

A Eucharistic Theology of the Immigrant in JB Metz's *Memoria Passionis*

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I. Introduction and Context

In the Bull of Indiction *Spes non Confundit*, Pope Francis turns the Church's attention to the needs of the immigrants, who sometimes lives in hopelessness of the moment and uncertain future. He writes, "Signs of hope should...be present for *migrants* who leave their homelands behind in search of a better life for themselves.... Their expectations must not be frustrated by prejudice and rejection."¹ While the Holy Father was addressing the universal Church, one can argue that the immigration crisis in this country was always on his mind. In the wake of presidential proclamations in relation to mass deportations, Pope Francis wrote to the US bishops: "The rightly formed conscience cannot fail to make a critical judgment and express its disagreement with any measure that tacitly or explicitly identifies the illegal status of some migrants with criminality. [Even though] a nation has a right to defend itself, ...the act of deporting people...damages the dignity of many...and places them in a state of particular vulnerability and defenselessness."² As an immigrant myself, I have always

¹ Francis, *Spes non Confundit* [Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025], The Holy See, May 9, 2024, sec 13, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/bulls/documents/20240509_spes-non-confundit_bolla-giubileo2025.html

² Francis, *Letter of Holy Father Francis to the Bishops of the United States of America*, The Holy See, February 10, 2025, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2025/documents/20250210-lettera-vescovi-usa.html>.

grappled with what it means to be Catholic, and specifically for the fellow immigrants that I work with in my role as a priest in these fractured times, many of whom have come here in a bid to seek better lives for themselves and their families.

In my search for answers, I have wondered whether the Church, particularly in its liturgical life and Eucharistic theology, can provide a language for speaking about the hopelessness of many immigrants in a way that, on one hand recognizes this hopelessness and thus provides some hope, and on the other hand invites Catholics, who are the partakers of the Church's sacramental life, to see their role in providing this hope to their immigrant brothers and sisters around them. To be clear, the Church has in many ways provided a language for this hope for the immigrant, especially through its "Catholic Social Teaching," with its emphasis on the life and dignity of the human person and solidarity. In a bid to seek solidarity among all peoples, the Church has at times turned to Eucharistic theology to this end. In the wake of the liturgical movement of the twentieth century in the United States, the liturgical pioneers who linked the Eucharist to social justice turned to the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ as a framework for that nexus. Keith Pecklers notes that for Virgil Michel (a major pioneer in the US liturgical movement), the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ meant that "a community transformed in worship could ultimately be instrumental in the transformation of society.... Liturgy became for Michel the means of countering secularism and individualism of the modern age."³ Pecklers adds: "Liturgy was the solution to individualism, capable of opening the eyes of American worshipers to the possibilities of a truly Christian culture...a culture which would embody the principles of the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ."⁴ This was the model that, complemented by Catholic Social

³ Keith F. Pecklers, *The Unread Vision: The Liturgical Movement in the United States of America: 1926-1955* (The Liturgical Press, 1998), 127-129.

⁴ Pecklers, *The Unread Vision*, 129.

Teaching, would challenge the secular models of American society and enable the Church to take its rightful position in the secular space instead of the dichotomy that existed.⁵

In addition to underpinning the Eucharist in the doctrine of the Mystical Body, the Church has sometimes directly used the language of the human dignity of all persons in addressing the plight of the immigrant. From their 2025 plenary assembly in Baltimore, the US bishops taught: “Catholic teaching exhorts nations to recognize the fundamental dignity of all persons, including immigrants. We bishops advocate for a meaningful reform of our nation’s immigration laws and procedures. Human dignity and national security are not in conflict. Both are possible if people of good will work together.”⁶ Other theologians such as Kristin Heyer and Daniel Groody have also provided this hope for the immigrant.

This project takes on a different trajectory. This paper argues that there is a new route, a framework to argue for the nexus between the Eucharist and the immigrant. I find in Johann Baptist Metz’s theology of *Memoria Passionis* (dangerous memory) a paradigm rooted in the Eucharist that advances the kingdom of justice for those who suffer in general and the suffering immigrant in particular. In our present moment in the face of othering the immigrant, Metz’s *Memoria Passionis* provides a language of hope and solidarity for the immigrant community as the suffering other.

Reimagining the thought of Johann Baptist Metz, a German Catholic priest and political theologian, against this hopelessness of the immigrant, I recognize that our current context is different from his twentieth century Germany. I nonetheless find his turn to the subject as the suffering other appealing, since it provides a language that Metz called “the theodicy question.... That the meaning of human language is rooted in [a] cry.”⁷ Metz’s

⁵ Pecklers, *The Unread Vision*, 129.

⁶ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “US Bishops Issue a ‘Special Message’ on Immigration from Plenary Assembly in Baltimore,” November 12, 2025, <https://www.usccb.org/news/2025/us-bishops-issue-special-message-immigration-plenary-assembly-baltimore>.

⁷ Johann Baptist Metz, *A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity*, trans. J. Matthew Ashley (Paulist Press, 1998), 5.

words at the sight of the loss of his childhood friends during the Second World War are insightful: “What would happen if one took this sort of remembrance not to the psychologist but into the Church? And if one did not allow oneself to be talked out of such unreconciled memories even by theology but rather wanted to have faith with them and, with them, speak about God?”⁸ I do not presume any connection between Metz’s loss of childhood friends and the immigration crisis in this country. I, however, argue that this biographical information of Metz’s loss informed his way of looking at those who suffer in the world, such as the immigrants in my case, and that his own biographical sketch informed his language about God. The death of Metz’s childhood friends towards the end of the Second World War would lead him to imagine a theology of suffering not just for the dead but also those who suffer due to humanity’s inhumanity. Like his childhood friends whose dreams were cut short, many immigrants die daily crossing the borders in their bid to “protect” life for themselves and their family members.

