

Metz's Response to Secularization

From a Transcendental-Linear to a Utopic Theology of History

This chapter begins by examining Johann Baptist Metz's early understanding of the modern process of secularization and his effort to present a positive interpretation of this process in light of Catholic theology. By tracing the manner in which Metz approached this task in his writing through 1966, we will see that it was through engaging the process of secularization that a distinctive eschatology emerged in his theological program. His transcendental-linear theology of history presented a productive apologetic resource, allowing him to affirm the ongoing validity of Christianity for those who experienced the process of secularization as a threat to their faith. The advantages of this tack, the legitimization of both Christianity and the secularization process, complement his early apologetic interests. As we will see, though, encounters with new interlocutors, particularly Ernst Bloch, repositioned his evaluation of the cultural situation and

the appropriate theological response. The importance of the practical character of Christian hope, as well as a utopic understanding of history that could allow for the possibility of the genuinely new, came to characterize Metz's thought by the mid-1960s. While continuing to address an increasingly secularized society, the manner in which he approached this task was in flux. It was here that his promotion of an eschatologically framed "political theology" surfaced.

The emergence of a creative and practical eschatology, however, would not signal a departure from Metz's concern with the process of secularization. He continued to argue that this process need not be experienced as contrary to a Christian understanding of the world and history. Indeed, he repeatedly championed the Christian provenance of modernity, though we will see that this now was affirmed by a hope mediated within history rather than the transcendental structure of history itself. It was not without reason, then, that by his first taking up the concept of secularization, eschatology moved to the center of his thought. The very renewal of eschatology that Metz called for was engendered by the future-consciousness characteristic of the modern world; his eschatology emerged out of his apologetic engagement with secularization. Moreover, he insisted that eschatology underwrites secularization; eschatological hope determines the future-oriented dynamic of modern culture.

Yet, having now reconsidered the manner in which he understood history theologically, Metz was better positioned to locate within the Christian's eschatological hope an inherent resource that radically resists the identification of eschatology with the future-oriented dynamic that came to the fore with modernity. Thus, by the mid-1960s, eschatology would begin to emerge as a potent source of cultural criticism. Read alongside chapter 2, on Schillebeeckx's

early eschatological writings, this chapter will reveal the important relationship between the theological engagement with mid-twentieth-century interpretations of secularization and developments in the doctrine of eschatology, the emergence of practical eschatology in Catholic theology, and, ultimately, the beginnings of an even more critical employment of Christian eschatological hope as it meets the challenges of a modern world. This study of Metz's early writings will proceed in three steps: an investigation of his initial theology of history, in which Metz employs a transcendental-linear framework; Metz's political turn to a utopic understanding of history and the practical character of hope; and the consequences of Metz's political turn for a critical reading of secularization and his articulation of the Christian's eschatological hope.

A Transcendental-Linear Theology of History

Secularization as the Advent of History

In even his earliest writings, it was apparent that Metz believed that by the middle of the twentieth century, Western European society had entered into a process of secularization and would only continue along that course. Though little agreement existed regarding the theological validity and consequence of that process, there was general consensus among sociologists and theologians alike that a new historical reality was emerging across the Continent. In engaging the issue, then, Metz's primary interest was not with whether the widespread secularization of European culture in fact was in progress but with the significance of that process for modern Christianity. What challenges does the secularization of society present the believer, he asked, and what does the believer have to say in response?

As secularization is a notoriously difficult concept to define, it is important that we begin by looking at the particular way in which Metz understood the secularization process. Although he made it clear that he was aware of a range of both theological and nontheological interpretations of secularization, it is his own use of the term that interests us here.¹ The earliest appearance of what would become his “secularization thesis” (*Säkularisierungsthese*) can be found in a 1957 article entitled “Die ‘Stunde’ Christi.”² Though the secularization of European society was not yet a central issue in this article, it was here that he made an early attempt to speak of the “historical power” of Jesus Christ (*Geschichtsmächtigkeit*), an important theme that would reappear in other early writings and will be examined in the first part of this chapter. His dissertation, written under Karl Rahner and published in 1962, *Christliche Anthropozentrik*, in which he attempted to correlate the formal structure of Thomas Aquinas’s theology with the anthropocentric shift characteristic of modern epistemology, also provided Metz the opportunity to reflect on the rise of secularization in modernity, though, again, only briefly and by way of footnote.³ It would be with the publication of his first major collection of essays, in 1968, under the title *Zur Theologie der Welt* that Metz directly turned his attention to the theological significance of secularization as a sociohistorical phenomenon and placed it at the center of a programmatic agenda. Containing essays

