

The Solidarity of Humanitarian Activists in Addressing the Humanitarian Crisis in Papua: Understanding the Role of the Subject through the Lens of J. B. Metz's Political Theology

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Abstract

The humanitarian crisis in Papua, Indonesia, persists due to ongoing tensions between the state and indigenous Papuans. This crisis manifests in various forms, including war, horizontal conflicts, murder, arrests, violence, intimidation, and terror. These dehumanising conditions have led to the emergence of individuals and groups who stand in solidarity with those most affected, such as humanitarian activists from diverse backgrounds. Johann Baptist Metz highlighted the significance of solidarity as a cornerstone of his practical fundamental theology. Drawing on this theoretical framework, this study employs a phenomenological approach to explore and analyse the experiences of activists in Papua. The purpose is to capture the lived experiences of those who seek solidarity with vulnerable communities. The findings reveal that solidarity arises from a desire to help others, shared human values, and personal encounters with those who suffer. It develops across all social groups, among fellow sufferers or individuals from more privileged backgrounds.

Keywords: activists, humanitarian crisis, JB Metz's political theology, Papua, solidarity

Introduction

Solidarity is understood as an individual's action to support others, driven by specific motives. According to Scholz, solidarity spans political, social, and civil dimensions. It is political because it involves groups or activists who are concerned with their social environment. It is social because it is rooted in communal bonds, and it is civil because it reflects a sense of shared responsibility among members of society. These three dimensions converge in a moral obligation toward the broader community to challenge and transform structures that perpetuate injustice. From this understanding, Ferdman concludes that "solidarity connects social, political, and moral aspects together" (Ferdman & Kohn, 2018, p. 3). Tava, in his interpretation of Habermas, stresses that solidarity is distinct from justice. While solidarity often arises in response to perceived injustice, injustice itself is not the only foundation for its emergence. As he writes, "Perceived injustice is one of the important sources (among many others) of intersubjective relationships" (Tava, 2023, p. 2). Damayanti argues that solidarity emerges where there is mutual respect, affection, and care among individuals (Damayanti, 2023, p. 49). Virve Repo sees solidarity as one of the most significant motivations for one party to assist another, highlighting that solidarity is always connected to space, and vice versa (Repo, 2024, p. 2). Solidarity, therefore, is not merely a vague feeling of compassion or empathy for others' suffering, but a firm commitment to the common good (Begić, 2024, p. 964). In Christian thought, solidarity is not simply an ideal or a constant goal to be pursued—it is a fundamental principle for how Christians are called to live in the world (Bărbat, 2015, p. 136).

This research is conducted in Papua, the easternmost region of Indonesia. Papua faces persistent challenges across civil, political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions, which recur annually (Koten et al., 2019; Rangga et al., 2023; Koten et al., 2024). In the civil and political spheres, numerous unresolved issues persist, including human rights violations, violence and armed conflict, displacement, restrictions on freedom of expression, corruption, and widespread poverty. Research by the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) on the situation in Papua identifies four core problems: (1) the marginalization of indigenous Papuans, (2) failed development efforts, (3) human rights violations and military violence, and (4) the unresolved historical controversy surrounding Papua's integration into the Republic of Indonesia (Widjojo et al., 2010: 9). Anugerah's research also points to historical grievances and flawed development processes as key sources of ongoing conflict in the region (Anugerah, 2019). Similar conclusions were drawn in a more recent joint study by LIPI and BRIN, presented in the book *Mozaik Cendrawasih*. This study highlights persistent development disparities, public dissatisfaction with government performance, unequal access to healthcare and education, and ongoing challenges in improving the economic conditions of local residents (Elisabeth, 2020).

Based on the data above, it can be concluded that Papua is experiencing an ongoing humanitarian crisis. Ku Carbonell et al., citing the Humanitarian Coalition, categorize humanitarian crises into three main types: (1) natural disasters, including geophysical, hydrological, climatological, meteorological, and biological events; (2) man-made emergencies; and (3) complex emergencies, which often involve a combination of natural and human factors, such as food insecurity and displacement. Their research highlights that humanitarian crises often leave people in urgent need of shelter, food, water, and healthcare services (Ku Carbonell et al., 2024, p. 16). Similarly, Brandon A. Kohrt and colleagues define humanitarian crises as encompassing: (1) man-made disasters, such as armed conflict and displacement; (2) natural disasters, including floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, and droughts; and (3) outbreaks of infectious diseases. They also emphasize that these crises often occur simultaneously, for example, war accompanied by famine or natural disasters compounded by disease outbreaks (Kohrt et al., 2019, p. 1).

