Murray Hofmeyr

(University of Pretoria)

## ABSTRACT

### Passionate Theology. Desire, Passion and Politics in the Theology of J B Metz

*The author argues that a theory of concupiscence (desire), the subject of much of Metz's early work (during his "transcendental phase") implicitly plays a decisive role in his Political Theology. The implied concept of concupiscence is explicated with the aid of the major categories of a theory of reification as developed by Lukács, Benjamin and Adorno. The main categories of Metz's Political Theology (notably asceticism, theodicy, negative theology and praxis) are linked to the (implied) central concept of concupiscence, eventually described as the might of what is. As this might seems to be absolute, the problem of the praxis of the believer becomes acute. Metz calls for a theology that integrates into its concepts societal, historical and cultural contexts. His notion of praxis as privation is interpreted in terms of longing and resistance.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In his contribution to *Stichworte zur "Geistige Situation der Zeit"*, edited by Jürgen Habermas in 1979, Metz complains about the subjectless concepts of the contemporary philosophical and theological dialogue, and the resultant high level of abstraction. He takes issue, by implication, with Habermas' project of communicative action: Metz's idea of inter-subjectivity does not know much of the ideal communication situation. To him the "other" is the victim, and the important thing is to be able to see and judge oneself through the eyes of the other (Metz 1979:534). His language reminds of Adorno when he advocates solidarity with and partiality for damaged life (Metz 1979:535; cf. Adorno 1986). As for the idea of a new culture of solidarity in political life that will bring to fulfilment the project Modernity, Metz (1979:537) asks: whence the power for resistance against a mode of solidarity characterised by hate for the other? The answer: Christian religion has a heritage

---

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on research done for a dissertation entitled "n Teologie van die verlangete. *Concupiscentia* in die Politieke Teologie van Johann Baptist Metz" that has been accepted by the Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria with professor C J Wethmar of the Department of Dogmatics and Christian Ethics as promoter.

of concepts that do not fit the contemporary discourse, concepts that are, as it were, productively outdated, and accordingly have the potential of indicating the contours of a praxis that would change the world. Metz (1979:536-537) specifically refers to the concepts asceticism, sin and conversion, sacrifice and grace.

Metz's implicit critique of Habermas, and option for Adorno, should be interpreted in terms of the following words from Deleuze and Guattari (1994:108): "We do not lack communication. On the contrary, we have too much of it. We lack creation. *We lack resistance to the present*". The above list of theological concepts that Metz tries to "re-create", or to rescue, by using them "politically", that means de-internalsed and de-privatised, by implication includes the concept concupiscence. I will argue that this concept in its political interpretation implicitly plays a decisive role in Metz's Political Theology.

The young Metz, in his "transcendental phase", which is the phase of his close association with Karl Rahner, his mentor and life-long friend, was well on his way to write a book on *concupiscentia*, or concupiscence, but the project was abandoned before completion (Metz 1962: 28 note 5). A number of articles on the topic and related issues from his pen were published in the late 1950s and early 1960s (see Metz 1958a-c; 1961a-c; 1962c-f; 1963a-b; 1964). According to Metz his research in this regard has supplied him with one of the central axioms of his Political Theology: the inability to abolish something does not imply an inability to change it (Interview, Münster, 2.7.1987). This axiom is intended to open up a middle position between a conservative reading of Heidegger (thrownness), and classical historical materialism. It is a space shared by the Frankfurters, notably Adorno, as Metz soon found out.

Traditionally concupiscence is placed within the doctrine of original sin. Historically this doctrine has been used in conservative political theologies to defend a particular status quo. Metz, in developing his "new" Political Theology, had to clarify the concept of concupiscence. And yet, after making the switch from transcendental theology to Political Theology (alternatively after transforming transcendental theology into Political Theology), Metz hardly ever uses the concept and nowhere explicitly develops an adequate reformulation. The most important pointers are given in his treatment of the concept during the transitional phase, when he first came to interpret the category "world" in terms of history, and eventually in terms of history and society (see Metz 1968). But Metz has not yet provided an explicitly developed conceptualisation of concupiscence as the foundation of the new Political Theology. I propose to explicate this "hidden", implied concept of concupiscence, with the help of the major categories of a theory of reification as developed by George Lukács, Walter Benjamin, and Adorno. I will try to

relate the main categories of Metz's political Theology to the (implied) central concept of concupiscence.

Concupiscence will eventually be described as the might of what is. The problem of change will be described in terms of the critique of society of Critical Theory. Negative dialectics ultimately despair about the ability of praxis to change society that has become second nature. The might of what is seems absolute. What is, is "legitimised oppression" (Marcuse 1965:101). The problem of the praxis of the believer becomes acute. Metz (1997:7 – all translations are mine) wants a "theology that faces the world", a theology that integrates into its concepts the societal, historical and cultural context, something which Metz does not find in the usual "theological identity-thinking". Metz eventually develops a concept of praxis as privation. I will describe this as a praxis of longing and resistance.

## **2 RAHNER'S THEORY OF CONCUPISCENCE**

Rahner (1954) acknowledges that desire intrinsically belongs to being human. Desire becomes sinful if it resists the free self-fulfilment of the human person. On the basis of his definition of a human person as spiritual body and corporeal spirit, Rahner (1954:399) no longer explains the tension inherent in desire in terms of a metaphysical distinction between body and spirit, but in terms of a distinction between person and nature. "Nature" is defined by Rahner everything in a human being that constitutes the condition for the possibility of self-determination, as well as the object of this self-determination (Rahner 1954:393 note 1). A "person" is a being capable of self-determination. The distinction between person and nature boils down to the distinction between activity and passivity ("frei getan" versus "bloss erlitten").

