

Introduction

"Always be ready . . ."

“Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15). Within this biblical charge, addressed to early Christian communities suffering religious persecution at the turn of the second century, we find a concentrated expression of a task that has persistently pressed itself upon Christian theology. What is that hope which would sustain Christian communities down through the centuries? How might theologians offer an account of that hope responsive to the distinct demands of their time? Although the history of Christian theology might be read profitably as an effort to respond to these questions through the range of traditional theological topoi, beginning in the 1960s a number of prominent theologians in Europe would move these questions to the center of their theological projects as they attempted to renew the Christian tradition’s reading and appropriation of the doctrine of eschatology. Examined from a new historical vantage point, they identified in this doctrine a potent and compelling resource for offering a defense of the Christian’s hope under the conditions of the modern world.

Two Catholic theologians who contributed to this turn to eschatology in the mid-1960s and for whom eschatology has been a

crucial concern ever since are Edward Schillebeeckx (1914–2009) and Johann Baptist Metz (b. 1928).¹ In their early writings, each of these theologians worked to uncover the manner in which the Christian's eschatological expectations for the future radically impinge on the present. Seeking to respond to what they described as the secularization of European society and its accompanying crisis of faith, they positioned eschatology as a passionate hope in action committed to the innovating and changing of the world toward the kingdom of God. As Schillebeeckx's and Metz's work steadily matured, however, both theologians came to argue that the central problem pressing upon the Christian's hope was not primarily this modern crisis of faith but the unrelenting crisis of history's suffering people. Still seeking to respond to the biblical charge with which we began, and now more attentive to experiences of suffering such as those from which that charge initially emerged, they recognized the need to offer a defense of the Christian's hope in the midst of a world marked by so much injustice and tragedy. Coupled with the insights developed in their earlier work, each of these theologians committed himself to fashioning a subversive account of eschatological hope that might animate and sustain a life of practical resistance in the face of history's unmitigated suffering.

A number of articles, dissertations, and books have been written on the eschatological visions of Metz and Schillebeeckx.² Despite the

1. Other prominent representatives of this turn to eschatology in European theology, at the time frequently associated with "the theology of hope," include Jürgen Moltmann, *A Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implication of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch (New York: Harper & Row, 1967); and Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, trans. Lewis Wilkens and Duane Priebe (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968). We will take up Moltmann's project in the postscript of this study.
2. For Metz, see J. Matthew Ashley, *Interruptions: Mysticism, Politics, and Theology in the Work of Johann Baptist Metz* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), and "Apocalypticism in Political and Liberation Theology: Toward an Historical *Docta Ignorantia*," *Horizons* 27 (2000): 22–43; Rebecca S. Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering: An Interpretation of Liberation and Political Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986); Alan John Revering, "Social Criticism and Eschatology in M. Walzer and J. B. Metz" (PhD diss., Harvard University,

unmistakable similarities in their projects, however, few scholars have attempted to place the two theologians in dialogue with regard to this issue.³ In part, this can be explained by the different ways in which each theologian retrieved the doctrine of eschatology in his later writings.⁴ As Metz's position toward prevailing interpretations of history became even more critical in his mature theology, he argued that contemporary eschatology has been compromised by the myth of evolutionary progress and suggested an apocalyptic eschatology as

2001); Gaspar Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God: Political, Liberation, and Public Theologies* (New York: Continuum, 2001); Cynthia Rigby, "Is There Joy before Morning? 'Dangerous Memory' in the Work of Sharon Welch and Johann Baptist Metz," *Koinonia* 5 (1993): 1–30. For Schillebeeckx, see Brian David Berry, "Fundamental Liberationist Ethics: The Contribution of the Later Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx" (PhD diss., Boston College, 1995); Bradford Hinze, "Eschatology and Ethics," in *The Praxis of the Reign of God: An Introduction to the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx*, ed. Mary Catherine Hilker and Robert J. Schreiter (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 167–83; Tadahiko Iwashima, *Menschheitsgeschichte und Heilserfahrung* (Düsseldorf, Ger.: Patmos, 1982); Derek J. Simon, "Provisional Liberations, Fragments of Salvation: The Practical-Critical Soteriology of Edward Schillebeeckx" (PhD diss., University of Ottawa, 2001), and "Salvation and Liberation in the Practical-Critical Soteriology of Schillebeeckx," *Theological Studies* 63 (2002): 494–520; Elizabeth Tillar, "Critical Remembrance and Eschatological Hope in Edward Schillebeeckx's Theology of Suffering for Others," *Heythrop Journal* 44 (2003): 15–42.