1. Along with the work of Talcott Parsons, Karl Löwith, and Hans Blumenberg cited in the introduction of this study, throughout *Zur Theologie der Welt* (Mainz, Ger.: Matthias-Grünewald, 1968) Metz references the work of a number of Protestant theologians, including the influential writings of Friedrich Gogarten and the American Harvey Cox. Schillebeeckx is among the numerous Catholic theologians cited. This text was published in English as *Theology of the World*, trans. William Glen-Doepel (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969), and subsequently will be abbreviated in citations as *TW*.
2. Metz, “Die ‘Stunde’ Christi: Eine geschichtstheologische Erwägung,” *Wort und Wahrheit* 12 (1957): 5–18; see 16–17.
3. Metz, *Christliche Anthropozentrik: Über die Denkform des Thomas von Aquin* (Munich: Kosel, 1962), see 132n22.

written between 1962 and 1967, the first two parts of this collection, which include essays written through 1966, provide our point of entry in this chapter into his efforts to engage modern European society. Read alongside a number of other uncollected articles published during this period, these writings reveal a theologian searching for an adequate response to the challenges of his time and, consequently, a theological project in transition.

The most developed account of what Metz understood by the historical process of secularization appears in an essay delivered at an academic conference in 1963 and later published in *Theology of the World* as “The Future of Faith in a Hominized World.”⁴ Here, we find the social analysis of modern culture that would orient his theological project throughout much of the 1960s. In this essay, Metz characterized secularization as the transition from a divinized to a hominized world, a process he claimed parallels modern epistemological developments, in which there is a reorientation of thought from the known object to the knowing subject.⁵ In the divinized world of the past, men and women encountered the world as sheer “nature” (*Umwelt*). It was the pregiven default context of human existence and, as such, was experienced as mysterious and beyond human control. The world as nature provided the nourishment and resources needed to sustain life but also bestowed inexplicable catastrophe and death. The precariousness of human existence was beyond address, with protection and danger coming

4. This essay was first published as “Die Zukunft des Glaubens in hominisierten Welt,” *Hochland* 56 (1964): 377–91, and was edited for compilation in *Zur Theologie der Welt*. For Metz’s brief reflections on the conference in a later interview, see Ekkehard Schuster and Reinhold Boschert-Kimmig, *Hope against Hope: Johann Baptist Metz and Elie Wiesel Speak Out on the Holocaust*, trans. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Paulist, 1999), 21. First published as *Trotzdem Hoffen: Mit Johann Baptist Metz und Elie Wiesel in Gespräch* (Mainz, Ger.: Matthias-Grünewald, 1993).

5. For Metz’s understanding of the relationship between hominization and modern epistemology, particularly as this relates to the influence of Aquinas, see *Christliche Anthropozentrik*, 41–95.

from the same incomprehensible source. Nature, and not humankind, reigned sovereign in such a world. Metz argued that it was by approaching the world from this cosmocentric perspective that nature itself predictably functioned as the primary locus of religious life. Men and women bestowed nature with divine qualities, finding in it the power of God directly revealed. In a divinized world, the flux of an immediately numinized nature reflected the outworking of divine providence.