To Rahner the doctrine of concupiscence is the answer to the question as to why a human person never completely succeeds in being free, defined as self-determination. To be free means that everything a human being is (nature), including the involuntary act, becomes revelation and expression of that which a human being wants to be as a person. The free decision thus transforms and permeates the spontaneous act (which, strictly speaking, does not qualify as an act – see Brümmer 1981:9) that it becomes my act, alternatively a genuine act, if an act is something we do for a purpose, and not something that is done to us, or happens to us (Rahner 1954:395-396).

The purpose of freedom is to be a person, and that is described by Rahner (1954:405) in Biblical terms – to love God with all your heart and strength, which is to be a saint. The freedom of a saint is the freedom of someone who has succeeded in total surrender to God. Everything such a person does is complete expression of what this person is in

her innermost being – loved by God. Rahner describes concupiscence as an explanation of the lack of freedom in terms a tension between nature and person. The tension is the result of finitude and materiality. A person on account of being finite fails to express her essence in concrete existence. “Materiality” is to be understood in terms of “worldliness”. Matter resists being formed by the person, but is simultaneously the basis for personhood - by virtue of being a person’s opening to the world. This opening, however, also exposes a person to the contradictions that go hand in hand with being in the world.

Concupiscence in general addresses the fact that such contradictions characterise being human. Rahner emphasises the ambivalence of concupiscence: it hinders a human being from becoming both totally evil and totally good. Concupiscence in the strict theological sense refers to the specific experience that these contradictions resist a human being's free self-realisation as a person, alternatively compromise his openness to being as such (Rahner 1954:405). To realise herself would be to become what she is – openness unto God, the absolute; transcendence. According to Rahner the initial fulfilment of this openness is already present (Rahner 1966:184):

“the experience of infinite longings, of radical optimism, of unquenchable discontent, of the torment of the insufficiency of everything attainable, of the radical protest against death, the experience of being confronted with an absolute love precisely where it is lethally incomprehensible and seems to be silent and aloof, the experience of a radical guilt and of a still abiding hope etc”.

Rahner (1954:395 note 1) finds in desire and suffering the same basic structure. Both are prior to the free self-determination of a person. Both involve the other. Rahner’s concept of “integrity” as ideal provides for a process of becoming during which a person in free decision progressively incorporates that which offered resistance to her free self-realisation. Free decision always already intends God, and the “world” is progressively incorporated into a person’s free movement unto God, and transformed into the medium of expressing freedom. The fact that complete freedom is unattainable on the present level of being is no reason not to strive for it (Rahner 1954:405). This is Metz’s point of departure for his negation of the unchangeable.

### 3 METZ'S ORIGINAL THEORY OF CONCUPISCENCE

#### 3.1 Negative existential

Metz (1962d:843-844) proceeds from Rahner's position: concupiscence is that perpetual contradiction in a person's self-realisation. This contradiction is not to be understood in terms of the spirit-sensual dualism. It is the result of spontaneous strivings, tendencies and desires that are effective in the process of self-realisation. They are the conditions of possibility of the free self-determination of a person, never fully brought under the control of the person, and never fully incorporated into the dynamics of his self-realisation. A person participates in the other of the world by virtue of bodily, material existence.

Metz (1962b:844) defines "evil desire" as such desires that resist and compromise the self-determination of a person. The human spirit derives its reality from bodily existence. My body is my openness towards the other. It belongs to my essence to be "outside" myself, to be in the world. Reciprocally the world – the concrete other – has always already entered my spirit to empower it to its own existence, as human spirit (Metz 1962b:845-846). The present world is simultaneously the result of other, foreign self-expressions that have "stamped" it, in accordance with their free self-expressions. These thus have always already entered my constitution by virtue of my participation in world. The world as *materia prima* is no *tabula rasa*. Other "spirits" have already been realised in it, and have not left it unaffected. In Heideggerian terms: Dasein designs world as being thrown amidst other designs. "World" is always already existentially pre-formed, always already expression and objectification of other spiritual origins, and foreign freedoms, which are transferred, by virtue of the human spirit being "spirit in the world", to the human subject as tendencies, drives, "desires", which impact on the direction of free self-conceptualisation. Not sensuality as such produces "temptations", but the reciprocal participation in world by means of sensuality results in the subject being "constitutionally tempted".

Metz proceeds beyond Rahner by emphasising the historical nature of "desires". World is history, and therefore "desires" must be understood historically. Rahner's concept of nature remains strangely static and a-historical. The resistance of nature against the personal decision he describes in terms reminiscent of the matter-form duality. Metz describes nature in terms of world and the relationship between the self and the other in terms of inter-subjectivity. World for Metz (1962b:846) is the all-preceding and all-encompassing spacial-temporal medium for free self-realisation. World is the medium in which history is made, and simultaneously history makes world. The "desires" are of historical origin and cannot be transcendently deduced from human nature. Even

the so-called supernatural existentials (Rahner 1961:300) are dependent on history as medium to be factors influencing human self-realisation. The primary result of Rahner's analysis of desire remains valid for Metz, though: there exists a contradiction between the self and the other, which affects a person fundamentally as spiritual-sensual subject, as unity of body and soul. Metz (1962b:847) calls this otherness within a person the "ontological difference".

Metz (1962b:847) interprets these findings theologically. The fundamental "temptedness" of the human realisation of freedom becomes concrete in the light of revelation and theology as concupiscence. That means that post-Adam freedom is characterised by a lasting "negative existential". Adam's act (to be understood as original and not first) has provided the world with a godless tendency. Adam has designed the world negatively and human beings are thrown into this negativity. What is more, the negativity has reciprocally entered the person. Concupiscence, in the theological sense of the word, thus describes the human inability since Adam (history!) to incorporate the negative existential, intrinsically belonging to the exercise of freedom, finally and permanently into the free decision in which God is intended (Metz 1962b:848).