3. See Tillar, "Critical Remembrance and Eschatological Hope." Lieven Boeve's *God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval* (New York: Continuum, 2007) should also be noted. It is a more constructive than descriptive theological work, but he explicitly employs the eschatological thought of both Schillebeeckx and Metz in developing his project.
4. Another factor may be the manner in which contemporary scholars frequently categorize modern theologians according to broadly defined methodological schematics. Though Metz and Schillebeeckx trained and worked within twentieth-century expressions of the Thomistic tradition early in their careers, as their work matured both theologians sought to develop projects with a greater attention to the historical and interpretive dimensions of theology than they believed their earlier methodological commitments allowed. However, because of the distinctive ways in which each of them performed this task, as well as future developments in Catholic theology, particularly in Latin America, Schillebeeckx's work is frequently presented as an example of twentieth-century phenomenological Thomism, whereas Metz's project is categorized with political and liberationist theologies. See, for example, James Livingston and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, eds., *Modern Christian Thought*, vol. 2, *The Twentieth Century* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000). As we will see, this distinction is not without merit. Nonetheless, it need not obfuscate their profound similarities and the value of comparative study. For his part, Schillebeeckx has suggested that he understands his own project as a "liberation theology" and is hesitant to embrace the language of "political theology" because of potential confusion with classical expressions of political theology. See Schillebeeckx, ed., *Mystik und Politik: Theologie im Ringen um Geschichte und Gessschaft; Johann Baptist Metz zu Ehren* (Mainz, Ger.: Matthias-Grünewald, 1988), 56.

the most effective way to maintain sensitivity to history's suffering persons in a culture marked by apathy. The temporal framework of evolutionary time makes it impossible to remember suffering. Only hope in a God who will interrupt history soon, he believed, can secure a future for the suffering and even the dead. Imminent expectation of the second coming, time framed apocalyptically, allows for dangerous memories that bespeak a future freedom and that stimulate action now. By proposing an apocalyptic narration of time, Metz sought to rescue the subversive power of Christian eschatology as a protest unto the end.

Schillebeeckx, by contrast, consistently argued for a decidedly nonapocalyptic eschatology as he looked to ground his notion of negative contrast experiences in the very protology he initially put forth in his earliest effort to respond to the challenges he believed had accompanied the unfolding secularization of Europe and North America. Grounding his mature eschatology upon this position, he argued that the experience of innocent suffering is a worldwide phenomenon confronting all men and women, one that calls for an ethic of worldwide responsibility. Moreover, the prereligious experience of indignation and protest to this suffering is equally universal. Consequently, for Schillebeeckx, modernity's distorted and rigidly defined expectations for the future, rather than the onset of apathy, were the focus of his mature prophetic eschatology. By offering an eschatological narration of history from the side of history's victims, when protestation against suffering is located at the heart of history rather than when suffering is legitimated as a necessary, if unfortunate, consequence of history's progress, Schillebeeckx believed a limitless hope is found for all people. In his hands, a prophetic eschatology articulates an inexhaustible horizon of hope that he grounds in the absolute saving presence of the Creator God and that receives its concrete contours and is definitively

inaugurated and confirmed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Here, Schillebeeckx intimately connected his eschatology to a theology of creation and Christology. Hope in a future beyond our expectations, an eschatological surplus, is supported by an inexhaustible surplus of creation and concentrated in the eschatological prophet, providing a limitless source of strength and encouragement to protest against all injustice unto the kingdom.

In this study, I argue that by our attending to these distinctive modes of speaking of eschatology while at the same time remembering their shared starting point and concerns, a fuller appreciation of the unique resources as well as the insights and limitations of each theologian's project can be realized. In turn, by our placing these two projects in dialogue, it will be possible to evaluate the relative capacity of Metz's apocalyptic eschatology and Schillebeeckx's prophetic eschatology to articulate an account of hope capable of responding to the particular cultural and historical contexts that consistently remained the horizon from which they theologized.

A "Zero-Sum" Theory of Secularization and the Idea of Progress

Because eschatology came to the fore in the work of each of these theologians in the 1960s amid debates surrounding the future of religion in modern societies, some initial comments about those debates are in order before we turn to the early writings of Metz and Schillebeeckx. Often under the rather unwieldy appellation of "secularization," during the 1960s a surprisingly consistent interpretation of twentieth-century European and North American societies emerged through the social sciences. Influenced in part by Max Weber's earlier interpretation of the "disenchantment" of the modern world, a number of sociologists began arguing that as men

and women decreasingly experienced the world as mysterious and uncontrollable and gradually seized responsibility for fashioning their future, religion no longer would be needed to make sense of human existence and the unknown.⁵ Dramatic advances in technology and the ability to understand and even manipulate nature and society offered an increasingly efficient and productive future. In the wake of these modern advancements, the embracing social character of religious belief and practice was widely believed to be in decline. In the nations of the West, those nations deemed sufficiently “developed,” it was alleged that as the processes of modernization assumed a more prominent role in society, less and less would the images and priorities of the Christian tradition inform public life. Charles Taylor has referred to this interpretation of secularization as the subtraction theory, whereas Lieven Boeve has described it as the zero-sum theory of secularization.⁶ Modernity’s advances could come only at the price of religion’s retreat. “In short, the sum of modernization and religion is always zero,” Boeve writes. “[T]he more religion, the less modernization, and especially the reverse: the more modernization, the less religion.”⁷