It is humanity’s tendency to assert power and control over the other with total disregard to respect for the dignity of the other that breeds suffering and even death. It was this human dominance during the Second World War that swept away the lives of Metz’s friends. It is human dominance and power control that disregards the dignity of the immigrants at the point of locking innocent kids in cages. One can easily trace, then, the connection between Metz’s childhood memories and his memories of the suffering in the base communities of Latin America as stories of human suffering in the world. His reflection of the experience with liberation theologians is worth noting here: “During my encounters in Latin America...the work that my friends and colleagues are doing in base communities struck me at its most powerful and most pioneering, work that begins...‘wholly from below,’ in that place where all rhetoric...breaks down...where speechless suffering prohibits one

⁸ Metz, *A Passion for God*, 2.

from speaking and where only being-amidst...counts.”⁹ Of this suffering in Latin America and the death of his friends, Metz formulates suffering as a single theological category and a way of addressing God: “*the memoria passionis*, the remembrance of the suffering of others as a basic category of Christian discourse about God. This entails the theodicy question.... There are for me questions that may be directed back at God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Jesus.... Why, God, suffering? Why have you made no provision for evil?”¹⁰ For Metz then, following Christ is action and is a praxis of solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. He sees the suffering of those in Latin America and the “wordless cry” of his childhood friends as a wakeup call to act now for the future of others. He wrote: “I have met in the face of communities of the Third World...in whose struggle, in whose sorrow, and in whose courage, I can identify the symbols of the Kingdom.... Through my experience of these persons and these communities I can relate the pictures and parables about the kingdom of God finally also to myself.”¹¹

What if our sacramental life and especially the Eucharist could provide us with this language for the immigrants and speak about God from their own fears? The question of suffering for Metz is framed through his theological category of memory as *memoria passionis et resurrectionis* (the memory of the passion and resurrection rooted in Christ, as this project will show). This is Metz’s anamnestic theology, rooted in the theology of the Eucharist that I seek to show as relevant for enlightening the immigration crisis in the United States.

At the heart of this project, therefore, I argue that Metz’s *memoria passionis* is a helpful Eucharistic framework for articulating a theology of hope for the immigrant. In other

⁹ Ekkehard Schuster and Reinhold Boschert-Kimming, *Hope Against Hope: Johann Baptist Metz and Elie Wiesel Speak Out on the Holocaust* (Paulist Press, 1999), 10.

¹⁰ Metz, *A Passion for God*, 5.

¹¹ Bruce T. Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory: Political and Liturgical Theology in Dialogue* (Liturgical Press, 2000), 48.

words, a eucharistic theology, understood through the lens of *memoria passionis*, contributes to a theology and spirituality of hope for the immigrant. My hope for this project is therefore Metz's hope for those who suffer in this world: an eschatological hope that defines a future in which the suffering of others is taken up in the crucified and resurrected Christ by Christian message of solidarity.

While this project may have something to offer to a growing scholarship in the theology of immigration, the overall goal will be an articulation of a Eucharistic theology through the lens of *memoria passionis* that attends to the immigrant in solidaristic hope. In so doing, the overall picture of this project will emerge as a spiritual stance rather than a distinct theology of immigration. In any case, this spiritual stance can only shine, I argue, through an articulation of a theology of the Eucharist as *Memoria Passionis*, a lens that seeks to attend to the suffering immigrants in the world.

This paper will unfold in three major moves. First, I will briefly present a biographical sketch of Johann Baptist Metz and thus provide the historical-intellectual context from which his political theology emerged. I will highlight some key elements emerging from his historical-intellectual milieu that undergirded his theological development as *memoria passionis*. Second, I will provide a theological understanding of *memoria passionis*, a category that highlights Metz's theology especially with regard to the suffering in this world. I will also show how the concept of *memoria passionis* is rooted in the Eucharist. I will demonstrate how Metz turned to the category of narrative as a vehicle for *memoria passionis* and how narratives are central to understanding the Eucharist as *memoria passionis*. Third, I will explain how the vision of the Eucharist as *memoria passionis* provides a language of hope for the immigrant. In other words, this section will underscore the paper's thesis as stated above. It will show how Eucharistic theology, understood through the lens of *memoria passionis* contributes to a theology and a spirituality of the immigrant: a way of being in the

world as eucharistic people that attends to the immigrant in their suffering. This centerpiece of my paper will help articulate the vision that the Eucharist, understood as *memoria passionis*, provides a theological and pastoral response for our time. Finally, to demonstrate the link between the Eucharist and a response to the immigrant, I will turn to Metz's category of solidarity and his spiritual notion of "mysticism of open eyes."

II. Johann Baptist Metz: A Biographical Sketch

In their book, *Hope Against Hope: Johann Baptist Metz and Elie Wiesel Speak Out on the Holocaust*, Ekkehard Schuster and Reinhold Boschert-Kimming provide a wonderful biographical sketch that shows the importance of place in shaping one's faith and how it is practiced. Born in 1928 in Auerbach of Bavaria, Metz emphasized his birthplace and the cultural milieu in which he was born: "you come from far away when you come from there.... For Johann Metz, it is crucial to pay attention to the times and places where one lives, believes, and sometimes also does theology."¹² He was born at a time when religion was transitioning into modernity. While his milieu was "a virtually seamless religiosity," these times were characterized by the challenges of modernity and the Enlightenment that would later shape how his theology developed.¹³

Metz's childhood was the period of the Third Reich. It was at this time that he was drafted into the military at the age of sixteen.¹⁴ Of this experience, Metz wrote: "Toward the end of the Second World War when I was sixteen years old, I was taken out of school and forced into the army.... One evening the...commander sent me with a message to battalion headquarters.... [A]nd when I returned...I found only the dead, nothing but the dead...."¹⁵ This event became for Metz a turning point in his life. The death of his childhood friends,

¹² Schuster and Boschert-Kimming, *Hope Against Hope*, 3.

¹³ Schuster and Boschert-Kimming, *Hope Against Hope*, 3.

¹⁴ Schuster and Boschert-Kimming, *Hope Against Hope*, 4.