The process of secularization initiated a shift from this cosmocentric perspective to an anthropocentric view in which the world now could be appropriated as “history” (*Mitwelt*). The emergence within modernity of a secularized worldview exposed the historicity of human existence and, thus, marked the advent of history itself. In the wake of this process, Metz argued, humans experience the world no longer as mysterious and uncontrollable nature but as a history in the making in which men and women are the “masters” of creation. The human person discovers “that he is more and more removed from the enfolding unity of a pre-given nature and experiences himself as the active subjectivity of nature which stands over against it and interferes with it, planning and transforming, in order to construct a world out of it.”⁶ Humans themselves are now the demiurge responsible for the world. A hominized world no longer relies on the logic of myth and magic found in the religious imagination of a divinized world. The nature that had embraced or attacked the human seemingly on divine whim now was seen as ordered according to natural laws accessible to human understanding and control. The world became material for manipulation and could be subdued and managed by human hands. An explosion of scientific and technological advancements in the

6. *TW*, 60.

modern era followed, fostering a new confidence and progressive optimism regarding what humans themselves could accomplish in the world. Secularization, therefore, inaugurated history; it dedivinized a world experienced as nature and transformed it into a world experienced as history, fostering the historical consciousness of freedom.

Metz's Secularization Thesis as Apologetics

Metz took up the question of secularization because he was concerned that many Christians were experiencing this process of hominization, in which the human person comes to reign as sovereign over nature, as a frightening crisis or shattering of faith.⁷ What once seemed to proclaim the work of God now was seen to be the work of humans alone. "What shines out of the world today, primarily and directly, are not the *vestigia Dei*," he wrote, "but the *vestigia hominis*."⁸ A hominized world was without magic and mystery. Seemingly affirming the zero-sum theory, the process of secularization had removed God from the world, leaving the divine nowhere to be found and the believer distraught and unsure of where to turn. Metz insisted that theology could not ignore the pastoral consequences of this phenomenon. If theology was to avoid descending into an ahistorical "mythology" unable to address the lived experience of Christians, it must take up its responsibility to

7. See *ibid.*, 60 and 14. The latter citation appears in the first chapter of the text, "How Faith Sees the World: The Christian Orientation in the Secularity of the Contemporary World," an edited translation of "Weltverständnis im Glauben: Christliche Orientierung in der Weltlichkeit der Welt heute," *Geist und Leben* 35 (1962): 165–84. Though this particular understanding of a crisis of faith was not yet present, Metz's earlier effort to respond to what he described as men and women's "deliberate effort to forget the coming of God" is notable in a small meditation he published for the Advent season in 1959. See *The Advent of God*, trans. John Drury (Paramus, NJ: Newman, 1970), n.p.; originally published as *Advent Gottes* (Munich: Ars Sacra, 1959).

8. *TW*, 61.

accompany the modern person for whom the dedivinization of the world had made God invisible.⁹ Secularization demanded of the theologian a new apologetic tack.

In his treatment of the subject written in 1962 and later published in *Theology of the World* as “How Faith Sees the World: The Christian Orientation in the Secularity of the Contemporary World,” we find the clearest and most complete expression of Metz’s secularization thesis. At the center of his apologetic response stands the belief that the modern crisis of faith betrays an insufficient appreciation of the Christian theological tradition. The process of secularization need not be experienced as contrary to a Christian understanding of the world, nor should Christians resist its realization in world history. In his own words, he sought to construct “a positive interpretation of this permanent and growing secularity of the world in the light of Catholic theology.”¹⁰ Supporting this positive interpretation would be the bold claim that, rather than having arisen against Christianity, the modern process of secularization was fundamentally Christian in character and provenance. Indeed, it is through this process that the world ultimately fulfills its created purpose. Secularization represents the growing awareness within history that God has given the world to humans with the authority to govern and cultivate.

According to Metz, it is the protological and christological structure of human existence that determined the modern transition from an experience of the world as the reign of numinous nature

9. *Ibid.*, 14.