Though allied, this often-rehearsed twentieth-century theory of secularization was not immediately related to the grandiose theories of historical progress that emerged out of the Enlightenment in the

5. For a prominent account of this interpretation of modern society from the context of Northern Europe, see Bryan R. Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society: A Sociological Comment* (London: Watts, 1966). For equally well-known accounts by American sociologists, see Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1967); and Talcott Parsons, *Structure and Process in Modern Societies* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1960). A helpful historical and conceptual overview of these and similar interpretations of secularization can be found in Daniel Olson, ed., *The Secularization Debate* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

6. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press / Belknap, 2007); Lieven Boeve, “Religion after Detraditionalization: Christian Faith in a Post-Secular Europe,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 70 (2005): 99–122. See also, Boeve, *God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval* (New York: Continuum, 2007).

7. Boeve, “Religion after Detraditionalization,” 100.

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In his study *History of the Idea of Progress*, Robert Nisbet argues that although the idea of progress can be traced back to classical Greece and the philosopher's pursuit of knowledge, it was only in the eighteenth century that the view arose that "all history could be seen as a slow, gradual, but continuous and necessary ascent to some given end."⁸ In the writings of prominent thinkers such as Immanuel Kant, G. W. F. Hegel, and Karl Marx, philosophies of history emerged in which world history no longer provided merely the possibility of advancing human knowledge but was itself inscribed with a unified pattern of inevitable progress directed toward a more ideal human condition. These influential interpretations of history's progress would not guarantee the full realization of an individual life, or even of a particular historical epoch, but humankind was believed to be caught up in the unbroken march of a history ultimately moving toward its proper telos. The rapid development of science and technology during this period, the advent and growth of modern industrialization, and the rise of an educated and self-governing middle class only seemed to confirm such an understanding of history. A future of remarkable promise appeared to be just over the horizon, a future presumably within human reach.

The eventual disruption of the enthusiastic optimism that accompanied this modern "belief" in the evolutionary progress of history, particularly in its European context, was aggressively diagnosed almost as soon as it occurred.⁹ As the nineteenth century came to an end and the twentieth century began, the idea of progress

8. Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 171.

9. See, for example, Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, 2 vols. (New York: Knopf, 1926–28). T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (New York: Boni & Liveright), published in 1922, also illustrates well the philosophical and cultural transition under way in Europe. For a contemporary defense of progress as an appropriate category for understanding history, see Charles Murray, "The Idea of Progress: Once Again, with Feeling," *Hoover Digest* 3 (2001).

would confront a series of crushing historical challenges. “The nineteenth century ended on August 1, 1914,” Paul Tillich is said to have announced at the beginning of each year to his students at the University of Chicago.¹⁰ The failure of modern rationality to prevent the commencement of World War I (1914–1918), as well as the ruinous price of modern technological advancements put toward the service of that war, would bring to a halt the “carousel” of progress and expose such belief as both naive and indefensible. As the Great War then reemerged as World War II (1939–1945), with the exacting efficiency of Nazi Germany’s Final Solution and the scientific competence of the Manhattan Project in the United States, a decisive turn in the philosophical milieu unsurprisingly surfaced. Prominent voices among the European intelligentsia began tearing away at what remained of the idea of progress. With his “The Question concerning Technology,” from 1949, Martin Heidegger was one of the most prominent among them.¹¹ Also important were the social theorists associated with the Institut für Sozialforschung in Frankfurt, Germany. The “dialectic of Enlightenment” investigated by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, which will be considered later in this study, exposed the idea of progress as a dangerous ideological illusion and attempted to articulate a philosophy of history doggedly committed to unearthing the ambiguous effects of instrumental rationality and technological advancement.

The “zero-sum” theory of secularization emerged amid these critical reevaluations of the idea of progress and, thus, did not depend immediately upon the hubristic philosophies of history of the preceding centuries. No longer was historical advancement presumed inevitable. Nevertheless, with the unprecedented prosperity of the

10. Paul Tillich, quoted in Douglas John Hall, “‘The Great War’ and the Theologians,” in *The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview*, ed. Gregory Baum (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999), 3.