Metz's (1962b:849-851) negation of the unchangeable must be viewed in the light of his placing concupiscence within the history of salvation. The co-existence of grace and concupiscence in the believer must be understood historically. Grace is already given, but must be caught up with in time. The simultaneity of nature and grace is not to be understood as a condition, but as a process. The existentials are the result of history, because the world has *become* what it is. The discrepancy between the self and the other is abiding, but a particular configuration of the world is not unchangeable. Changing the world is a struggle between the existential of Adam and that of Christ. "Integrity" is a promise that pulls in a particular direction, and must be realised.

### **3.2 Lack of faith and concupiscence**

Metz (1965a) describes lack of faith as the desire for the self against the other, the tendency towards isolation that is given on the basis of the constancy of concupiscence. The body is the condition of possibility of inter-subjectivity. Freedom and transcendence only exist within inter-subjective relations. The body represents the other and the relationship to the other constitutes the relationship to the self. A human being is subject only inter-subjectively. Faith, as transcendental determination, is thus an inter-subjective category. Inter-subjectivity must be understood in terms of the person as spirit-body unity. Concupiscence has also been described in these terms. What we have here is an important step towards

relating faith, as seen within the framework of society, with concupiscence.

Faith is experienced within inter-subjective relationships. Concupiscence manifests as the drive towards self-isolation (Metz 1965a: 489). This drive, elsewhere described by Metz (1962b:849) as absolutising the self over against the other, he now describes in terms of unbelief. The desire to be self-contained is sinful when it implies oppression of the other. It can be described as self-realisation at the cost of universality. But the desire to be self-contained is the basic drive towards human becoming. This desire, on the basis of the definition of the human being as spirit-body unity, belongs constitutionally to being human. That means the other belongs in the constitution of the self, but then as other. When the other is replaced by the self, with less or more violence, it ceases to exist, as does the self. The destruction of other, occurring simultaneously with self-destruction, is sin, and the tendency that causes it is sinful desire.

How is this notion of inter-subjectivity to be reconciled with Rahner's description of integrity as the ability to include the other in the free self-realisation of the self before God? I think Rahner is still captive of an Idealist position, from which Metz departed when he moved away from Rahner. The non-identical has a role, but is ultimately taken up into identity. Rahner is too confident that the free human decision in fact does intend God. For him it is merely matter, the weight of nature, which resists the instantaneous realisation of the free human decision. Rahner's notion of the anonymous Christian refers to the implicit faith in the non-believer. Metz is increasingly interested in the implicit unbelief in the confessing believer. He uses the doctrine of concupiscence to illuminate the implications of unbelief in the believer, speaking of *a simul fidelis et infidelis* which he calls a Catholic version of *simul justus et peccator* (Metz 1965a:488).

The contradiction between faith and unbelief should be understood in terms of the contradiction addressed in the concept *concupiscentia*: the contradiction between what a person is as thrown, and what she wants to be as project. Metz interprets the *materia prima* as other in terms of inter-subjectivity. Concupiscence as unbelief, as impulse towards isolation (Metz 1965a:489) is explicated as not allowing the other to be other, but to replace her with the self. The result is the objectification of both the self and the other, which destroys inter-subjectivity, the basic structure of believing subjectivity. This urge or impulse is a constant, human beings are "constitutionally tempted".

The "temptation" is constant, and thus also the struggle of faith. Freedom is only concrete in the struggle to increasingly love the other. Struggle is not just a phase in the overall realisation of freedom. Struggle

is the way in which freedom is concrete. The struggle of faith is concrete as the struggle against the lack of love, isolation, self-realisation at the cost of the other; and for love, communion, self-realisation in universality. Faith means to opt for God and concretely means to love your neighbour. Jesus' freedom of concupiscence would mean that he succeed in making the world (and everything that means in terms of woeful thrownness) itself expression of the total surrender of a human being to God (Metz 1965a:848).

Metz follows Rahner (1965) in teaching the unity of love of God and neighbour. He objects to the customary "horizontal" and "vertical" double inter-subjectivity of theological personalism. The one and only inter-personal inter-subjectivity is in itself transcendent ("auf Gott hin eröffnet") (Metz 1965a:490). The love of God occurs in neighbourly love. And: the human subject is not constituted in isolation, only secondarily entering into inter-subjective relations. Inter-subjectivity belongs to the constitution of the subject. A human being is human only in neighbourliness. The inter-personal encounter is the only inner-worldly site from whence the world as such becomes transparent unto God (Metz 1965a:491). The theological ground for this view is the incarnation, which reveals that the unmediated experience of God is unlocked in love for the other person. What might look like a contradiction (unmediated experience of God mediated by the neighbour) expresses Metz's view that there is no more "unmediated" or direct experience of God than that experienced in love for the neighbour. The worldliness of the world implies that God is not a sector of the world. God is encountered in the encounter with the fellow human being. Faith occurs in an inner-worldly relationship. Faith in the incarnation, to accept as true the mystery of the grace of the self-communication of God (Metz 1962b:206), includes accepting as true the belief that God is encountered in the other. Metz describes the incarnation as "inner-worldly transcendence" and always refers to Matthew 25:31-46 in this regard. Jesus says here, according to Metz (1962b:279): "The other, that is me". This is a key aspect of Metz's theology.

Christians, however, live in a world which is structured in such a way that love of neighbour has become impossible. That is why Metz does not ultimately follow Rahner's doctrine of anonymous Christians, but rather speaks of the lack of faith of confessing believers. With this deviation Metz registers the growing consciousness of the power of civil society over the individual.