¹⁵ Metz, *A Passion for God*, 1.

drafted in the army together with him, became for him “a wordless cry.”¹⁶ He writes of this childhood memory that shines throughout his life and theology: “A fissure had opened in my powerful Bavarian-Catholic socialization, with its impregnable confidence.”¹⁷

To be clear, this childhood memory becomes crucial for his turn to the suffering subject in the world. This defining moment led him to question not only God, but how to speak about God in the face of evil. Here, he located his theological category of memory as he himself wrote: “What would later come to be called political theology has its roots in this speaking about God within the *conversio ad passionem*. Whoever talks about God in Jesus’ sense will always take into account...[those] who are wounded by the misfortune of others.”¹⁸ But for Metz this memory does not stand alone in his concern for the suffering in the world. The millions of those who died in Auschwitz, this horror that bears the name of catastrophe, is another memory. It is this memory of the dead that led him to question the role of faith in the world if it becomes detached from concrete histories such as Auschwitz. For Metz, a theology and faith that is indifferent from the needs of the oppressed is no theology at all and neither is it faith.¹⁹

That decisive event in his life on that fateful night in the army led him to reflect on what would seem to be the beginning of his commitment to the Church for the rest of his life: “What would happen if one took this sort of remembrance not to the psychologist but into the church? [A]nd if one did not allow oneself to be talked out of such unreconciled memories even by theology but rather wanted to have faith with them and, with them, speak about God?”²⁰ Metz was ordained a priest in 1953.²¹

¹⁶ Metz, *A Passion for God*, 2.

¹⁷ Metz, *A Passion for God*, 2.

¹⁸ Metz, *A Passion for God*, 2.

¹⁹ Schuster and Boschert-Kimming, *Hope Against Hope*, 4-5.

²⁰ Metz, *A Passion for God*, 2.

²¹ J. Matthew Ashley, *Interruptions: Mysticism, Politics, and Theology in the Work of Johann Baptist Metz* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 27.

J. Matthew Ashley in his introduction to *Faith in History* shares two other principal elements that guided Metz's political theology: The Second Vatican Council and Metz's dialogue with Marxism. He writes, "In 1963 Metz accepted a chair in fundamental theology at the University of Münster, where he would remain for the next thirty years.... The Second Vatican Council was under way.... In addition, the 1960s were already proving to be a turbulent decade socially and politically...."²² Modernity and the Enlightenment had already permeated German life and the Church was no exception. The Second Vatican Council aimed at renegotiating the Church's relationship with the Enlightenment and its priority to the ideas of freedom, autonomy, tolerance, as well as the Church's position in an age of globalization as no longer a European Church.²³ Thanks to the Second Vatican Council, the Church's interest in the so-called Third-World countries, for example, would be a major impulse for Metz to reimagine political theology. Metz wrote: "During my stay in the United States it became ever clearer to me that there is a growing conflict of cultures...within Catholicism...in the so-called first world countries.... Yet for me the new theological challenge became that of drawing in the non-western world, the so-called third world."²⁴ He would later insist that his experiences with liberation theologians helped him appreciate "suffering and misery."²⁵

Metz's dialogue with Marxism was also crucial to his theology. The historical and theological category of memory came to Metz via his two conversation partners of the Frankfurt School: Hebert Marcuse and Walter Benjamin. As Ashley writes on the crucial role of memory: "memory-remembrance, or anamnesis... came to have an increasingly important part to play as a power which could resist modernity's attempt to... rewrite history of progress

²² J. Matthew Ashley, introduction to *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, by Johan Baptist Metz, trans. J. Matthew Ashley, (The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2007), 9.

²³ Ashley, introduction to Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 9-10.

²⁴ Metz, *A Passion for God*, 4.

²⁵ Metz, *A Passion for God*, 4.

in which the vanquished and forgotten are finally deprived even of their power to disturb our present self-satisfaction.”²⁶ Ashley writes that it was Herbert Marcuse that saw the role of memory in interrupting the logic of modern progress. Ashley quotes Marcuse to this end: “Remembrance of the past may give rise to dangerous insights, and the established society seems to be apprehensive of the subversive contents of memory.”²⁷ It was this insight, Ashley notes, that Metz grasped and that shaped his theology.²⁸

In a nutshell, Metz’s memory of the loss of his friends perdured in his theology and the category of memory for his theology was formed for the most part from this event. Auschwitz and the death of the Jews also became one of his focal points and “the key historical ‘interruption’ to his own thought.”²⁹ As Schuster and Boschert-Kimmig pointed out: “The murder of millions and the ineradicable horror it engenders became for Metz the center of his theological thinking.”³⁰ It is clear to me that these histories are human histories that troubled Metz. His time in the United States and the encounter with Liberation theologians and the suffering of those in the so-called Third World countries became increasingly part of his theological project. Metz’s concern was a genuine concern for the suffering—not only in the past but even in the present moment. While his concerns of the time may differ with the current immigration crisis at the moment, his theology cuts across by shedding light on the atrocities of the reckless disregard of the human person as a subject in history for the sake of political and economical calculations that become exclusivist ideologies of the few. This project draws on how Metz’s historical account and memory led him to turn to a theological category of *memoria passionis*. The central category of *memoria passionis*, to which I now turn, permeates Metz’s thought.

²⁶ Ashley, *Interruptions*, 116.

²⁷ Ashley, *Interruptions*, 116.

²⁸ Ashley, *Interruptions*, 117.

²⁹ Ashley, *Interruptions*, 32.

³⁰ Schuster and Boschert-Kimming, *Hope Against Hope*, 4.