11. Martin Heidegger, “The Question concerning Technology,” in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993).

1950s and 1960s in Northern Europe and the United States, the question of social and historical progress once more would return to the public discourse. A renewed enthusiasm determined by the ongoing economic and material productivity of the sciences, as well as a progressive optimism in the possibility of sociopolitical transformation illustrated by the well-known student movements of 1968, reinvigorated confidence in the possibility of historical progress and a better future. Although this theory of secularization did not necessitate continuous progress into the future, once again historical advancement was envisioned as attainable. What now was predicted by its proponents, though, was the dissolution of religion. As the prosperity and technological prowess accompanying modernization emerged, religious faith would subsequently surrender its influence on public life and increasingly fade in importance.

Beginning in the late 1960s, this theory of secularization gradually encountered greater resistance and, like the idea of progress itself, in the end has failed to withstand serious scrutiny.¹² Tested against the ongoing viability of traditional religions in many highly modernized nations, particularly the United States, as well as the rapid development of alternative or “new-age” spiritual movements, its inability to account for the socioreligious dynamics of contemporary culture has become evident. History did not unfold to the exclusion of religion. Indeed, as José Casanova and others have pointed out, religion survived and continues to occupy a privileged, if at times ambiguous, place in the lives of many men and women and in

12. For an early reevaluation of the secularization theory, see Andrew Greeley, “The Secularization Myth,” in *The Denominational Society: A Sociological Approach to Religion in America* (Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman, 1972), 127–55. For contemporary reevaluations of the secularization narrative by two of its most important proponents during the 1960s, see Peter Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999); and Harvey Cox, “The Myth of the Twentieth Century,” in Baum, *Twentieth Century*, 135–44. A contemporary defense of the thesis can be found in Steve Bruce, *God Is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

the ordering of modern cultures.¹³ This is not to suggest that the historical processes that this theory sought to describe were of no consequence. Instead, subsequent efforts to interpret the phenomenon of secularization have had to become both historically and philosophically more rigorous.¹⁴ Undoubtedly, wide disagreement still exists among these more recent interpreters of the process of secularization. Common to many of these projects, however, is the recognition that the zero-sum theory of secularization inadvertently functioned as an unmarked carrier of the idea of progress. As we have seen, there are significant differences between this idea of secularization and the idea of progress prominent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Nonetheless, both prescribed an understanding of history itself, even if one did so under the auspices of the social sciences.

13. José Casanova assesses this “deprivatization” of religion through a number of helpful case studies in *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
14. Along with the writings of Taylor, Boeve, and Casanova referenced above, see also John Caputo, “How the Secular World Became Post-Secular,” in *On Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 37–66; Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West* (New York: Knopf, 2007); and David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005). Although in this study our interest in interpretations of secularization will be limited to Metz’s and Schillebeeckx’s theological responses to this phenomenon in the 1960s, and more specifically the manner in which their responses relate to the development of their early eschatologies, these recent and more critical analyses of the issue offer helpful insights into the limitations of what I have referred to as the “zero-sum” theory. Interestingly, Metz also has returned to the debate surrounding the meaning of secularization in his more recent writings, though, again, the interests of this study will be limited to his earlier work as it pertains to the development of his eschatology in the 1960s. See, Metz, *Memoria passionis: Ein provozierendes Gedächtnis in pluralistischer Gesellschaft* (Freiburg, Ger.: Herder, 2006), and “Under the Spell of Cultural Amnesia?,” in *Missing God? Cultural Amnesia and Political Theology*, ed. John K. Downey, Jürgen Manemann, and Steven T. Ostovich (Münster, Ger.: LIT, 2006).

Theology in the Wake of Secularization: Developments in the Eschatologies of Metz and Schillebeeckx

Further sustaining the zero-sum theory of secularization was a theological judgment regarding the inherent opposition between Christianity and modernity, a judgment often shared by those with and without Christian commitments.¹⁵ Theologians and advocates of the process of secularization did not need to agree upon which side of the equation they advantaged in order to agree that the sum of modernization and religion was necessarily zero. Of course, this theological presumption for the essential incompatibility of Christianity and the modern world was not without its prominent critics. Within Catholic circles, the stage had been set for a more critical engagement with the phenomenon of secularization by philosophers such as Dominicus De Petter and Joseph Maréchal, whose own projects had sought to retrieve and appropriate the Catholic theological tradition precisely by way of a critical conversation with the epistemological developments of modern philosophy. With the completion of initial reconstruction in Europe in the late 1950s, the productive dialogue with the modern world exhibited in the thought of these thinkers would find powerful and original expression in postwar attempts to engage what now appeared to many to be an increasingly secularized European society. Metz's and Schillebeeckx's early theological projects offer an entrance into this work.