10. *Ibid.*, 13n1. As is mentioned earlier, Metz was well aware that other theologians had engaged in similar projects, but what he found lacking in these efforts was this genuinely positive interpretation of the growing secularity of the world. He acknowledged that in many cases theologians had advocated “a less inhibited openness to the world,” but he equally criticized them for maintaining the “obvious assumption that the secularity of the world as such is something that is actually contrary to the Christian understanding of the world and must therefore be totally overcome by Christian means.” Prominent among those Metz criticized in 1962 was Yves Congar (*TW*, 14–15). We will have an opportunity to return to these remarks in chapter 2.

to that of transformable history. More specifically, he argued that a hominized worldview is made possible because of the way in which creation and the incarnation transcendently orient the human person toward the world. Consequently, Christian understandings of protology and Christology uniquely clarify the historicity of the world that only through the course of secularization was now experienced as constituting human existence.

Beginning with the significance of Christian creation faith, and revealing the influence of Aquinas's theology of creation that he examined in *Christliche Anthropozentrik*,¹¹ Metz grounded the modern subject's experience of autonomy and freedom upon the protological distinction between the Creator and the created. The God of creation, he argued, does not usurp human autonomy and freedom but, rather, grants and secures it: "The majesty of the freedom he bestows is that he is the one who truly lets things be what they are. He is not in competition with, but the 'guarantor' of the world."¹² God's existence is the sustaining source of created existence and, thus, the transcendental ground of human freedom. In creating, God does not seek to divinize that which is created but establishes and accepts humanity precisely as that which is different from God's self. As transcendent Creator, God lets the world be the world. Needless to say, Metz was not seeking to describe the transcendent God of the deist here. The radical transcendence of the Creator does not alienate God from creation but denotes a distinction that allows for intimacy without confusion, freedom and autonomy without estrangement.

While grounding the experience of autonomy and freedom in a secularized world upon the nondualistic divine–human relationship established in creation, Metz argued that only through the

11. We will briefly examine Aquinas's theology of creation in chapter 2, where Schillebeeckx more explicitly appropriates Aquinas's writings with regard to the process of secularization.

12. *TW*, 27.

incarnation was the definitive and eschatological acceptance of the “worldliness of the world” realized and made manifest in history: “In Jesus Christ, man and his world were accepted by the eternal Word, finally and irrevocably. . . . [W]hat is true of this nature that Christ accepted is also fundamentally true of the acceptance of man and his world by God.”¹³ Complementing his understanding of creation, Metz believed that the incarnation should be construed not as the divinization of the world but rather as God’s historical acceptance of the world as that which is not divine. From the perspective of Christology, the autonomy and freedom of the world are compromised only if a christological monophytism is presumed in which that which is human is collapsed into the divine. Properly understood, it is precisely in the person of Jesus Christ that the world is set free to be the world.

Again, then, the radically transcendent God “does not remove the difference between himself and what is other, but rather accepts the other precisely as different from himself.”¹⁴ It is in the incarnation that God’s acceptance of the world as nondivine, as worldly, is made historically manifest. In Jesus Christ, for the first time, the world is recognized as truly world, and at the same time God is revealed to be wholly divine. It is in and through the incarnation that the process of secularization is let loose in history, revealing both the sovereignty of God and the freedom of humanity. The modern process of secularization should be understood, consequently, as the historical continuation of the incarnation. The apologetic value of Metz’s position is clear. There is no need for a crisis of faith surrounding this process; indeed, secularization is the historical extension of that which was accomplished in Christ. Rather than envisioning them as inherently incompatible, Metz believed there is

13. *Ibid.*, 26.

14. *Ibid.*

an intrinsic connection between the Christian faith and the modern world.

Metz's Secularization Thesis as a Theology of History

If creation and the incarnation reveal the historicity of the world at this early stage in Metz's writing, it is important that we also consider how he conceptualized the theological character of history during this period. Although he first considered this question in 1957 with the writing of "Die 'Stunde' Christi," it is in the essay from 1962 presently under consideration that Metz directly located this question within the context of secularization. The theological foundation he developed for secularization, in which the process is approached from the perspective of protology and Christology, here can be seen to inform his theological understanding of history in three significant ways. First, it allowed him to reposition divine transcendence temporally; second, it made it possible for Metz to speak of the incarnation as the condition for the possibility of authentic history; and finally, he could contend that history is eschatologically determined by the historical power of the incarnation.