III. Metz's *Memoria Passionis* and the Link to Eucharistic Theology

I have emphasized above that memories play an important role in Metz's theology and the turn to theology of the suffering. Ashley wrote that Metz's memories "enkindled [his] thought, even driving his search for the very categories in anthropology (memory and dangerous memory)...that could do justice to the importance of the specific memories."³¹ In this section of the paper, I will attempt to lay out the conceptual framework that undergirds Metz's political theology as *memoria passionis*. As I will soon demonstrate, while Metz is aware that the full message of Christian discipleship is anchored in *memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis Jesu Christi*, dangerous memory (*memoria passionis*) evokes the dangerous subversive form Metz's theology calls for. Metz deliberately foregrounds *passionis* because his theological concern is the suffering of victims and the challenge that their memory poses to triumphant narratives of history.

Moreover, this section will present the ways in which Metz presents *memoria passionis* as anchored in the memory of Jesus, *memoria Jesu* and thus in the Eucharist, understood as the sacramental memory of Christ. To be clear, I must mention from the outset that Metz himself does not develop a Eucharistic theology in his work. Indeed, theologians such as Bruce Morrill have turned to other liturgical sources in developing a eucharistic theology in Metz's thought. In so doing, Metz's work has continued to be treated as political theology and best at that. I, however, argue that while Metz may not have committed himself to developing a robust Eucharistic theology, the sources of his thought are sufficient in themselves and warrant a great addition in imagining a fruitful Eucharistic theology that helps attend to the immigrant.

³¹ Ashley, *Interruptions*, 34.

Metz's theology is rooted in part in his biography. His "historiographical practice," to borrow Michel de Certeau's expression, sheds light on his theological development.

Consider, for example, his well known autobiographical piece from his childhood that reads in part:

I saw only the lifeless faces of my comrades, those same comrades with whom I had met the day before shared my childhood fears and my youthful laughter. I remember nothing but a soundless cry. Over and over again just this silent cry! And up until today I see myself as such. Behind this memory all my childhood dreams vanished.³²

Metz considers this memory very crucial to his theology and the role of memory in it. He wrote: "This biographical background shines through all my theological work, even to this day. In it, for example, the category of memory plays a central role."³³ This story alongside his interest in the stories surrounding Auschwitz highlight his consideration that no theology, and indeed no faith can proceed in indifference to the suffering in the world. His visit with the base communities of the Third World and his encounter with liberation theologians helped him definitively shape his turn to suffering as a real historical category that informed his doctrine and praxis.³⁴

For Metz, his memories would find a perfect paradigm in Jesus Christ. He defines a dangerous memory as the following: that in the life of Jesus, we find a man who leaves a memory that can be rightly called a dangerous memory. It is dangerous for what it revealed and achieved for humanity and for what it commits Jesus' followers to be and to do in God's world. This "*memoria passionis, mortis, et resurrectionis Jesu Christi*" becomes the testimony for the Church in the world. The Church becomes the bearer of a dangerous testimony that takes on the public form, "the remembered freedom of Jesus into contemporary society, its forms of consciousness and its life praxis."³⁵ I, therefore, argue here

³² Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory*, 46.

³³ Metz, *A Passion for God*, 2.

³⁴ Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory*, 47-48.

³⁵ Metz, *Faith and History*, 88-89.

that Metz's understanding of the Church as the bearer of this memory is perfectly lived out in the Church at her most public act of worship, the liturgy of the Mass. At Mass, the people of God gather as "the public memory of Jesus: the Church remembers an indebted freedom."³⁶ Metz's understanding of the Church as the bearer of this memory is, therefore, fully expressed in the liturgy of the Mass. Yet, this public worship must flow into the public witness in the world. In an interview in reference to the dangerous memory to which Auschwitz commits the Church, Metz seemed to connect this memory of Christ to the Eucharist and our solidaristic daily life. He said: "The way we deal with Auschwitz in our church today is a test, a sign, of whether we are nurturing the self-assertion of traditionalism, or more disturbing traditions; whether we celebrate anamnesis only critically in the Eucharist, or whether we also develop an anamnestic culture in our everyday life."³⁷ In a sense, Metz is aware of how this theological category bears on the Church's sacramental life even as he advocates for something more: Indeed, this public worship of anamnestic liturgy must flow into the public witness in the world. As Metz writes, "this remembering does not dispense us from responsibility for the history of freedom; rather it introduces us into it."³⁸

Bruce Morrill notes that Metz came to identify Dangerous Memory in "the eucharistic tradition of memorial or remembrance, formulaically summarized in the anamnesis section of the Eucharistic Prayer."³⁹ Metz's category of memory is rooted in "the memory of Jesus, the narrative of whose passion, death and resurrection reveals God's identification with, and a promise of redemption for all victims of humanity's inhumanity."⁴⁰ This is what the Eucharist prolongs here on earth. The notion of *imitatio Christi* becomes important for Metz. *Imitatio Christi* for Metz is what Katharina Merian provides us: "[T]he Christian faith is about

³⁶ Metz, *Faith in History*, 89.

³⁷ Schuster and Boschert-Kimming, *Hope Against Hope*, 38.

³⁸ Metz, *Faith in History*, 89.

³⁹ Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory*, 140.

⁴⁰ Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory*, 140.

remembering Jesus Christ, what he did, and what he left behind.”⁴¹ Quoting Metz directly, Merian goes on: “Christian faith is thus understood...as the practice in which the human being remembers promises made and a hope lived in view of these promises and binds itself to these memories in a way that determines its life. [...] In faith, Christians carry out the *memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis Jesu Christi*....”⁴² Morrill adds that: “This *imitatio*..., is at once dangerous both in the conversion it requires of its practitioners, away from a privatized view of salvation, and in the threat it poses to the conventional wisdom of society.”⁴³ Jesus’ life and message offers the one authentic response to suffering which ushers in a history of human freedom.⁴⁴ Followers of Christ take what Jesus did and said seriously and they make his lifestyle, theirs in hope of a future freedom for all.