Independent of one another initially, Metz and Schillebeeckx each sought to respond to the interpretation of history underlying this idea

15. The rejection of religion in the name of historical progress found a theological counterpart, for example, in the antimodernist movement of the Catholic Church during the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For a helpful introduction to this period, see Darrell Jodock, ed., *Catholicism Contending with Modernity: Roman Catholic Modernism and Anti-Modernism in Historical Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

of secularization by challenging the perceived opposition between Christianity and the modern world that each theologian believed was provoking a crisis of faith. Ascribing wider meaning to the term *secularization* than that suggested by social scientists, they rejected the theological presumption of the essential incompatibility of Christianity and the modern world yet critically affirmed the modern world's self-assured hope for the future. As we will see, the factors in their decisions for such a response were theologically and culturally manifold. Though highly suspicious of naively construed theories of historical progress, these two young theologians also shared in the renewed cultural confidence and the tempering of postwar skepticism characteristic of the period. Although Metz, a Catholic priest from Bavaria, would explicitly and powerfully confront his own memories of World War II later in his career, and even more significantly the horrific events of the Shoah, the completion of his philosophical and theological studies under Emerich Coreth and Karl Rahner in the 1950s coincided with the zenith of the *Wirtschaftswunder*.¹⁶ By the end of that decade, a West Germany left in ruins at the conclusion of World War II had emerged as one of the strongest economies in the world. On the strength of modern technology and aggressive socioeconomic-policy engineering, the German people had achieved a level of prosperity far surpassing that of prewar Germany.¹⁷ Though surely not willing to concede that the gains of modernization

16. For Metz's reflections on his draft and military service during the war, see "In Place of a Foreword: On the Biographical Itinerary of My Theology," in *A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity*, ed. and trans. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Paulist, 1998), 1–5. Beginning in the 1970s, Metz increasingly scrutinized contemporary Christian theology's alarming negligence of the Shoah, which he spoke of under the historically concrete name Auschwitz, and frequently lamented that the memory of these events appeared "slowly, much too slowly" in his own theological reflections. See, for example, "Theology as Theodicy?" in *Passion for God*, 54–71, first published as "Theologie als Theodizee," in *Theodizee: Gott vor Gericht?*, ed. Willi Oelmüller (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1990), 103–18. Though we will not take up this powerful theme in Metz's writings in this study, we can note that the positions and categories examined in chapters 5 and 6 find concentrated expression in his efforts to do theology "after Auschwitz."

required the ruin of religion in general or Christianity in particular, Metz had witnessed firsthand the potential of technical rationality and the power of the modern person to determine one's own history.¹⁸

Writing from the Netherlands some thirty years later, Schillebeeckx would look back on this same period and write, "At that time we were still living in a world which had emerged from the chaos of the Second World War and which had become overbold as a result of economic progress and an international perspective on peace."¹⁹ Certainly, this boldness characterized the experience of the Dutch Catholic Church during the 1950s and early 1960s. Though a native Belgian born into a Flemish family, the Dominican priest was appointed chair of the Department of Dogmatics and the History of Theology at the Catholic University of Nijmegen and relocated to the Netherlands in 1957.²⁰ He assumed that position just as the Dutch social system of *verzuiling*, or columnization, began to break down, a social and theological process that would shape

17. For an introduction to the postwar economic transformation of West Germany, see Armin Grünbacher, *Reconstruction and Cold War in Germany* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004).
18. Johann Baptist Metz was born on August 5, 1928, in Auerbach, a small town in Bavaria. After the war and a brief period in an internment camp in the United States, Metz returned to his studies and earned doctorates in philosophy with a thesis on Heidegger and a dissertation on Thomas Aquinas. Ordained in 1953, he was assigned to a small parish near Bamberg from 1958 to 1963 before accepting a chair in fundamental theology on the Catholic faculty at the University of Münster. He was a cofounder of the journal *Concilium* in 1965, where in the early 1980s he served with Schillebeeckx as the director of the section for dogmatics, a collaboration that he would later recall "with great gratitude." Currently, Metz is the Ordinary Professor of Fundamental Theology, Emeritus, at Westphalian Wilhelms University in Münster.
19. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 235; originally published as *Mensen als Verhaal van God* (Bloemendaal, Neth.: Nelissen, 1989). The English version of this book will be referenced in this study.
20. Edward Cornelius Florentius Alfons Schillebeeckx was born November 12, 1914, in Antwerp. He entered the Flemish province of the Dominican order at Ghent in 1934 and was ordained a priest in 1941. He studied in Louvain and at Le Saulchoir in Paris before completing his doctoral studies in 1951 under the direction of M. D. Chenu. He taught dogmatic theology at the Dominican House of Studies in Louvain before accepting the position in Nijmegen, the academic post he held until retirement, in 1983. Schillebeeckx was a cofounder of the journal *Concilium* and in 1982 became the first theologian to win the Erasmus Prize from the Dutch government for his contributions to European culture.