To the first point, Metz noted that it was through the incarnation that God appeared in history as the God of history. Again, divine transcendence must not be seen to engender estrangement. Through Jesus Christ, transcendence becomes a historical reality: "God is no longer merely 'above' history, he is himself 'in' it, in that he is also constantly 'in front of it' as its free, uncontrolled future."¹⁵ In the incarnation, God was revealed as the ground of history as well as the ground of being. In turn, divine transcendence becomes a temporal

15. *Ibid.*, 22–23.

category as well as an ontological category. From the perspective of a hominized world, then, God's radical transcendence no longer should be approached as an exclusively static claim about ontological otherness. Such a claim would fail to account for the ramifications of secularization: "God for us is not merely a God who is always the same, colorlessly and facelessly present as the numinously shimmering horizon of our being. . . . Transcendence itself has become an event. It does not simply stand above and beyond history, but is still to come in history."¹⁶ In the wake of secularization, Metz believed, to speak of divine transcendence is to make a temporal claim concerning the inexhaustible meaning of history.

Second, Metz warned that the "historical power" (*Geschichtsmächtigkeit*) of Christ is not like that of any other single historical factor, nor is Christ to be understood as simply the greatest or most significant factor within history. The Word of creation and salvation is not one among many finite beings in the world, acting in history as creatures act in history. The Word "does not merely reign *over* history, by appearing in it (beside other historical phenomena) and setting up a universal kingdom in it (*beside* other 'kingdoms'), but he reigns within it by historically giving it its basis."¹⁷ The historical power of Jesus Christ is that which founds the possibility of history. Christ, it can be said, is the very beginning of history. It is the incarnation that sets the world free to be the world as history rather than nature. The incarnation is not merely a "principle" that is *applied* subsequently *within* history (to particular phenomena), but the inner principle of history itself; its coordinating point, its final ground . . . its 'fulfillment,' its absolute concretion, in which alone what is earlier and what is later in time become genuine history."¹⁸ Undoubtedly, the incarnation is a historical event. But

16. *Ibid.*, 22.

17. *Ibid.*, 23. See also "Die 'Stunde' Christi," 5.

theologically construed, and more germane to Metz's early position, the incarnation constitutes the transcendental structure of history itself; Jesus Christ is the condition for the possibility of authentic history and human freedom.

Finally, it is important to emphasize for our purposes, and to understand properly what Metz was seeking to accomplish at this early stage in his writing, that the emergence of the modern hominized understanding of the world was not dependent upon the *idea* of the incarnation. Metz's secularization thesis is not his attempt at a history of ideas, nor is secularization merely the result of church teachings. Rather, Metz was searching for a way to speak of history as having been eschatologically determined by the power of the incarnate Son of God.¹⁹ History in the perspective of the incarnation has a unique christological dynamic and inner teleology in which a Christic transcendental subject is persistently coming to be in history through the very process of secularization: "The 'spirit' of Christianity is permanently embedded in the 'flesh' of world history and must maintain and prove itself in the irreversible course of the latter."²⁰ Secularization, as we have seen, is the process by which the incarnation continues to be made historically effective. Secularization is historical progress theologically understood; it is a "historically irreversible process" transcendently determined by the Christ.²¹ The incarnation "reveals the world not only in its general historicity, but above all in its *eschatological character*. In an historical movement forward that [the world] cannot itself know[,] it has to attain an end that has already been promised to it. It must itself become what it already is through the deed of Jesus Christ."²² Secularization, it can

18. *TW*, 23n13.

19. See, for example, "Die 'Stunde' Christi," 10, and *TW*, 23n13.

20. *TW*, 16.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*, 25.

therefore be said, is an eschatological event in that through it, history progressively becomes what it already is in the incarnation.