Based on the definitions and classifications of humanitarian crises, the author defines a humanitarian crisis as a condition in which individuals are unable to live a dignified life due to human-induced errors and/or natural circumstances. Fundamentally, living as a human being entails the ability to enjoy and express one's existence freely and without external constraints, in line with the principle of freedom. In this study, the term humanitarian crisis specifically refers to a situation where individuals lack access to the fulfillment of their human rights in the civil-political and socio-economic-cultural domains.

In discussing the role of activists in addressing the humanitarian crisis in Papua, this research focuses on interfaith and gender activists who dedicate their efforts to serving, advocating for, and empowering victims of human rights violations, armed conflict, displacement, and inadequate healthcare access (such as HIV/AIDS activists). Even amidst the ongoing crisis, there are individuals who demonstrate deep concern for the challenges faced by the people of Papua. This study examines the contributions of these activists through the lens of Johann Baptist Metz's concept of solidarity. Metz, a pioneer of political theology, underscores the importance of human subjects actively engaging in communal life to work toward the realization of a more just and harmonious world—a "heavenly" world.

Many scholars have drawn on Johann Baptist Metz's political theology as a foundational framework in their research. Sopiani et al. highlight the significance of the memory of forgiveness as a vital dimension of solidarity (Sopiani et al., 2023). F.X. Armada Riyanto underscores the centrality of hope as a "faithful companion" to humanity, inspiring individuals to open their hearts to both God and others (Riyanto, 2021). Robson, in exploring the intersection of Metz's political theology with Carmelite spirituality (particularly Edith Stein's thought), argues for a broader perspective, suggesting that political theology should not be confined to themes of suffering but should also embrace the concept of resurrection (Robson, 2014). Slaubaugh examines the relationship between open-eye mysticism and liturgical mysticism, proposing a new model he terms open-eye liturgical mysticism (Slaubaugh, 2021). Firmanto investigates Metz's concepts of incarnation and secularity, concluding that human identity is deeply shaped through shared experiences of suffering and encounters with others (Firmanto, 2021). Prevot highlights that the historical experience of suffering must serve as a persistent challenge to societal complacency. He advocates for a Christ-centered and socially engaged faith that envisions the renewal of the world and the realization of justice for all humanity (Prevot, 2020). Jandjsek explores the concept of hope, asserting that the hope of this age is found in fostering solidarity not only with the people of today but also with future generations and even the dead (Jandjsek, 2024).

From previous studies and the existing theoretical framework, the author identifies a critical area for further discussion: the solidarity of subjects (activists) who advocate for other subjects (the oppressed). Activists inherently demonstrate solidarity with the situations they navigate. They live in community with others, working both for and alongside them. However, they also face significant psychological pressures, often being marginalized, intimidated, labeled as separatists, or even constrained by opposing forces. This prompts key questions: What roles do activists play, and what challenges do they face in their efforts to address the humanitarian crisis in Papua? What are the concrete manifestations of their solidarity?

Metz emphasizes the importance of taking sides with those who are neglected. This preferential option is grounded in two primary reasons. First, the Christian faith exists in the world—it is a historical faith. Christianity is embedded in history and cannot disregard the reality of historical existence. The history that Metz refers to is the concrete context of human life today. A theology that detaches itself from history implies a Christian faith that is unthreatened and unaffected by the lived realities of the

present (Metz, 1969, p. 13). Second, there is the human responsibility to care for one another. Quoting Luke 11:13 “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven...”, Metz stresses that respect for and readiness to help the vulnerable is a Christian imperative, modeled after God’s goodness toward His creation (Metz, 2006). In the context of Papua, such solidarity is not merely a moral or spiritual expression, but a theological virtue that gives rise to social responsibility—manifested in active engagement for empowerment, welfare, peace, and justice.