### **3.3 Concupiscence, (original) sin, penance and conversion**

Metz's point of departure is that essential human transcendence unto God is concretely enacted in the transcendence towards fellow human



beings. A person is essentially always already exposed to the other. Sin is the negation of being exposed to the other and thus negation of self (Metz 1962b). Metz (1962b:202) says the urge towards isolation and absolute autonomy is the basic form of sin, “die Sünde der Sünde”. Augustine’s notion of the will to be like God as perverse (*libido dominandi*) can be presupposed for Metz’s explication of “original sin”. The imitation of God does not reckon with the gracious self-communication of God. The tragedy of the Modern history of emancipation is that the negation of God, understood as a condition for autonomy, is the negation of a God the concept of which ignores the mystery of grace. The Modern history of freedom remains in spite of all atheism the captive of a concept of God that has resulted from human autonomy being projected into the absolute. The decline of the human subject in civil society, which Metz registers only later, can be interpreted in terms of Metz’s earlier stated view of punishment being inherent in sin. The painful contradiction caused by punishment enforces a resolution. This could result in penance and conversion, which, according to Metz, may not be under-estimated with regard to the impact they could have on the state of the world.

Penance, according to Metz (1962b:204-205) in his transcendental phase, implies the whole person and anticipates a whole. The complete person, and according to the logic of corporeal existence, also the world of the person, with its past, is involved in penance as free decision. The world is given a new horizon. Punishment is a question asked anew of a person, which can be answered by understanding yourself in a new way, removing the misunderstanding about who and what you are. It is this concept of penance that will have to be made relevant for the Political Theology. The misunderstanding about who and what we are as human beings has become “second nature” in the process of Modernity.

### **3.4 Concupiscence and alienation**

Metz (1966a) progressively describes concupiscence as self-alienation in terms of the foreignness of societal structures with regard to the human subject. Over against Marxism he insists on the *particula veri* of the notion that certain things cannot be abolished. Original self-alienation has been given with being human and will not be abolished through socio-economic progress. Such alienation is fixated by Christian theology in the doctrine of concupiscence. What Rahner has called “nature” and Metz originally “world” now becomes a particular society - civil society as a market society, dominated by the principle of (unfair) exchange. Suffering is here seen as a symptom of alienation. It is supposed to interrupt the everyday experience and to register the absence of wholeness, challenging the pretence of wholeness. The double meaning

of the word passion, as desire and suffering, that Rahner has explained in terms of both being prior to freedom, here denotes a double act where suffering, as the experience of the absence of salvation, fires desire for salvation/wholeness. Civil society is according to its own concept the whole, the general. In reality it entails self-realisation without universality. The result is the pretence of universality, of wholeness (see Theunissen 1982). In such a situation the fixation of alienation feeds the desire for salvation, which refuses the claim to wholeness as false universality. Passion as suffering debunks the pretence of liberty, equality and solidarity. Passion as desire witnesses to another power that promises real freedom. Metz particularly emphasises passion as suffering. Suffering is being eliminated in civil society. To restore suffering to its rightful place, and thus “life to its original difficulty” (Caputo 1987:1), is the task to which Metz devotes much of his theological effort.

#### **4 CONCUPISCENCE AND “SECOND NATURE”**

The development of Metz’s thinking in the sixties received important impulses from European Marxists whom he met at the conferences of the “Paulus Gesellschaft”. His theory of concupiscence has from the beginning contained an element which enabled him to integrate an important insight of particularly the Frankfurters, the insight namely that society, per definition the product of freedom, becomes nature again, “second nature”, in a dialectical movement called the dialectic of Enlightenment.

The point of connection for this insight is based in the ontological explanation of sensuality that Rahner develops in his Thomas-reception, and which must be presupposed in Metz. Human spirit has always already, spontaneously and actively entered into the real other, the world. Human spirit is consequently prior to all conscious decision already the recipient of the world that has already gained an entry into a person in order to empower that person to a reality of her own (Metz 1962d:846). World is always a human product, and a person the product of the world by virtue of human openness to world as given with being a body. As Paul Tillich (1978:78) has formulated: “Existence is always both fact and act”. The “fact” is that which a person “suffers”, like the weather, even though it has a historical origin (“act”).

The notion of society being second nature gains an even more specific content if read in terms of the dialectic of Enlightenment. One of the central motives in Adorno’s critique of society (his name first appears in a Metz text in 1965 (Metz 1965b:234) is the unmasking of the universality of civil society as false universality. The struggle for survival, nature’s dominant principle, remains in force in history. History, per definition the history of emancipation from nature, is in effect the progressive unfolding of nature’s dominant principle, and is

thus nature, not history. The result of history, civil society, is thus also nature, the second. Metz's definition of concupiscence is based in a definition of world as always already expression and objectification of other spiritual origins and foreign freedoms. These "objectifications" must now be explicated in terms of the concept of "nature-history", or reification, as developed by Lukács, Benjamin and Adorno.

## 5 CULTURE AS SECOND NATURE

### 5.1 The negativity of the existing world: Hegel

The expression "second nature" stems from Hegel. In what can be called his "constitution for the new century", his *Verfassungsschrift* of 1799/1800, the young Hegel (1971:457:460) uses the term positively. He opposes a vision of culture as second nature to the "negative of the existing world", his description of eighteenth century Germany, a state of affairs described by Fichte as an epoch of consummate sinfulness. Germany was divided into any number of small states, causing the violence of the particular against the particular, the exact opposite of Hegel's vision of the particular overcoming itself into the universal, as absolute Spirit coming to itself, which would be natural. The divisions are unnatural, as they stifle vital life. Nature is the source for the longing for life in fullness, life that transcends the known that is offered and allowed. Nature provides the idea of something different, an idea striven for as humans represent nature in the form of society. Society as represented nature must be vital, life in the sense of universality, against absolutising the particular. The negative of the existing world must be overcome, and if not, it means that the present order of existence is accepted as eternal and absolute, a false absolute. The tension between nature and the present mode of life is the need that the contradiction should be overcome.