Thus, by Metz's engaging secularization from the perspective of creation and the incarnation, his earliest theological understanding of history came to support what may be described as a transcendental-linear metaphysics of history, in which the future is determined by and deducible from the beginning.²³ This understanding of history in turn established an eschatological vision of history in which what is hoped for stands in direct continuity with that which has already been realized.²⁴ Continuity is the mark of an eschatologically charged history. The future is transcendently determined by the past. Nothing "wholly new" is revealed in history, according to Metz, for everything is drawn from the incarnation of Christ: "As it moves forward, the world passes ever more deeply into its historical origin and places itself more and more seriously beneath the star and the law of its beginning, which is: acceptance by God in Jesus Christ."²⁵ The process of secularization, then, is the gradual realization in history of that which has been realized already in Christ. It was for this reason that when Metz wrote of the historically *neues* during this early period of his career, he often found it necessary to put quotation marks around the word in order to restrict what was meant by the term.²⁶ And when that was not the case, he was sure to qualify the term carefully. World history, he averred, "no longer reveals anything of a radically new nature, but draws everything from what

23. See Francis Fiorenza, "The Thought of J. B. Metz," *Philosophy Today* 10, no. 4 (1966): 250.

24. Though Metz's understanding of the eschatological structure of history would soon evolve, we should note that his position during this period largely paralleled the position being developed by his mentor, Karl Rahner, during this period. See, for example, Rahner, "The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions," in *Theological Investigations* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 4:326–46. For a helpful study of Rahner's eschatology, see Peter Phan, *Eternity in Time: A Study of Karl Rahner's Eschatology* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1988).

25. *TW*, 33.

26. See, for example, *Zur Theologie der Welt*, 14.

is of Christ.”²⁷ The modern process of secularization is a historically “new” happening, but its historical realization is made possible and determined by the *Geschichtsmächtigkeit* of the incarnation.

In light of this way in which Metz accounted for the eschatological character of history during this early stage in his career, he was careful to denounce a theological understanding of history that betrayed an unfettered world-optimism or an uncritical belief in inevitable progress. World history is intrinsically coextensive with the history of salvation, but the two cannot be identified: “We cannot and must not simply *identify* the actual modern process of secularization with the secularity of the world that Christ made possible and intended.”²⁸ Metz engaged and affirmed secularization as a theologically positive process fundamentally Christian in character. But it was precisely in light of its Christian character that he simultaneously attended to the persistent ambiguity of secularization, an ambiguity he found christologically signified in the cross. The cross uniquely reveals both God’s definitive acceptance of the world and the world’s ongoing rejection of that acceptance mistakenly received as an attack on human autonomy and freedom. The cross reminds the Christian that the course of secularization within history must be approached judiciously, for God’s acceptance of the world provokes the world’s free protestation even as that acceptance establishes the condition for the possibility of the world’s autonomy.

The historical freedom established in the incarnation, then, can be set against God’s gift of freedom. In the essay from 1962 already considered, Metz warned, “The secular world of modern times will always appear also as contradicting, protesting, shutting itself off secularistically from its origins.”²⁹ In the essay published in 1964,

27. *TW*, 33.

28. *Ibid.*, 40–41.

29. *Ibid.*, 40.

he developed this warning even further. The hominization of the modern world, he insisted, offers no guarantee of genuine humanization, the historical flourishing of human freedom. In fact, this modern process introduces a unique danger into human history: “[N]ot only the world as nature but also man himself threatens more and more to become ‘manipulatable.’ Not only is he, as subject, in charge of the hominization process, but he is more and more in danger of himself being degraded to the object of all this planning.”³⁰ At great human cost, the very freedom gained with the rise of secularization can break down in its aftermath. Significantly, at the time, Metz resisted attributing this danger to the structure of the modern world as such. Indeed, he insisted that only by accepting this historical development can men and women overcome this danger and realize genuine humanization.³¹ We will look closely at Metz’s reevaluation of this position in chapter 5 of this study. Nonetheless, his resistance to an uncritical belief in historical progress, and his recognition of the dangers that accompany construing history accordingly, was already clearly evident.