This study aims to provide an in-depth description of the experiences of subjects involved in solidarity actions towards the humanitarian crisis in Papua. The study begins with a literature review on Johann Baptist Metz’s concept of political theology, which then becomes the basis for developing the theoretical framework. In the results and discussion section, the focus is on the forms of solidarity shown by activists in responding to the humanitarian crisis. The solidarity in question is not only symbolic or rhetorical, but includes various concrete actions such as policy advocacy, public campaigns, community organizing, and direct assistance to victims and affected families. In addition, solidarity is also realized through the dissemination of information aimed at building public awareness and pressuring the authorities to take responsibility. This research concludes with critical reflections and recommendations based on the main findings, in order to strengthen transformative and sustainable solidarity practices.

Method

This research employs a qualitative method with a Heideggerian phenomenological approach. Heidegger’s phenomenology begins with the idea that humans are not primarily thinking beings but beings who first exist (*dasein*) to encounter phenomena. In the process of discovery, humans come to understand (*verstehen*) various possibilities within the transient reality of time (*zeit*). Beyond this temporal reality lies *das Nicht* (nothingness), symbolizing death or emptiness. Self-realization within the span of time serves as the gateway to human existence in the world. Heidegger’s phenomenology emphasizes the notion of humans as thrown beings (*geworfenheit*), existing in the world prior to becoming thinking beings. Humans are inherently unified with reality and possess inseparable consciousness with the world (intentionality). The most concrete manifestation of this thrownness is found in our immersion in routine, daily life. The ultimate goal is to become authentic human beings (*eigentlichkeit*). Although humans are thrown into existence, they bear the responsibility of giving meaning to their lives. This process involves grappling with existential anxiety and the inevitability of mortality, yet it drives individuals to transcend the mass man (*das Man*) and move toward *eigentliches dasein* (authentic *dasein*).

The qualitative approach emphasizes the researcher’s role in creating or interpreting meaning from social reality (Subagyo, 2020, p. 62). In this study, the reality being examined is the lived experiences of humanitarian activists. The research process involved several stages: first, reflection: The researcher began by reflecting on the challenges they encountered, which led to the selection of the theme of solidarity among humanitarian activists who have been working extensively in Papua. Second, research location: Papua was chosen as the primary research site due to its ongoing humanitarian issues. Third, engagement with Activists: Activists were contacted and invited to share their experiences in their work. Fourth, building rapport: this interaction with the activists facilitated a more natural and in-depth sharing of their experiences. Fifth, data analysis: following the fieldwork, the researcher withdrew from the field to process, analyze, and summarize the research findings.

The data processing was conducted using a "dialogue with" approach (Riyanto, 2020). In this process, the researcher engaged the collected data in dialogue with Johann Baptist Metz's concept of solidarity within his Political Theology. The phenomenological exploration of the subjects' experiences was juxtaposed with Metz's writings and those of other scholars discussing similar themes. Metz's Political Theology underscores the need for faith reflection to be grounded in reality—understood not as abstract speculation but as narrative. This narrative-based approach is reflected in the presentation of data, which brings to life the lived experiences of activists. The solidarity experiences of the activists are organized and narrated around specific themes, including the role of the subject, the experience of solidarity, and their aspirations for shaping a just and equitable reality.

Metz highlights the intrinsic connection between the history of human life and God's plan of salvation in the world. History, as he describes, is a lived experience marked by conflict and contradiction, while salvation represents God's act of reconciliation through Jesus Christ. Metz explicitly argues that a theology overly reliant on abstract argumentation, detached from its foundational elements of narrative and suffering, ultimately erodes the essence of Christian salvation (Metz, 1973, 93). In this research, the experiences of humanitarian activists are analyzed through the lens of Metz's political theology, which emphasizes the centrality of narrative and suffering. The analysis explores how activists encounter and interpret the "cross" in their work, shedding light on their personal struggles and the meaning they ascribe to these experiences within their commitment to solidarity.

Findings and Discussion

This section will be divided into two main parts. The first part will outline the concept of solidarity within Johann Baptist Metz's political theology. The second part will describe the solidarity experiences of activists working to uphold humanitarian values in Papua, illustrating how their actions align with and reflect Metz's theological framework.