Just over a hundred years later the unification of Germany was accomplished and the society of which Hegel dreamt became reality. And it *is* second nature. But what is, invites questions concerning Hegel's positive evaluation of nature. If what is should be everything, the final coming to itself of Absolute Spirit means: no escape for anybody (Kundera 1988:11). Adorno (1974:60) says civil society was still weak at the transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, and that critique of the particular still had a different dignity. With the advent of the next millennium Lukács (1971:5) asks: who saves us from Western civilisation?

## 5.2 Culture as transcendental homelessness: Georg Lukács

Lukács speaks of a prior existing construct found by the soul in the process of becoming human that serves as substratum of all activity. This is the world of convention, a second nature, in its necessities equally cold to human meaning as the first, and thus equally unknowable (Lukács 1971:53). It differs from first nature in being the result of decay; it once expressed vital inwardness, but has frozen, ceasing to be a home, becoming a prison instead (Lukács 1971:55).

The adequate form of this epoch of consummate sinfulness (Fichte's expression ironically appropriated), the nineteenth century, is the novel, as expression of transcendental homelessness (Lukács 1971:12, 32, 137). Art and life are closely linked in Lukács, and each historical period has its genre. A genre must overcome itself into something new, in Hegel's sense of the word, but art is bound to the empirical historical situation, and the novel will dominate until a particular form of life has been transcended (Lukács 1971:137). Lukács finds in the novels of Tolstoy anticipations of the transition to a new world-historical era. First and second nature share the same concept of time – time that does not pass away. In the first people live in rhythm with nature, like the character Muschick in "Three Deaths", who cut trees, sew grain and harvested it, butchered sheep, sheep that were born with him, as were children, old people died and he knew this law well, having looked it in the eye. When he died it was a tree that died, calm and simple. Beautiful, because he did not lie, nor did he grimace, he feared nothing and had no regrets (Lukács 1971:130). This utopia, however, remains unmediated with real life, and that is the dilemma of Tolstoy's novels: nature can never become the foundation, the ontological basis of human universality. That role is reserved for culture. But culture is the world of convention, much ado about nothing, restless boredom. Boredom is the result of infinitude. Time is endless, eternal movement without direction, without growth, without passing (Lukács 1971:135).

The anticipation of a transition into a new epoch is found by Lukács in Tolstoy's third time dimension, the great instant. In Tolstoy's novels the great instantaneous insight into meaning which allows all conflict and suffering and failure to fade into insignificance is always the moment of death, as for instance the instant experienced by Karenin and Wronsky at the deathbed of Anna Karenina. When Anna is revived against all expectation, the great instant disappears. What remains is life in the world of convention. The great instant remains isolated from the world of nature and of culture as second nature. The great instant remains subjective, the anticipation abstract, like the longing for a reality befitting humanity (Lukács 1971:134-137).

The question (who saves us from Western civilisation?) remains unanswered. This question has led to the writing of a book on the novel. Literary criticism serves soteriology. Walter Benjamin shares this consciousness. The intellectual has a messianic role that is no longer the spreading of the light of Enlightenment: “The task given the intellectual by History in a godforsaken world is to be a vessel for redemption” (Feher 1985:135).

### **5.3 The task of the intellectual in a godforsaken world: Walter Benjamin**

Lukács’ expression “godforsaken world”, which Benjamin made his own, means according to Ferenc Feher (1985:126-127) the exact opposite of Nietzsche’s world that came to pass as a result of the death of God. We could thus surmise that we are dealing here with an alternative theory of postmodernism. The atmosphere of the Baroque “Trauerspiel” is the melancholic ambience of a godforsaken world (Benjamin 1978). The characters enacted, however, are creatures, created by God. They act in a world unable to house God, but God is not dead. On account of the notion of creation active here, myth is replaced in these “Modern tragic dramas” (not tragedies) by history. Benjamin uses Lukács’ use of the concept second nature to describe this history: history as second nature, reified history.

One of the most important similarities between Metz and Benjamin is the experience of godforsakenness. In opposition to other Political Theologians like Dorethea Sölle, Metz never speaks without reservation of the death of God, just as he resists the notion of Jesus’ suffering being God’s suffering. The pervading reference to God, especially in the later work, is to the faceless, silent God. That is how God is experienced. Metz’s concept of God will be discussed below, and is here prepared by a short analysis of what Lukács and Benjamin mean when they speak of godforsakenness.

The world is godforsaken on account of being without meaning. Something without meaning is a mere thing. Second nature in Benjamin is the continuum of the history of conquest. The existing order is mirrored in the concepts of the rulers (Benjamin 1977:231). It is history as nature in that it does not come to pass. Nothing new, that would have been different, happens in it. The enemy has not been halted in his victory march. Benjamin (1965:82-83) wants to brush history, as told by historicism, against the grain. He wants to develop a way of seeing that will enable him to perceive historical events independently from their meaning within the present order as function of the ruling consciousness. Interestingly enough it is reification that makes such a view possible, by virtue of the loss of meaning suffered by things reified. The loss or

decay of meaning liberates things for new constellations of meaning. Terry Eagleton has described the “logic of decay” thus (Eagleton 1990:326-327):

“The blank, petrified objects of Trauerspiel have undergone a kind of leakage of meaning, an unhinging of signifier and signified, in a world which like that of commodity production knows only the empty, homogeneous time of eternal repetition. The features of this inert, atomized landscape then have to suffer a kind of second reification at the hands of the allegorical sign, itself a piece of lifeless script. But once all intrinsic meaning has hemorrhaged from the object, in a collapse of the expressive totality which Lukács espouses, any phenomenon can come by the wily resourcefulness of the allegorist to signify absolutely anything else, in a kind of profane parody of the creative naming of God. Allegory thus mimes the leveling, equivalencing operations of the commodity but thereby releases a fresh polyvalence of meaning, as the allegorist grubs among the ruins of once integral meanings to permutate them in startling new ways”.