Metz’s history of freedom is eschatological in nature. To be clear, Metz’s eschatology is not the traditional notion of eschatology as the end of times unrelated to the present moment. Instead, it is a future that must be shaped by what one does to attend to the needs of the suffering in this world. Here is a future promise of human freedom shaped by our subversive role in the world. For Metz, eschatology is not a future unrelated to the present moment in which God is already present and at work. For Metz, this freedom interrupts any political ideology and structures: “In this sense it is an emancipatory remembering that liberates us from every divinization or absolutization of cosmic and political powers. In its light all political orders appear as orders for freedom.”⁴⁵

Metz understood that eschatology is a nexus between parousia (Jesus’ second coming) and discipleship. Metz holds that the Christian hope for the future reign of God shapes and demands discipleship in the present. He wrote: “Following Christ is not something that can

⁴¹ Katharina Merian, *Remembering Marielle Franco from a Theological perspective, New Approaches* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 45.

⁴² Merian, *Remembering Marielle Franco from a Theological perspective*, 46.

⁴³ Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory*, 140.

⁴⁴ Ashley, introduction to Metz, *Faith in History*, 7.

⁴⁵ Metz, *Faith in History*, 90.

be lived out without the idea of the parousia, without looking forward to the second coming.... What corresponds to following Christ is an existence based absolutely on hope: a life with an apocalyptic goad.”⁴⁶ For Metz, following Christ is action and is a praxis of solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, a point to which I must return. This is crucial since the parousia is imminent according to Metz. He sees the suffering of those in Latin America and the wordless cry of his childhood friends as a wakeup call to act now for the future of others. He sees the promise of this future in the gospel narratives, especially the story of final judgement as recorded in Matthew 25. Morrill recounts one of Metz’s memories that connects him to the future Kingdom of God: “I have met in the face of communities of the Third World...in whose struggle, in whose sorrow, and in whose courage, I can identify the symbols of the Kingdom.... Through my experience of these persons and these communities I can relate the pictures and parables about the kingdom of God finally also to myself.”⁴⁷ Here, Metz connects memory to the Christian narratives of the Bible. He connects suffering to the hope that is there for those who work for the kingdom. Morrill succinctly summarizes the connection between the memory of Christ and the memory of the suffering in this world: “Metz’s recognition of a dialectic in the eschatology of the New Testament resonates with the dialectic he recognizes in the *memoria Jesu Christi*, wherein one cannot remember either Jesus’s death or resurrection without having the other in mind.”⁴⁸

Metz’s thought of *memoria passionis* contributes to our present moment as a wake-up call that should confront our “neutrality” and “political innocence.”⁴⁹ Metz is clear in what he calls an eschatological memory that a faith that accounts for change in our world is one that is on the side of “the forgotten or repressed freedoms: the freedom to suffer another’s suffering

⁴⁶ Johannes B. Metz, *Followers of Christ: The Religious Life and the Church*, trans. Thomas Linton (Paulist Press, 1978), 75-76.

⁴⁷ Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory*, 48.

⁴⁸ Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory*, 49.

⁴⁹ Metz, *Faith in History*, 87-88.

and to heed the prophetic call of the stranger's suffering...."⁵⁰ Dangerous memory is Metz's mystical logic, a spirituality that interrupts an evolutionary world view characterized by scientific, technological advancements. For Metz, the notion of interruption means that our Christian view of the world, rooted in the passion of Christ, must alter the *status quo* that is at home with notions of human progress with total disregard to those who suffer in our world. For Metz, then, interruption is a *conversio ad passionem*, a conversion to the passion of Christ, the Christ of the cross, in whose decisive action on the cross already inaugurated a promised future of freedom. Dangerous memory then interrupts the notion that technological progress, economic progress that says everything can be made and everything can be replaced, a notion that depletes "people's openness to mystery."⁵¹ Dangerous memory is prayer. It is a mysticism that opens one's heart while handing over authority to those who suffer in this world. Metz wrote: "for me this authority [of those who suffer] is the only one in which the authority of...God is manifested in the world...."⁵² Morrill notes: "The concept of the dangerous memory enables Metz to perceive in the nagging and disruptive stories of human oppression and death more than a despairing criticism of the ideological deceptions that enshroud technocratic society."⁵³

This turn to the memory of the suffering was informed in part by the fact that the "evolutionary logic of modern society suppresses the senseless suffering inflicted upon people in the name of human progress."⁵⁴ Evolutionary logic of progress was ushered in by the logic of the Enlightenment and modernity that convinced humanity that technology and science will drive the desired human progress. For Metz, human atrocities such as Auschwitz teach us that authentic progress is not what technology can achieve, especially when such

⁵⁰ Metz, *Faith in History*, 90.

⁵¹ Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory*, 28.

⁵² Metz, *A Passion for God*, 4.

⁵³ Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory*, 32.

⁵⁴ Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory*, 29.

technology instrumentalizes the human person in the name of progress. Those whose human dignity is easily forgotten in the name of safeguarding political or economic interests should be interrupted by this anamnestic logic rooted in the passion of Christ.

One may ask, what vision is there for the followers of Christ in this Metz's framework of dangerous memory? For me, one reason why I was attracted to Metz's work was his category of dangerous memory that permeates his thought. In a world of historical catastrophes, a language such as the one Metz provides is crucial. One may argue that it seems experiences such as Metz's should inform one's conviction of this form of theology. Metz is not just speaking for the dead and those who suffer. He is aware that people will do theology differently depending on their experiences, but he does invite every follower of Christ to see Christ crucified as a paradigm for discipleship. Metz invites everyone to a spirituality of suffering in which the suffering in the world can confront us out of our comfort zones. In an interesting line, Metz notes that: "Catastrophes are reported on the radio in between pieces of music. The music plays on, like the 'passage of time' rendered audible, rolling over everything mercilessly, impossible to interrupt. 'When atrocities happen it's like when the rain falls. No one shouts 'stop it!' anymore'."⁵⁵ Metz uses this quote to bemoan the sense of indifference or lack of a mourning culture, especially in the so-called First World countries in the face of atrocities hidden in plain sight. This call to attend to human suffering in the world is key to understanding Metz's dangerous memory. I will return to how we are called to attend to the dangerous memories of our world in respect to the immigrant below. But first, I must attend to another of Metz's categories that he used as a vehicle for dangerous memories: Narratives.