Political Theology of JB Metz

In exploring Johann Baptist Metz's political theology, this paper will focus on key aspects relevant to the discussion. These include Metz's critique of the dominant culture, particularly modern thought and the practices of the Church in his time, the role of subjects in theology, and the significance of solidarity in God's work of salvation throughout human history. These elements form the foundation for understanding how solidarity plays a crucial role in addressing suffering and injustice in the world according to Metz's theological framework.

A Critique of the Dominant Ideology

As Metz explains, political theology is, at its core, theology itself, but it seeks to integrate the context of human life into every theological reflection as a testimony to God in our time. Drawing on Rahner's concept of the anthropological turn, as well as the existence and challenges of the Church in modern times, Metz argues that the anthropological turn is not simply a precondition of (transcendental) consciousness but rather a dialectical dynamic in which the human person is situated in history and in relation to other humans. Metz's theology is described as "post-idealist" because it critiques traditional theologies that engage in theological reflection without considering the suffering of the human condition (Metz, 1998, p. 23). In the Gospel narratives, Metz notes, there are numerous accounts of Jesus, who, as God, expresses deep sympathy with the suffering of human beings. These stories form a foundational aspect of Metz's understanding of theology, where the suffering of humanity cannot be ignored in

theological discourse.

There is only one salvation history, which is shared by humanity together with God. This history is experienced by human beings as they journey through it. It cannot be isolated or generalized as belonging to any particular group or party. The historical journey, which honors the subject who walks through it, inherently involves interruption. By interruption, Metz means the call for human consciousness to pause and recognize the phenomena unfolding in history. Metz's theology is rooted in God's presence in history, especially through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The presence of Jesus is consistently marked by his respect for and concern toward those who suffer. He also embraced the reality of suffering unjustly (Metz, 2022, p. 5). The history of suffering is an undeniable reality in the world, and Christianity bears responsibility for addressing the crises that exist in the world. This responsibility stems from the fact that Jesus entered the world to redeem humanity from its crises. Height affirms Metz's position by suggesting that the historical identity crisis faced by Christianity today is not a result of a crisis of faith among people, but a crisis of Christian subjects and institutions that reject the true meaning of discipleship. As Christianity has evolved, there is a growing suspicion that the identity of Christ, once central to the faith, has been diminished or even lost in some form (Haight et al., 2024, 95). While the doctrines of the faith remain unchanged, its practice and spirit have been altered.

The messianic identity of Christ, as united within the Church, was severely challenged by the rise of bourgeois religion. Metz criticized the state of the Church in his time, feeling it had lost its way. He writes, "In the Christianity of our time, the messianic religion of the Bible has largely been transformed into bourgeois religion" (Metz, 1981, pp. 1-2). For Metz, the concept of bourgeois religion arises not because religion itself has taken on the role of social movements advocating for equality and justice, but because it has become a tool that supports and reinforces the status quo. It becomes a religion that serves the interests of those who are already secure and well-off. Bourgeois religion, in Metz's view, is like an opiate for the suffering—the poor and marginalized—offering them false comfort without leading to real transformation. It pacifies them with teachings that fail to challenge or change their circumstances, such as the comforting but ultimately unhelpful message, "... but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it," (Mt 16:25). Metz offers an alternative vision of religion, one that recognizes its true discipleship identity. He emphasizes the importance of a conversion of the heart. Religion, in this sense, must be present to open its heart to all people, without exception, and strive for genuine transformation rather than simply providing solace to those who are suffering (Metz, 1981, pp. 71-75).

The critique presented by Metz offers a compelling and necessary challenge to dominant theological ideologies that have become detached from the lived realities of human suffering. By situating theology within history and insisting on the centrality of suffering in theological reflection, Metz reinvigorates the prophetic dimension of faith. His rejection of "bourgeois religion" exposes how institutional Christianity can become complicit in maintaining systems of inequality when it prioritizes comfort over confrontation. Metz's call for a "conversion of the heart" and his insistence on a theology that listens to the cries of the oppressed is not only a theological imperative but also a moral one. It demands that the Church move beyond abstract doctrines to a praxis of solidarity and justice. This vision reclaims the radical, transformative essence of Christianity and holds contemporary believers and institutions accountable to the true meaning of discipleship as modeled by Christ—a discipleship rooted not in power or privilege, but in proximity to the suffering and in active participation in their liberation.