It has been noted elsewhere, however, that even having attended to the ambiguous and even dangerous character of secularization, Metz’s presentation of this process as an ongoing advent of the incarnation left Christianity poorly positioned to address the failings and limitations of the modern world.³² By offering a transcendental analysis of history, he attempted to identify the theological origins that determine the historical realization of secularization. As a result, the progressive optimism of modern society was theologically

30. *Ibid.*, 74. It is likely that here Metz is drawing on Max Weber’s influential concept of instrumental rationality (*Zweckrationalität*), though Weber is not cited and Metz does not use the term. As we will see in chapters 5 and 6, this concept will receive an increasingly central role in his evolving analysis of the modern situation.

31. *Ibid.*, 76.

32. See Rebecca S. Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering: An Interpretation of Liberation and Political Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986), 67.

legitimated in advance and, thus, only subsequently could be evaluated and called into question. Metz's apologetic affirmation of the inner connection between secularization and the Christian faith came at a high price. Within his transcendental-linear theology of history, the transhistorical identification of the incarnation and secularization presumed an essential continuity that, though ambiguous, risked compromising the Christian voice as it engages secular culture. Christianity, inadvertently for sure, had taken its place among the rear guard. Whatever the consequences of modern mores, Metz's position made it difficult to direct any structural or systemic criticism against the ongoing historical process itself, leaving Christianity to identify mere abuses and misapplications.

As his project continued to develop, Metz would reevaluate the manner in which he linked Christianity and modernity with precisely this concern in view. This will be clear in what follows. It is important to remember, however, that during this period (1962–64) Metz was concerned primarily with reestablishing the viability of Christianity in a new historical context. He wanted to locate a vantage point from which to affirm the ongoing significance and validity of Christianity for those who experienced the process of secularization as a threat to their faith, not a vantage point from which to criticize that process. As we have just seen, Metz surely recognized the dangers that accompanied the historical developments of the modern world.³³ Nonetheless, secularization had unleashed in world history the very essence of Christianity, and the prospects of modernity certainly appeared promising. To that point, Metz argued

33. Though his concerns remained largely underdeveloped, in *Christliche Anthropozentrik* Metz also had warned that care must be given not to detach the process of hominization from its Christian origins lest the freedom achieved with the rise of modernity slip away (128). As we will see in chapter 5, these concerns will take center stage in his later work. At this time, however, his primary interest was with antimodern "Christian philosophies" that set the Christian tradition over against modern philosophical thought construed as alien and incompatible with the faith, precisely the theological presumption underwriting a zero-sum theory of secularization.

that in “terms of the theology of history,” the power of evil in the world was “already on the decline.” The “‘prince of this world’ is already ‘cast out,’” because of God’s definitive acceptance of the world in Jesus Christ.³⁴ It is just such a claim, coming less than twenty years after the atrocities of World War II, that may reveal most clearly Metz’s understanding of the eschatological character of history at this early stage in his career. He approached history from the perspective of the incarnation and explicitly warned against an uncritical and simply optimistic view of historical progress by attending to the distortion of freedom signified by the cross. Nonetheless, within his transcendental-linear theology of history, secularization was positioned as a “historically irreversible process”; historical progress is transcendently determined as the “spirit” of Christianity irreversibly proves itself in the “flesh” of world history.

The Political Turn to a Utopic Understanding of History and the Practical Character of Hope

The Provocation of Ernst Bloch: The Possibility of the New in History

In 1963, the same year he received an appointment to the University of Münster as professor of fundamental theology, Metz participated in the conference at which he delivered “The Future of Faith in a Hominized World.” Notably, the organizing theme for this conference, held in Weingarten, West Germany, was “The Future of Man.” It was there that Metz met for the first time Ernst Bloch, a left-wing revisionary Marxist whose unique and revolutionary work on the philosophy of hope Metz admittedly knew very little about.³⁵

34. *TW*, 25n21.

35. See Schuster and Boschert-Kimmig, *Hope against Hope*, 21–22.