In his book, *The First Thousand Years*, historian Robert Louis Wilken opens his massive survey with a quote attributed to the Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz: "What power

⁵⁵ Metz, *Faith in History*, 157.

preserves what once was, if memory does not last?”⁵⁶ To this point Wilken adds: “The past does not vanish at once; it dies slowly. But if remembered, the dead maintain their ground and live among us.”⁵⁷ In these opening lines, Wilken speaks of the role of historical memory which allows history to be told. Wilken’s book highlights what he calls “those events and persons that are...worthy of remembrance...”⁵⁸ We see in Metz a similar move that turns to personal events and persons that are worthy of remembrance. To do this, the category of narrative is crucial to him. If memory makes possible the remembrance of history, narrative makes memory speak. Narrative is memory in a story form. Story telling is an art that captures human imagination and allows “the dead [to] to maintain their ground and live among us” as Milosz wrote. This section about narrative is fascinating for me because in my African upbringing narratives were the ways in which our elders passed on the past to us.

In an interview, Metz was asked why he had “fought vigorously for an entirely different form of language: the recognition of the importance of narrative for humanity, for faith and theology.”⁵⁹ To which he responded: “Narrative and narrating are so important-that is, for our human identity and the formation of life-because of what a human being represents, what we ought to hold true about the human...and we should think about it only in a coalition between those who are alive and those who have died....”⁶⁰ For Metz, the past of others, especially in respect to their suffering and lost hopes, cannot be limited to mere historical accounts of what happened. Narration as a form of literature can arouse the “reserves of wisdom”⁶¹ that cannot be told in plain language. In other words, stories motivate and cultivate what is core to humanity’s existence. Stories vividly make the past alive and

⁵⁶ Robert Louis Wilken, *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity* (Yale University Press, 2012), 1.

⁵⁷ Wilken, *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity* (Yale University Press, 2012), 1.

⁵⁸ Wilken, *The First Thousand Years*, 1.

⁵⁹ Schuster and Boschert-Kimming, *Hope Against Hope*, 29.

⁶⁰ Schuster and Boschert-Kimming, *Hope Against Hope*, 29-30.

⁶¹ Schuster and Boschert-Kimming, *Hope Against Hope*, 30.

draw the wisdom of the past into the present. To appreciate the role of narratives in Metz's thought, it should also be noted that he is against the dominant language of technology and science. He abhors sophisticated, prearranged speech about God and turns to the ordinary, everyday life as a way of speaking about God. In this sense, I believe, one begins to appreciate what Metz means by the language of narrative. Narrative, as he notes, "is the language of exchanging experiences, the language of wonder...."⁶² My Kenyan people passed on the "wisdom for life" by telling stories of what exactly happened: experiences, sometimes of horror and others of celebration of life. Such stories have relational power and capture the imagination of its hearers.

Through narrative, Metz gets back at his original critique of a theology that does not take into consideration the practical experiences of people. For Metz, narratives have the power to bring experiences into the fore. He writes: "what happens to a theology that has lost the category of narrative? It can only push authentic and primordial experiences of faith off into the realms of the unobjective and the unspeakable."⁶³ Consider once again Metz's biographical sketch given at the beginning of this paper: "Toward the end of the Second World War, when I was sixteen years old, I was taken out of school and forced into the army.... I wandered all night long...and when I returned...I found only the dead, nothing but the dead...."⁶⁴ In a way, this kind of memory is made possible by the ability to tell a story. In doing so, we can enter into this meaningful experience with Metz and see how his theological move is worthy of the meaning of dangerous memory even as he ultimately anchors this memory in Jesus Christ. To be sure, the memory of Christ is also received as narratives witnessed in the Gospels and other scriptural writings.⁶⁵

⁶² Schuster and Boschert-Kimming, *Hope Against Hope*, 33.

⁶³ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 187.

⁶⁴ Ashley, introduction to Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 3.

⁶⁵ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 187-190.

To what extent are narratives crucial to both faith and a theology of *memoria passionis*? As we have noted, Metz privileges experience over any form of abstract reasoning. Metz points out that Christian texts such as the Bible employ narratives. A case in point are the creation narratives: “The world arising out of nothingness, the person formed from the mud...”⁶⁶ Metz also reminds us that stories are told for a particular purpose: “In every case the storyteller is a [person] who has counsel for his readers.... The storyteller takes what he tells from experience-his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale.”⁶⁷ A good example of this is what happens at Mass. The story of Jesus born of the Virgin, crucified, died and resurrected is narrated both in the Eucharistic prayers and the Creed. Metz himself observed that these narratives of dangerous memory are made alive “by the canon of our faith and our liturgy, by the center of our Creed- ‘suffered under Pontius Pilate,’ ‘on the night on which he was betrayed,’”⁶⁸

In the narrative section of his book *Faith in History*, Metz reminds us of the power of the eucharistic narrative and its ability to form its listeners. Consider, for example, how Metz connects the use of narratives sacramentally. He talks of narratives with their power of sacramentality: “The sacramental sign can easily be characterized as ‘a speech act’ in which the unity of narrative as an efficacious word...is expressed in the same speech process.... The linguistic formulas involved in conferring the sacraments are not only what linguistics names the ‘performative expression,’ but also that they are themselves telling a story, as for example, in the Canon: ‘On the night in which he was betrayed’”⁶⁹ Here, in this last example, taken from the Roman Canon, the passion narrative introduces the Canon at Mass.

⁶⁶ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 187-188.

⁶⁷ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 189.

⁶⁸ Johann Baptist Metz, “Facing the World: A Theological and Biographical Inquiry,” trans. John K. Downey, *Theological Studies* 75, no. 1 (2014): 27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563914520919>.

⁶⁹ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 190.