Allegory functions negatively. It polemicises against symbol. It illuminates the brokenness of the particular in opposition to false universality, which it destroys (Benjamin 1977:235-239). Destruction goes hand in hand with salvation, as the broken pieces are rescued, the ruins of the break between subject and object, humanity and nature. Benjamin’s messianic reading of history does not tolerate faith in progress as salvation. The signs of salvation are rather to be found, as Eagleton (1990:326) formulates, “in the very unregeneracy of historical life, in its postlapsarian suffering and squalor.” The world of the Modern tragic drama is irrational and transcendent, godforsaken. But God is a spectator. The more history becomes visible as decay, as ruin, the more it refers negatively to the coming of the Messiah. Eagleton (1990:326) again:

“The very transitoriness of a history in pieces anticipates its own ultimate passing away, so that for Benjamin the ghostly traces of paradise can be detected in its sheer antithesis - in that endless series of catastrophes, which is secular temporality ... At the nadir of historical fortunes, in a social order grown morbid and meaningless, the figure of the just society can be glimmeringly discerned....”

#### **5.4 Priority of the object: Adorno**

Adorno (1973) translates Benjamin's messianism into philosophy through his concept of "Naturgeschichte", the concrete unity of nature and history, which must be understood as an alternative to Heidegger's concept of "thrownness". Adorno persists with the distinction between subject and object, but gives priority to the object. History remains nature on account of the natural principle of domination remaining its dominating principle. Domination is objectified and reified in society. The instrument of domination is reason, a reason on account of which society comes into being, and that is shaped by the circumstances of its genesis (Adorno 1974:75; see Adorno 1980:32). Adorno (1980) speaks of identifying reason, and criticises it for violating reality by producing the pretence of identity in the absence of the same. Negative dialectics prioritises the objective by criticising this fiction. It is propelled by the longing for real identity. Persisting with non-identity in the face of feigned identity contains true identity in the mode of longing (see Adorno 1980:152). The problem is that reason and being are indeed identical in that civil society is the product of the kind of reason that produced it (Adorno 1980:17). Change becomes impossible, as we do not have the ability to think difference. The priority of the object also implies that Adorno puts his hope in the non-identical, in that which remained outside the sphere of power of the subject, which resisted identification, that which has no meaning within the "whole".

### **6 ANTICIPATING THE WHOLE**

According to Adorno the whole is civil society and the whole is false. One could interpret by saying the "Vorgriff" does not anticipate the liberating mystery of God, as Rahner would have it, but self-absolutising empirical society. It is the whole in the sense that nothing escapes its grasp, and yet it only pretends wholeness. The concept of civil society promises self-realisation in universality, a promise that is broken in reality. Individual beings are only known in their anticipation of the whole. If the whole is false, individual beings cease to be knowable for what they are. The power of the whole, which Rahner and the young Metz found active in every single being, remains potent in Adorno's vision of things, as negation of the individual being.

Metz's concept of concupiscence has originally been characterised by his emphasis on the historical dimension. The human condition, being "constitutionally tempted", has a historical origin, and should at least in principle be open to change. The problem is the powerlessness of individual decision and action, as "history does not play itself out on the level of our conscious individual decisions" (Vattimo 1993:54). The later Metz retains the conviction that things have become what they are and

should be able to become something else. The problem, however, becomes more acute as Adorno's truth dawns on the ever so hopeful pre-1968 generation. The question that comes to occupy Metz's mind is: what kind of praxis could change the world?

Concupiscence could best be described, in the light of the influence of the Frankfurters, as the power of what is. What is, according to Marcuse (1965:97-107, 101), is legalised oppression. It is history turned fate, society that has become second nature. But it is exactly the totalising tendency of what is, expressed in its disregard for the other, that leads to its ruin. By closing itself to the other, it forfeits the possible and thus the ability to change, to imagine difference. It loses all meaning, because meaning is a relational category. This tendency must be related to the young Metz's (1962b:202-203) description of sin as the desire to absolutise the self, that carries its own punishment. The possibility of new constellations of meaning being formed with the rescued pieces of the ruined whole could then be described in theological terms: grace, penance, conversion. This is my hypothesis: Metz has taken up an important philosophical theory into his theological conceptual apparatus. And he has delivered on his own plea in his conversation with Habermas: that concepts such as sin and conversion, sacrifice and grace be taken up in a theory with societal-critical relevance (Metz 1979:536-538). Asceticism is one of the terms mentioned by Metz. Asceticism, or the praxis of missing, of lack, as he eventually formulates, becomes one of the central categories of the new Political Theology. It answers the question: what praxis could change the world as history and society? This issue will be dealt with in the second part of this article which will be published in the next volume of *Verbum et Ecclesia*.

### Consulted literature

- Adorno, ThW 1970. *Über Walter Benjamin*. Hrsg. von R Tiedemann. Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp.
- , 1973. *Philosophische Frühschriften*. (Gesammelte Schriften; Bd. 1). Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp.
- , 1974. *Drei Studien zu Hegel*. Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp.
- , 1980. *Negative Dialektik*. 2. Auflage. Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp.
- , 1986. *Minima Moralia. Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben*. Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp.
- Ashley, J M 1999. *Interruptions. Mysticism, politics and theology in the work of Johann Baptist Metz*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Benjamin, W 1965. *Zur Kritik der Gewalt und andere Aufsätze*. Mit einem Nachwort von Herbert Marcuse. Frankfurt M: Suhrkamp.
- , 1977. *Illuminationen. Ausgewählte Schriften*. Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp.
- , 1978. *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*. (Hrsg von Rolf Tiedemann). Frankfurt/M Suhrkamp.