Schillebeeckx's thinking profoundly. Under that system, Catholics, socialists, and the Dutch Reformed Church had managed to coexist within a single political community by establishing three distinct "columns," or social structures, that supported and mediated civic life. Social and ecclesial stability were determined through this system of volunteer separation. In *The Evolution of Dutch Catholicism, 1958–1974*, sociologist John A. Coleman offered a valuable analysis of the Catholic response to the midcentury breakdown of this system.²¹ After a brief period of hesitation, he demonstrated, the church responded with a robust sociological confidence that it could overcome the refuge of self-segregation and successfully engage in cultural and ethical leadership, occupying a position of "integrated autonomy" within the wider society. Although they were not altogether neglected, less attention was given to the possibility of lost ecclesial identity, doctrinal cohesion, and critical independence. A progressive hopefulness, what Coleman even described as an experience of "collective effervescence," marked a church reenvisioning its relationship with the broader world. It was from this context that Schillebeeckx would engage the theological and pastoral challenge of secularization. As we will see, the self-assurance of the Dutch church, its ambitious transition from volunteer separation to "integrated autonomy," came to mark his own mode of engaging the modern world.²²

21. John A. Coleman, *The Evolution of Dutch Catholicism, 1958–1974* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

22. The Second Vatican Council's pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, a conciliar document to which Schillebeeckx directly contributed, further suggests that the effort to reinterpret the role of the Catholic Church in the modern world extended beyond the unique context of Dutch Catholicism. Indeed, although John XXIII's opening speech to the council carefully warned against "excessive confidence in technical progress," he preceded these comments by chastising those "prophets of gloom" within the church who saw in modern times "nothing but prevarication and ruin."

Sympathetic to this collective enthusiasm, though never uncritically committed, Metz and Schillebeeckx looked to develop a response to the secularization narrative that would secure the legitimacy of the modern project while refuting its predictive conclusions regarding Christianity. In formulating this response, both theologians first sought to establish a theological foundation for the modern process of secularization through Christian protology and Christology, affirming the autonomy and freedom of the world by way of standard theological topoi in the Catholic tradition.²³ Having offered this systematic foundation, they then turned to the category of eschatology to make theological sense of the future-oriented dynamic that came to the fore in modernity. In doing this, they were then well positioned to look anew at uniquely Christian notions of history and hope. Eschatology would quickly move from the periphery to the heart of their theological projects.

Metz and Schillebeeckx located within modernity's privileging of the future an important impulse derived from the Christian eschatological vision.²⁴ They argued that eschatological hope no

23. The attention given to the doctrine of creation in particular can be linked to the antimodernist interests prevalent in the Catholic Church leading up to the Second Vatican Council, precisely the period within which both theologians had begun responding to the issue of secularization. Following the promulgation of Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris*, in 1879, Catholic theologians had been largely limited to working within the Thomistic tradition in an effort to curtail the influence of modern philosophical thought upon theology. Though shaped in distinct expressions, Metz and Schillebeeckx were subsequently trained within the Thomistic theological tradition, including Aquinas's metaphysics of creation. As we will see in chapters 1 and 2, this training plainly influenced their earliest writings, and it was from this vantage that both theologians located in the doctrine of creation a permissible yet effective resource for their initial responses to the situation of Europe in the early 1960s. Along with Jodock's *Catholicism Contending with Modernity*, Erik Borgman offers a helpful discussion of the historical context of the church's antimodernist agenda and the privileging of the Thomistic tradition, with particular attention given to the early work of Schillebeeckx, in *Edward Schillebeeckx: A Theologian in His History*, trans. John Bowden, vol. 1, *A Catholic Theology of Culture (1914–1965)* (London: Continuum, 2003), 191–99.