In such a deliberate move in the example, Metz makes a very crucial connection between narratives and the Eucharist as a privileged locus that opens us to mystery in the passion of Christ.

Memoria passionis opens us to the mystery in the person of Christ and so provides us the ground for solidaristic hope. This is so simply because Christ's passion was a solidaristic action that inaugurated a future freedom and hope for those for whom he died. Liturgy is the privileged locus that tells the narrative of *memoria passionis* and allows the hearers at Mass to be formed and transformed by the stories of Christ. In liturgy, when *memoria passionis* is recounted, the memory of Christ is brought into the present, thus inviting us into the memory of those who suffer. As I have noted earlier, Metz's experience of the suffering people in Latin America led him to appreciate his understanding of "the symbols of the Kingdom of God."⁷⁰ It seems to me that the task of the eucharistic people is to connect the memory of Christ to those who suffer in history. Our liturgy, then, is no longer "a purely cultic experience, isolated from and unburdened by conflicts," but one that embraces them.⁷¹

Memoria passionis rooted in the Eucharist can help us attend to the immigrant crisis that painted the introductory paragraphs of this paper. Metz's *memoria passionis* anchored in the Eucharistic narratives can help us hear our call as eucharistic people to a form of discipleship in solidarity with the immigrant. The final section to which I now turn will help us see our call to stand in the presence of the immigrant within Metz's paradigm of *memoria passionis* rooted in the Eucharist.

⁷⁰ Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory*, 48.

⁷¹ Samantha Slaubaugh, "A "Liturgical Mysticism of Open Eyes": Johann Baptist Metz, Caryll Houselander, and Pandemic Liturgy:" *Religions* 12, no. 685 (2021), 3-4, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12090685>.

IV. A Eucharistic Theology of the Immigrant

In *Kingship Across Borders*, Kristin Heyer talks of why most immigrants cross borders: for economic reasons and the pursuit of dignified livelihoods. Against the backdrop of an unjust immigration system in this country, Heyer writes that “casualties of unjust immigration policies... include a significant increase in border deaths and smuggling networks,...family separation and the creation of an underclass.”⁷² Heyer points out that “commitments to welcoming the vulnerable and fostering solidarity in light of common human dignity grounds a Christian immigration ethic....”⁷³ I believe that this Christian immigration ethic is at the heart of the mystery of the Eucharist, the memory of Jesus Christ, who as we pray in one of the Eucharistic prayers, “always showed compassion for the poor... and... became a neighbor to the oppressed.”⁷⁴

In what ways, then, can a Eucharistic theology framed as *memoria passionis* be helpful beyond an ethical stance argued for by theologians such as Heyer? In other words, how does Metz help us think about the nature and the task of the Eucharist in the world? First, Metz’s category of solidarity is instructive here. In Metz’s book *Faith in History*, he presents his important category of solidarity. A special attention is given to global solidarity as Metz speaks of the obligations to which faith invites us. Solidarity is not just merely solidarity of exchange value of sorts. To be clear, as noted by Merian, “Metz problematizes the common understanding of solidarity in today’s societies, where it is conceived as an alliance of solidarity that follows the logic of ‘I will support your concerns, and you will support mine.... In contrast, solidarity with the...suffering (through remembering them) does

⁷² Kristin E. Heyer, *Kingship Across Borders: A Christian Ethic of Immigration* (Georgetown University Press, 2012), 35.

⁷³ Heyer, *Kingship Across Borders*, 35.

⁷⁴ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Eucharistic Prayers for Use in Masses for Various Needs IV,” in *The Roman Missal* (Catholic Book Publishing Corp, 2008), 643.

not build on the equivalence...of alliance partners.”⁷⁵ The aim of solidarity is to confront the followers of Christ with the suffering in the world. This confrontation must push us to question why there is disparity among nations. As Metz writes: “How does the one world Church react to ‘its’ class problem, namely the contrast between the Churches of the North and of the South, which it has to harmonize with its self-understanding as the one table fellowship of the Lord, as the visible symbol of eschatological unity?”⁷⁶ While Metz does not elaborate this global solidarity as the one table fellowship, I do suggest here that a Eucharistic theology understood as *memoria passionis*, in other words, a eucharistic theology understood in its commitment to the suffering in this world, is a way in which the call to solidarity can begin to make sense.

The Eucharist, therefore, I argue, is a sacrament of solidarity. In other words, its very nature as revealed to us through its narratives, for instance, commits us to solidarity especially with the poor of this world, such as the immigrant in search of a homeland. Consider, for example, the “Orations and Eucharistic Prayers” of the liturgy: in the “Prayers for Various Needs” in the *Roman Missal*, the Church invites its members to pray for “Refugees and Immigrants.” One particular line in the Eucharistic prayer that can be used for this kind of mass so as to invite people to imagine themselves in relation to the other, the refugee and the immigrant, goes like this: “O Lord, to whom no one is a stranger and from whose help no one is ever distant, look with compassion on refugees and exiles, on segregated persons and on lost children; restore them we pray, to a homeland, and give us a kind heart for the needy and for strangers.”⁷⁷ That the eucharistic narratives of this kind invite us to attend to those in need is a prerogative for eucharistic people and followers of Christ.

⁷⁵ Merian, *Remembering Marielle Franco from a Theological perspective*, 60.

⁷⁶ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 214.

⁷⁷ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “For Refugees and Exiles,” *The Roman Missal*, 3rd ed. (Catholic Book Publishing, 2011), 1146.