- Caputo, J D 1987. *Radical hermeneutics. Repetition, deconstruction and the hermeneutic project.* (Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy). Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- , 1997. *The prayers and tears of Jacques Derrida. Religion without religion.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Deleuze, G & Guattari, F 1994. *What is Philosophy?* London; New York: Verso.
- Eagleton, T 1990. *The ideology of the aesthetic.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Feher, F 1985. Lukács and Benjamin: Parallels and contrasts. *New German Critique* No. 34, 125-138.
- Filthaut, T (Hrsg.) 1966. *Umkehr und Erneuerung.* Mainz: Grünewald.
- Habermas, J (Hrsg) 1979. *Stichworte zur 'Geistigen Situation der Zeit'. Band 2: Politik und Kultur.* Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp.
- Hegel, G W F 1771. Einleitung [zur Verfassungsschrift von] 1799/1800, in: *Werke in zwanzig Bänden. Bd. 1: Frühe Schriften.* (Theorie Werkausgabe). Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp, 457-460.
- Hochstaffl, J 1976. *Negative Theologie. Ein Versuch zur Vermittlung des patristischen Begriffs.* München: Kösel.
- Jaspers, K 1948. *Der Philosophische Glaube.* Zürich: Artemis.
- Jeanrond, W G & Rike, J L (Eds) 1991. *Radical pluralism and truth. David Tracy and the hermeneutics of religion.* New York: Crossroad.
- Kamphaus, F, Metz, J B & Zenger, E 1976. *Gott der Lebenden und der Toten. Drei Ansprachen.* Mainz: Grünewald.
- Kaufmann, F-X & Metz, J B 1987. *Zukunftsfähigkeit. Suchbewegungen im Christentum.* Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder.
- Kearney, R 1988. *The wake of imagination. Ideas of creativity in Western culture.* London; Melbourne; Auckland; Johannesburg: Hutchinson.
- Kellner, E (Hrsg) 1966. *Christentum und Marxismus – heute.* (Gespräche der Paulus-Gesellschaft). Wien/Frankfurt/Zürich: Europa.
- , (Hrsg) 1976. *Christliche Politik.* (Gespräche der Paulus-Gesellschaft). Wien: Europa.
- Kundera, M 1988. *The art of the novel.* London: Faber & Faber.
- Kuschel, K-J (Hrsg) 1990. *Welches Christentum hat Zukunft?* Dorothee Sölle und Johann Baptist Metz in Gespräch mit Karl-Josef Kuschel. Stuttgart: Kreuz.
- Lukács, G 1971. *Die Theorie des Romans. Ein geschichtsphilosophischer Versuch über die Formen der grossen Epik.* Neuwied; Berlin: Luchterband.
- Machovec, M, Metz, J B & Rahner, K 1968. Kann ein Christ Marxist sein? Ein Streitgespräch in Münster, Herbst 1967. *Neues Forum* 15:293-300.
- Marcuse, H 1965. Nachwort von Herbert Marcuse, in Benjamin 1965:97-107.
- Metz, JB 1958a. Befindlichkeit. *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* Bd. 2<sup>2</sup>, 102-110.
- , 1958b. Begierde. *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* Bd. 2<sup>2</sup>, 108-112.
- , 1958c. Zur Metaphysik der menschlichen Leiblichkeit. *Arzt und Christ* 4:78-84.
- , 1961a. Armut im Geiste. Vom Geist der Menschwerdung Gottes und der Menschwerdung des Menschen. *Geist und Leben* 34:419-435.
- , 1961b. Integrität. *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche.* Bd. 5<sup>2</sup>, 718-720.
- , 1961c. Leib. *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* Bd. 5<sup>2</sup>, 902-905.
- , 1962a. Caro Cardo salutis. Zum christlichen Verständnis des Leibes. *Hochland* 55:97-107.