24. It is important to note that the coupling of eschatology and secularization was novel to neither Schillebeeckx nor Metz. In 1949, Karl Löwith published *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), a study in which he argued that modern understandings of history, diverse expressions of the idea of progress, are “secularized” derivations of Jewish and

longer could leave the Christian aloof and indifferent to the dynamics of history, choosing to direct hope toward an eschaton located outside of the world and its history. Rather, they insisted that eschatological hope in a God who is the future of all people energizes Christian efforts to participate in the historical inbreaking of God's reign. Yet, Metz and Schillebeeckx also recognized dangerous limitations in the secularization narrative beyond its hubristic predictions of religion's demise, and they located within the eschatological hope of Christianity a resource for confronting those limitations. In response to the narrative's rigid segregation of faith and public life, both theologians argued that if the hope of the Christian, grounded in the promise of a peaceable kingdom, is not to be envisioned as a private affair indifferent to a future in the making, then the religious commitments of the modern person cannot be hermetically located within the private sphere. Moreover, if there is to be an authentic hope for the future, that hope must not be exhausted by the limits of what the human person can envisage as progress. In that case, nothing genuinely new can be hoped for the future, because the human alone has become its sole author.

By retrieving the doctrine of eschatology within the context of mid-twentieth-century Western European culture, both Metz and Schillebeeckx came to speak of eschatological hope as a practical and active hope that cannot be accounted for adequately through a

Christian concepts of eschatology. In the mid-1960s, Metz and Schillebeeckx would offer related arguments as their eschatological projects developed. In 1966, Hans Blumenberg, a professor of philosophy at the University of Münster, responded to Löwith with a rigorous philosophical and historical critique of his position. In *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (repr., trans. Robert Wallace, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), Blumenberg argued that modern understandings of history are not dependent upon the eschatological structure of Christianity but offer fundamentally distinctive accounts of a future that is the creation of an immanent process of development rather than a transcendent subject. As we will see, although Metz and Schillebeeckx continued to advocate the Christian provenance of the modern interest in freedom, their positions found new expression in their later writings. For a helpful introduction to this debate, see Robert M. Wallace, "Progress, Secularization, and Modernity: The Löwith-Blumenberg Debate," *New German Critique* 22 (Winter 1981): 63-79.

detemporalized and theoretical reflection on the eschaton. Only the praxis of Christian hope can make an eschatological faith meaningful in a culture oriented toward a future in the making. Yet, at the same time, both theologians insisted that Christian praxis could never be identified unambiguously with a particular human project or endeavor. No political or even religious program can claim a singular identity with God's plan for the future. The excess of definitive eschatological salvation places a proviso on or makes conditional all particular and therefore fragmented acts or movements of emancipation. God's promised kingdom cannot be conceived adequately under the conditions of the present.

Thus, by the mid-1960s, both Metz and Schillebeeckx had identified and started to exercise the critical function that eschatology could play in a culture presumably operating under the secularization narrative. Soon, however, both theologians would begin to ask new and more fundamental questions of this culture. Can and should modern history be narrated as one of advancement and success? Whose future does this account of history address? Is modern society constructed such that the futures of all people possess significance? Reflecting on those questions, Metz and Schillebeeckx arrived at similar conclusions. It is not only inaccurate but dangerous to frame history as a continuous advance toward an ever-greater future. That narrative is told from the side of history's victors alone and is ultimately incapable of securing genuine human freedom. The processes of modernity self-destruct and undermine the very hope animating the historical interest in freedom. It is only when history is told as the story of those who suffer, from the perspective of the victims rather than the victors, that a stimulus is located in which the hope and freedom sought after and promised in the life, cross, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are made available.

It was in response to these concerns that Metz began to speak of dangerous memories in the late 1960s. In the memory of suffering, *memoria passionis*, a negative consciousness of future freedom is revealed and a stimulus to overcome injustice is found through the narration of past sufferings. During this same period, Schillebeeckx in turn began to speak of negative contrast experiences. The fundamental human protest and rejection of evil and suffering discloses an unfulfilled yet powerful hope that is the basis on which such protestation is made possible. Negative contrast experiences are eschatological experiences of a limitless hope that energize efforts to overcome suffering in the present.

Moving beyond the challenges presented by the secularization narrative, though not abandoning the claim to freedom that the modern subject seeks to achieve in history, Metz and Schillebeeckx located human suffering at the center of an ambiguous history. By doing this, they would each witness to a uniquely Christian eschatological narrative of history. In their ongoing work over the next three decades, both Metz and Schillebeeckx developed an account of eschatological hope that avoids offering a blueprint for history that either empties history of significance or locates the totality of history within the human project. Rather, eschatology stimulates a practical or productive resistance unto the eschaton that is motivated or catalyzed by taking the history of human suffering seriously. We have not yet experienced the full flourishing of the free human. A just and peaceable kingdom is yet a vague ideal. Nonetheless, past and present suffering remains all too real, and through solidarity such suffering must be remembered, experienced, and challenged. Significant differences in their projects notwithstanding, in the hands of Metz and Schillebeeckx, the Christian eschatological vision provides the stimulus by which a life

of subversive resistance and rebellion against injustice can be realized and sustained in history.