Solidarity for Metz is our contribution “to a place where hope is at home, that hope in God of the living and the dead, who calls all...to be subjects in God’s presence.”⁷⁸

Second, our call for hope begins with our openness to the mystery of suffering in the world. This openness introduces us to another of Metz’s crucial theological contributions. The mystical stance to suffering as a “mysticism of open eyes.” A mysticism of open eyes is a spirituality of presence to the sufferings in this world. Matthew T. Eggemeier writes that a mysticism of open eyes for Metz is a spiritual stance that “sees more and not less. It is a mysticism that especially makes visible all invisible and inconvenient suffering, and - convenient or not-pays attention to it and takes responsibility for it”⁷⁹ Considering the immigration crisis in this country and the suffering associated with it, and recognizing its complexity, I argue here that, since the situation involves human subjects in their daily struggle to survive, followers of Christ are called to stand in the presence of this situation. As Eggemeier writes of mysticism of open eyes, “this mysticism involves both awakening to the reality of suffering in the world and responding to this suffering in terms of a praxis of responsibility for those who suffer unjustly.”⁸⁰ As I noted in the opening paragraphs of this paper, the US bishops did not advocate for open borders. In this regard, they upheld the rule of law. At the same time, aware that supreme justice is justice that allows all human persons to be subjects in the presence of God, they called for laws that advocate and uphold human dignity. Metz’s spirituality of open eyes has a value and window through which we can view the Eucharist and the Christian message of solidarity. In other words, there is a connection between the Eucharist and the Christian imagination that we live in a deeply sacramental world. Metz’s mysticism is a great addition to the crucial call for the Church to attend to the

⁷⁸ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 214.

⁷⁹ Matthew T. Eggemeier, “A Mysticism of Open Eyes: Compassion For A Suffering World And the Askesis of Contemplative Prayer,” *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 12, no. 1 (2012), 43, <https://doi.org/10.1353/scs.20120013>.

⁸⁰ Eggemeier, “A Mysticism of Open Eyes,” 43-45.

reality of historical atrocities that the immigrants may encounter as human beings and subjects in God's presence. Nevertheless, in no way does Metz mysticism close itself from contemplation or prayer. This mysticism embraces contemplation while "facing the world," as Metz wrote, or opening our eyes to the realities around us. Eucharistic liturgy then becomes a privileged ground for the vision of Metz's mysticism that is at once mystical and political. It is mystical since prayer, contemplation, and the interiority of the heart in the presence of God are all crucial. It is political for what it commits us to do in the world. The spiritual-praxis paradigm at work here is a great framework for understanding the nature and task of the Eucharist. How then, one may ask, does this mysticism allow for those who partake in the Eucharist to seek solidarity with the immigrant among us? What will it mean that liturgies are not just celebrated but indeed become moments of catechesis for solidarity? And what will it mean when such prayers and liturgies become avenues where our own memories and those of others lead us to stand with immigrants in their lowest moments of suffering and death?

Standing with immigrants in hope for a future of freedom is a spirituality that implies that we are not closed to the sufferings of those around us. We open ourselves to attend to those "whose memory we venerate" as the Eucharistic narratives often point us to during liturgy. This presence to the immigrant is born of this kind of faith that confronts our indifference to the plight of others. Metz has often recalled the indifference of people and their inability to be moved into the pain of others. Again, this seems to me to be a particular disposition and interiority that I have not developed within the context of the Eucharist. A few prompts that can be starting points for such imaginary suffice here. First, that the suffering of the immigrant should bother us. To be bothered by the suffering of another is a Christian stance, and for me, a praxis that orients us to a Christian attitude that begins to desire the good of the other. The notion of bothering, for me, is a crucial step in an ethical

process that may seek to interrupt structures that oppress the immigrant. Second, and consequently then, how do we allow what we celebrate to form us into this kind of sensitivity? Perhaps a liturgical formation can be helpful in ways that we can begin to appreciate that a dangerous memory of Christ is a dangerous memory in the world. Liturgical formation, for me, has meant that, at Mass, I may choose the Orations and Eucharistic Prayers for the Immigrant and invite the participants at a particular mass to enter into the power of the narratives being proclaimed. For all of us, the nature of the Eucharist and its emphasis on the memory of Christ's passion can help us to reflect on what such memories being recounted mean for the memories of our immigration crisis. Finally, solidarity might mean a discovery that when I pray, I pray also for others, including my enemies and seek a future of freedom for them.

V. Conclusion

This project has attempted to demonstrate a new framework for thinking about a theology that does justice for the immigrant among us. Metz's political theology provides a helpful resource for articulating that theology through the lens of the Eucharist. What emerges through this framework above anything else is a way of being in the world that attends to the sufferings of the other, including the dead.

Metz's biographical sketch presents us with a historiography that bears his own encounters of suffering: the loss of his childhood friends, the catastrophes of Auschwitz and his encounters with the plight of the poor in Latin America. His theological category of dangerous memory was for the most part born of these experiences. When Metz anchors his theology of dangerous memory and foregrounds it in the passion of Christ, he sees in that foregrounding a theology that does justice to those who suffer in this world. This paper has sought to demonstrate how Metz's paradigm of dangerous memory can help us to articulate a theology of the Eucharist that attends to those who suffer in our current times in the name of

the immigrant. Metz's use of narrative as a theological category aligns well with the power of narrativity in the Eucharist and for our world. While Metz generally sees narratives in their power to communicate meaning and open us to mystery, narratives such as those present in our liturgical Creeds, Orations, and Eucharist Prayers of the *Roman Missal* open us to the mystery of the Eucharist being celebrated as the dangerous memory of Christ and the sufferings in the world for example, Metz linked the narratives of the Gospels and the experiences of the suffering in Latin America.

In conclusion, dangerous memory is born of Christ on the cross, memorialized each day in the Eucharist, it commits us to interrupt the evolutionary logic of progress and allows us to be confronted by the evil in this world. At the heart of the Church's Eucharistic theology is the dangerous memory of Christ that has in no way taken away our responsibility in the world. What Metz proposes in his solidaristic hope is that interior openness to the mystery of God that allows us to see human atrocities in this world. I have turned to the situation of the immigrant because, in a sense, it is the most apparent need in our faith communities today. Welcoming the immigrant or being confronted by the evil of locking children in cages is central to who we are as human beings. This does not amount to the political rhetoric of bipartisan politics, but rather to a faith that must seek to defend the freedom of all subjects as beloved children of God.

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