The Urgency of the Subject

From his own experience, Metz observed that the subject is often dismissed or overlooked in modern thought. Universality, he argued, can diminish the significance of the individual subject's experience. In a history that prioritizes collective progress, the existence of the subject is frequently seen as irrelevant or secondary. Metz's emphasis on the subject stems from his critique of Rahner's transcendental concept, where the individual is drawn out of oneself and toward God, potentially erasing

the uniqueness of individual experience (Haight et al., 2024, p. 86). Metz argues that each subject has a unique experience of subjectivity that cannot be generalized. The experience of a subject is deeply personal and cannot be substituted or represented by another person or group. The subject is not only aware of their existence but also possesses the ability to self-realize. Within each subject lies a rich interior world, including a sense of self, desires, intuitions, attitudes, moods, and decisions (Ashley, 2015, p. 87). These personal experiences are fundamental to the subject's identity and are central to understanding human existence in a meaningful way.

Metz's political theology was shaped by his theological reflection on three key challenges of his time: the Marxist critique, the Auschwitz disaster, and the challenges posed by the Third World. He drew inspiration from thinkers such as Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, and the scholars of the Frankfurt School. Additionally, Metz revisited ancient Jewish thought and the often-overlooked wisdom within Judaism, using it as a lens through which to critique and expand theological understanding. In particular, Metz compared Jewish thought with the Hellenistic dualism that had influenced much of Christian theology. Hellenistic dualism, which separates the subject and object and treats the worldly and divine as distinct realms, stood in contrast to the Jewish conception of history. Jewish thought, as Metz emphasized, presents a unified view of history, where the sacred and the profane, the divine and the earthly, are inseparably linked. This unified historical view allowed Metz to challenge the dualistic thinking that had dominated theological traditions and propose a more integrated understanding of the relationship between humanity, history, and God.

From these three critical challenges, Metz offers a new understanding of the importance of interruption in comprehending both subjects and the history of their domination. *First*, the Marxist challenge: Metz explains that the threat posed by the Age of Enlightenment led to the danger of the subject's disappearance. This intellectual movement contributed to the rise of modern society's inclination toward myths and godless ideologies, which diminished the role of the subject in both theology and society. *Second*, the legacy of Auschwitz: Theology, according to Metz, belatedly recognized the reality that it was theology after Auschwitz. The *logos* of Christian theology had to be rethought, as it had been shaped by ideas that often lacked a connection to the subject and to history. At a deeper level, theology emerges through the event of remembrance—a remembrance of the suffering subject. For Metz, political theology centers on this remembrance, where the suffering subject cannot simply be suppressed, forgotten, or idealistically overcome. The history of human suffering must remain a critical part of theological reflection. *Third*, the third world or non-Europe: Metz argues for the necessity of incorporating the perspective of the Third World, or non-European regions, into theological discourse. This involves taking seriously the experiences of resistance and transformation against the domination of Western European ideologies, which have historically shaped much of global thought. The theology that emerges from this context should recognize and challenge the oppressive structures of Western-centric truth. Through these three reflections, Metz introduces the concept of interruption as essential to understanding human history, suffering, and liberation, stressing that a true political theology must be grounded in real historical experiences, particularly those of marginalized subjects.

Metz also references the dialectic of Enlightenment to position the constructed subject in the postmodern era. For Metz, the core of Christian faith and Western civilization that is worth preserving is the concept of human beings as subjects. These subjects are endowed with dignity and the responsibility to assert their existence, expressing themselves through the symbols, stories, and histories that shape their world (Ashley, 2015, pp. 43-44). The Enlightenment's glorification of human worth and excellence was a positive development. However, by focusing historical narratives on the stories of the

victors, the lives and experiences of the marginalized and oppressed were often overlooked or ignored. Metz argues that the purpose of emphasizing human beings is not because they are victors or powerful figures, but because they are subjects in their own right—real human beings with inherent dignity. It is the lived experience of these individuals, rather than their status or success, that is central to Metz's understanding of human significance.

