

## CREATION &amp; ESCHATOLOGY

Topic:	Mentor and Student, Rahner and Metz: Two Views on Eschatology Analyzed, the Prophetic and the Apocalyptic
Convener & Moderator:	Eugene Finnegan, Calumet College of St. Joseph
Presenters:	Peter Joseph Fritz, University of Notre Dame Steven Rodenborn, St. Edward's University

The two presenters gave wonderful presentations, followed by spirited questions and discussions about Karl Rahner and his pupil, Johann Baptist Metz, on the subject of eschatology.

Peter Joseph Fritz's paper was entitled "'I am, of course, no prophet,' Rahner's Modest Eschatological Remark." In the face of many statements about the future, Rahner claimed to be more modest, against false American fundamentalist apocalyptic views that seem to close out against Mystery. With the *docta ignorantia futuri*, Rahner makes a distinction between eschatology (present to the future) and apocalyptic (future to the present) thought. Does the future dominate the present? He particularly denounces a false apocalyptic stance, but is a proponent of true apocalyptic thought, which he calls eschatology.

Metz, the student, also insists on a certain ignorance of the future. However, Metz believes that humans cannot know the future. In fact, Metz falls under the critique that he had of Rahner. "Metz offers apocalyptic as a corrective discourse and a framework for praxis." The apocalyptic view functions as an interruption. In the face of many statements about the future, Rahner claimed to be more modest, *in a way that could be directed* against false American fundamentalist apocalyptic views that seem to close out against Mystery.

"Prophetic praxis is a Catholic alternative to the conservatism implicated in American apocalyptic *gnosis* of the future." Prophecy with full knowledge fails to be genuine. Christianity is not utopian. In his dialogue with Marxism, Rahner felt that history will endure and be radically transformed. However, Christians have hope in the future. "Prophetic commitments rise and fall with eschatological modesty." History is open because God is the Lord of history.

Steven Rodenborn's paper, "A Negative Theology of Creation within an Apocalyptic Framework" raises the following questions: How do world history and salvation history fit together? What happens to creation in the wake of apocalyptic eschatology? Based on the work of Edward Schillebeeckx on human liberation and history of salvation, the problem of Metz and creation poses a tension. The early Schillebeeckx thought that apocalypticism severed the future from the past and the present. The later Schillebeeckx allowed that apocalyptic salvation comes from God interrupting history. He warned against creation withering away into a pure eschatology.

Metz's own thought on this subject developed, as he tried to construct a political theology. "We are workers building this future, and not just interpreters of this future." Like *Lumen Gentium*, we are co-workers with God. In this earlier period,

Metz preferred the *theologia negativa* of the future that means that we are not satisfied with the present. Later, he emphasized not only a hope in the promises of a surprising God who exceeds what already exists and what humans themselves seek to bring into existence, but also a hope in the promise that God can interrupt history.

Metz turned to the apocalyptic with our limited human nature and the imminent Divine interruption, as we truly recognize the suffering and the vanquished. We have to avoid a soft eschatology that expects evolutionary logic to work out. We too often see history as pure progress. Salvation history and world history are related in an indestructible hope for past sufferings.

Then there is the question of suffering. Is there too much guilt management? “What is God waiting for?” “An apocalyptic theology of history remembers suffering and allows it to exist with the expectation that an end is coming soon.” We need to act in solidarity and put on the suffering Christ, we await the imminent expectation of God’s saving interruption. We do not stop thinking about the creator.

Is there discontinuity? Do we try to superficially placate history’s suffering people? Too often Christianity favors those who already have things. God’s creative power theologically maintains Christian hope. History by itself is tumultuous and unmanageable. We need to discover “a more reliable understanding about the proximity and distance of God, about God’s transcendence and God’s indwelling, about the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’ of God’s salvation—the pairs in each case not somehow pasted together but rather the one in the other and as the other.”

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