- , 1962b. Der Mensch ‘zwischen’ Freiheit und Schicksal, in *Dokumente der Paulus-Gesellschaft* Bd. 3. München: Selbstverlag der Gesellschaft, 188-207 (mit Diskussionsbeiträgen p.210, 211-212, 238-242, 242-245, 277-280, 308-312).
- , 1962c. Freiheit. *Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe* 1:403-444.
- , 1962d. Kunkupisenz. *Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe* 1:843-851.
- , 1962e. Mitsein. *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* Bd. 7<sup>2</sup>, 491-492.
- , 1962f. Natur. *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* Bd. 7<sup>2</sup>, 805-808.
- , 1963a. Leiblichkeit. *Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe* 2:30-37.
- , 1963b. Verhüllte Freiheit. *Geist und Leben* 36:220-223.
- , 1964. Freiheit als philosophisch-theologisches Grenzproblem, in Metz, J B *et al* (Hrsg), *Gott in Welt. Festgabe für Karl Rahner*. 2 Bände. Freiburg: Herder, 287-314.
- , 1965a. Der Unglaube als theologisches Problem. *Concilium* 1:484-492.
- , 1965b. Gott vor uns. Statt eines theologischen Arguments, in: Unseld, S (Hrsg), *Ernst Bloch zu ehren. Beiträge zu seinem Werk herausgegeben von Siegfried Unseld im Suhrkamp Verlag*. Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 227-241.
- , 1966a. Die ‘condition humaine’; Christliches Menschenverständnis; Zukunft gegen Jenseits?, in: Kellner 1966:108-111, 118-121, 218-228.
- , 1966b. Kirche für die Ungläubigen?, in: Filthaut 1966:312-329.
- , 1967. Der Mensch als Einheit von Leib und Seele (zusammen mit F P Fiorenza). *Mysterium Salutis*. Bd. 2, 584-636.
- , 1968. *Zur Theologie der Welt*. Mainz: Grünewald.
- , 1976a. ‘Politische Theologie’ als gesellschaftskritische Theologie, in: Kellner 1976:41-57.
- , 1976b. Unsere Hoffnung. Ein Bekenntnis zum Glauben in dieser Zeit, in Gemeinsame Synode der Bistümer in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. *Beschlüsse der Vollversammlung*. Offizielle Gesamtausgabe I. Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 84-111.
- , 1976c. Vorwort, in: Hochstaffl 1976:9-10.
- , 1977a. *Glaube in Geschichte und Gesellschaft. Studien zu einer praktischen Fundamentaltheologie*. Mainz: Grünewald.
- , 1977b. Vergebung der Sünden. Theologische Überlegungen zu einem Abschnitt aus dem Synodendokument ‘Unsere Hoffnung’. *Stimmen der Zeit* Heft 2:119-128.
- , 1979. Produktive Ungleichzeitigkeit, in Habermas 1979:529-538.
- , 1980. *Jenseits bürgerlicher Religion. Reden über die Zukunft des Christentums*. (Forum Politische Theologie; Bd. 1). München: Kaiser; Mainz: Grünewald.
- , 1981. *Unterbrechungen. Theologisch-politische Perspektiven und Profile*. Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn.
- , 1983. Aufbruch zur Reformation. Die katholische Kirche am Übergang in eine neue Epoche. *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 9/10 April 1983.
- , 1984. Im Angesicht der Gefahr. Theologische Meditation zu Lukas, Kapitel 21 und zur Apokalypse des Johannes, in Reinisch 1984:17-23.
- , 1987. Kampf um jüdische Traditionen in der christlichen Gottesrede. *Kirche und Israel* 2:14-23.
- , 1989. Anamnetische Vernunft. Anmerkungen eines Theologen zur Krise der Geisteswissenschaften, in: Honneth, A, *et al* (Hrsg). *Zwischenbetrachtungen im Proseß der Aufklärung. Jürgen Habermas zum 60. Geburtstag*. Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 733-738.
- , 1990. Theologie als Theodizee?, in: Oelmüller 1990:103-118.

- , 1991a. Die Verantwortung der Theologie in der gegenwärtigen Krise der Geisteswissenschaften, in: Müller 1991:113-126.
- , 1991b. *Gottespassion. Zur Ordensexistenz heute* (zusammen mit T R Peters). Freiburg: Herder.
- , 1991c. The 'One Word': A challenge to Western Christianity, in: Jeanron & Rike 1991:203-214.
- , 1992a. Die Rede von Gott angesichts der Leidensgeschichte der Welt. *Stimmen der Zeit* 210, 311-320.
- , 1992b. *Glaube in Geschichte und Gesellschaft*. 5. Auflage. (Welt der Theologie). Mainz: Grünewald.
- , 1992c. Gotteszeugenschaft in einer Welt der religionsfreundlichen Gottlosigkeit. *Ordensnachrichten* 31:2, 3-14.
- , 1994a. Karl Rahners Ringen um die theologische Ehre des Menschen. *Stimmen der Zeit* 212:6, 383-392.
- , 1994b. Lob der Negativen Theologie. Aus einem Interview zur Gottesfrage, in Lutz-Bachmann, M (Hrsg): *Und Dennoch ist von Gott zu reden. Festschrift für Herbert Vorgrimler*. Freiburg; Basel/Wien: Herder, 304-310.
- , 1997. *Zum Begriff der neuen Politischen Theologie 1967-1997*. Mainz: Grünewald.
- Metz, J B & Rahner, K 1977. *Ermutigung zum Gebet*. Freiburg; Basel; Wien: Herder.
- Metz, J B & Rendtorff, T (Hrsg.) 1971. *Die Theologie in der interdisziplinären Forschung*. (Interdisziplinäre Studien; Bd. 2). Düsseldorf: Bertelsman Universitätsverlag.
- Müller, H-P (Hrsg) 1991. *Wissen als Verantwortung. Ethische Konsequenzen des Erkennens*. Stuttgart; Berlin; Köln: Kohlhammer.
- Oelmüller, W (Hrsg) 1990. *Theodizee - Gott vor Gericht?* München: Fink.
- Rabinbach, A 1985. *Between Enlightenment and Apocalypse: Benjamin, Bloch and Modern German Jewish Messianism*. *New German Critique* No. 34:78-124.
- Rahner K 1954. Zum theologischen Begriff der Konkupiszenz, in *Schriften zur Theologie* Bd. 1. Einsiedeln; Zürich; Köln: Benzinger, 377-414.
- , 1961. *Theological Investigations Vol. I: God, Christ, Mary and Grace*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd.
- , 1965. Über die Einheit von Nächsten- und Gottesliebe, in *Schriften zur Theologie* Bd. 6. Einsiedeln/Zürich/Köln: Benzinger, 277-298.
- , 1966. *Theological Investigations Vol. IV: More recent writings*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd.
- Reinisch, L (Hrsg) 1984. *Das Spiel mit der Apokalypse. Über die letzten Tage der Menschheit*. Freiburg: Herder.
- Said, E 1980. *The question of Palestine*. New York: Vintage.
- Theunissen, M 1982. *Selbstverwirklichung und Allgemeinheit. Zur Kritik des gegenwärtigen Bewusstseins*. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter.
- Tillich, P 1978. *Systematic Theology*, vol 2. London: SCM.
- Vattimo, G 1993. *The adventure of difference. Philosophy after Nietzsche and Heidegger*. Translated by Cyprian Blamires with the assistance of Thomas Harrison. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Westermann, C 1978. *Theologie des Alten Testaments in Grundzügen*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.