The presence of the subject allows him to realize that he exists in the world and journeys alongside other subjects toward God, who serves as the ultimate destination. In this journey, individuals define their own presence. The presence of Christians in the world holds significant meaning, as they seek to imitate Jesus, who came in humility to save humanity (Metz, 1998b). Within the Christian context, Metz refers to Christians as formators or initiators of the new heavens and earth (Firmanto, 2021, p. 67). The Christian is one who is drawn out of themselves and into God. This person is “always with God,” embodying a life that reflects divine presence and purpose.

In the context of current conditions, Johann Baptist Metz's thoughts on the urgency of the subject become increasingly relevant, especially when facing humanitarian crises, social inequality, and the dominance of grand narratives that often ignore concrete individual experiences. In an increasingly digitized and fragmented global world, personal experiences are often reduced to statistical data or absorbed by collective narratives that ignore subjectivity. Metz emphasizes that the subject is not simply part of the system, but a person with unique experiences, self-awareness, and the capacity to remember suffering and act ethically. Contemporary realities, such as armed conflict, structural injustice, and climate and humanitarian crises in various parts of the world—including Papua—demand a theological and social approach that sides with the wounded and marginalized. In this regard, Metz's political theology encourages an “interruption” to the mainstream of discourse that overly prioritizes progress and power, by reappropriating the voices of victims and suffering subjects as the center of reflection. This realization is not only ethical and political, but also spiritual, as each subject is a reflection of created human dignity and is invited to walk together towards God. Therefore, in the face of today's global challenges, a theology rooted in the real experience of the subject—as developed by Metz—becomes an essential foundation for theology.

Solidarity with Suffering

An essential criterion for theology, according to Metz, is whether it affirms or rejects solidarity with humanity (Metz, 2022a, p. xiii). This conviction underscores Metz's theological approach: no human being can exist in isolation in a pluralistic world. The Gospel story of the Good Samaritan exemplifies this principle, demonstrating the importance of transcending distinctions between “me” and “him” or “us” and “them.” The Samaritan's actions reflect an innate drive to assist others in need. Solidarity, for Metz, is not merely an expression of empathy or critical concern but a deeper commitment intertwined with the hope that binds all humanity together. This hope-filled solidarity is central to Christian theology, emphasizing a shared journey of suffering and redemption, rooted in the love and compassion exemplified by Christ.

For Metz, solidarity manifests in two distinct forms (Metz, 1980, pp. 232-236). *First*, solidarity in the contemporary world. This type of solidarity emphasizes the Church's engagement with the present realities of the world. Metz critiques the tendency of the Church to isolate itself as a superstructure, distinct and detached from the world's struggles. Such separation leads to a diminished sense of accountability for the pressing issues of humanity, including poverty, violence, and inequality. Metz argues that the Church must not remain neutral or indifferent to the world's condition but must immerse

itself in these realities as a sign of true discipleship. *Second*, general solidarity. General solidarity encompasses the universal interconnectedness of humanity. It reflects a commitment that transcends specific contexts, binding all people together in their shared humanity. This form of solidarity aligns with the Christian ethos of *imitatio Christi*, the imitation of Christ, who entered fully into the human condition to bring salvation. For Metz, the Church's responsibility in the world cannot be reduced to mere concern or charity. It must be a profound, Christ-like solidarity rooted in active participation in the world's suffering and hope. The Church's mission, then, is not only spiritual but also deeply practical, aimed at fostering justice and transformation in alignment with Christ's example.

Solidarity is central to Metz's practical fundamental theology, which he frames as political theology. He emphasizes the role of the subject, whose existence serves as a sign of God's presence in the world. Metz defines solidarity as an act of help, support, and shared effort aimed at restoring the dignity of those who suffer (Metz, 1980, p. 229). For Metz, solidarity is deeply intertwined with memory and narrative. These elements are essential to theological practice, as solidarity gives life to human memory and narrative, transforming them into meaningful action. At the same time, memory and narrative provide the foundation for solidarity, ensuring that acts of compassion and justice are rooted in past events. Solidarity does not arise in isolation or abstraction; it is always informed by history and past experiences. This connection between solidarity, memory, and narrative ensures that solidarity is not merely theoretical but grounded in the lived realities of suffering and redemption. It bears witness to past struggles and inspires present and future efforts to address human pain and injustice. Through this, Metz ensures that solidarity remains an active and transformative force within theology and society.