Outlining the Analysis and Argument

The goal of this study is twofold: to analyze the development in the eschatological thought of both Metz and Schillebeeckx while at the same time highlighting the relative strengths in each project for offering a contemporary account of the Christian's hope that might animate and sustain a life of practical resistance in the face of history's unmitigated suffering. For that reason, the chapters of this study are structured as a chronological analysis of the shifts in each theologian's work and proceed toward the goal of bringing these projects into explicit dialogue in the concluding chapter of the book. In this introduction, however, it is important to underscore that there is a similarity in the development of the two projects that can be seen in three identifiable, if inexact, stages of their respective works. We will see that, during the earliest period under consideration, it was in fact by first taking up the concept of secularization that eschatology then moved from the margins to the center of Metz's and Schillebeeckx's theologies. Thus, the first stage begins with their efforts to interpret theological categories in light of their social analyses. We will see that it was precisely this manner of engagement that allowed both Metz and Schillebeeckx to develop and advance the practical character of eschatology. The distinctly modern route by which they retrieved the doctrine of eschatology allowed them to critically affirm the enthusiasm and ambition of modern European society while repositioning the hope of the Christian tradition as a hope in action. The emergence of a "political" eschatology in Metz's writings is examined in chapter 1 and the emergence of an "active hope" in Schillebeeckx's writings is considered in chapter 2.

In the second stage, as Metz and Schillebeeckx began to encounter the voices of those twentieth-century thinkers who had problematized the overly ambitious philosophies of history of the preceding period, as well as the violent sociopolitical consequences of a cold war then spreading throughout Europe, Southeast Asia, and Latin America, we will see that by the mid-1960s Metz and Schillebeeckx began distancing themselves more acutely from the enthusiastic understanding of history that marked their still-emerging practical eschatologies. Although eschatology had moved from the margins to the center of their thought through their engagement with the concept of secularization, as this engagement matured and became even more critical, eschatology transitioned to the privileged vantage point from which to resist and subvert unexamined assumptions about the modern world. The autonomy of Christian eschatological hope, it might be said, was being reclaimed. This gradual process began in the mid-1960s and unfolded throughout the course of Metz's and Schillebeeckx's careers. Consequently, evidence of this modification will surface throughout each of the chapters that follow.

Corresponding to Metz and Schillebeeckx's heightened awareness of the ambiguous relationship between eschatology and the process of secularization, in a third stage of their work we will examine the intensification of their concern with prevailing interpretations of history that arose in the wake of the Enlightenment. Relying in part on insights culled from Frankfurt theorists, both theologians came to acknowledge internal inconsistencies within the processes of modernity that inadvertently corrupted the very hope animating the historical interest in freedom. Though never dismissing the validity or even the implicitly Christian character of the modern claim to freedom in constructing the future, Metz and Schillebeeckx both seek to offer their own narrations of modernity that highlight the

oppressive and dangerous implications of a history framed in light of the idea of progress. A theologically adequate understanding of history recognizes history as inescapably marked by suffering. Consequently, both Metz and Schillebeeckx heighten the attention paid to the history of human suffering and insist that the practical eschatological hope of the Christian must be realized as a subversive protest to that suffering. The Christian's hope in action becomes a life of practical resistance in history. Chapters 3 and 4 will trace these developments in Schillebeeckx's writings, and chapters 5 and 6 will take us through Metz's work.

By providing the reader with both thematic and chronological heuristic resources, I hope to attend more deliberately to the rich and even prophetically subversive contributions made by both Metz and Schillebeeckx without hazarding superficial harmonization. Despite the profound similarities in these two theologians' writings, similarities that I hope will allow us to underscore the particular pressures confronting a practical eschatology, the concerns and interlocutors peculiar to each of these men acutely orient their projects in original and creative directions. By our tracing the development of each project in the chapters that follow, these distinctive features can also come to the fore, which in a complementary fashion also will allow us to draw out the challenges facing a practical eschatology as well as to measure the relative strengths of their divergent responses. The conclusion of the book, then, will initiate this productive dialogue between the two theologians' mature eschatologies. At this point, our task will be twofold. First, we will consider the challenges confronting contemporary eschatology jointly underscored by Metz and Schillebeeckx. Then, by means of comparative analysis, we will identify distinctive characteristics, contributions, and limitations of each project. In particular, attention will be given to Metz's

sensitivity to the apathy of modern culture and the enduring significance of protology in his Belgian colleague's thought. In doing this, we will seek to draw out and place in greater relief the potent resources introduced by both theologians as they struggled over the course of four decades to offer an account of hope responsive to the demands of the world.