Theological discourse must engage directly with the realities of life, remaining historically aware and attentive to the struggles and catastrophes humanity has faced throughout its ongoing journey (Haight et al., 2024, p. 17). Metz's new political theology seeks to confront the pervasive amnesia toward solidarity that characterizes much of contemporary thought. He warns that theology loses its transformative and liberating power when it detaches from the context of human suffering. For Metz, the discourse about God can only remain universal, relevant, and truly human-centered if it rekindles our sensitivity to the pain of others and calls us to a deeper sense of responsibility for those who suffer (Metz, 2022a). By rooting theology in the lived experiences of humanity, it can fulfill its mission as a witness to God's presence in the world and as an agent of hope and justice.

In the context of this research, the term local community refers to the group of people living in and around the areas directly affected by the humanitarian crisis in Papua. This includes indigenous Papuans as well as non-indigenous residents who share in the social, political, and economic dynamics of the region. The local community encompasses individuals, families, traditional leaders, religious groups, and grassroots organizations who experience the realities of conflict, displacement, marginalization, and state neglect on a daily basis. Their perspectives, experiences, and responses are essential to understanding the full scope of the crisis, as they are not only the primary subjects of suffering but also potential agents of change and resilience. Engaging with the local community means recognizing their voice, agency, and lived experiences as central to any meaningful expression of solidarity and to the development of a theology that is both contextually grounded and socially transformative.

Humanitarian Activists: Subject Solidarity

This section highlights the experiences and solidarity of humanitarian activists addressing the humanitarian crisis in the Land of Papua. The discussion will explore their roles in responding to the

crisis, the manifestation of their solidarity in daily efforts, and their aspirations for creating a more just and compassionate world. By narrating their lived experiences, this section seeks to uncover the depth of their commitment and the challenges they face as they strive to uphold humanitarian values in a complex and often hostile environment. Through their stories, the essence of solidarity as a transformative force will be brought to light.

Through the description of the experiences of humanitarian activists involved in responding to the crisis in the Land of Papua, this section succeeds in revealing the various dimensions of solidarity that are manifested in concrete daily actions. The solidarity shown is not only in the form of moral support, but also includes advocacy, public education, community empowerment, and the courage to speak out against injustice. The narratives show that activists' commitment is not born from passive empathy, but from active involvement and willingness to face risks for the sake of human values. It also shows how solidarity can be a transformative force that shapes identities, strengthens networks between individuals, and drives social change in politically and structurally challenging contexts.

The Role of Humanitarian Activists

This research involved interviews with six humanitarian activists, each serving in distinct but interconnected fields, reflecting the diverse scope of activism in Papua. Activist A focuses on human rights advocacy, socio-political issues, and the socio-cultural economy, working to address systemic inequalities and injustices. Activist B, a woman activist from a privileged background, dedicates herself to supporting political prisoners, investigating arms sales, and empowering indigenous communities and women through awareness programs. Activist C advocates for justice, democracy, human rights, and peace, engaging deeply in structural and grassroots initiatives. Activist D works with refugees and addresses broader humanitarian and justice-related concerns, providing support to displaced communities and advocating for equitable solutions. Informant E, a health activist, has long been committed to assisting people living with HIV/AIDS. His work includes educational outreach about the HIV/AIDS epidemic, offering legal and welfare support, and collaborating with humanitarian organizations to support refugee welfare in Papua. Finally, Activist F, a rural teacher in South Papua, combines education with activism. Beyond teaching, she researches and publishes books on literacy and local culture, particularly folklore, and fosters community development through digital-based economic initiatives. These activists exemplify the diverse roles and innovative approaches needed to confront the multi-faceted humanitarian crisis in Papua. Each brings unique perspectives, skills, and dedication to addressing the urgent issues facing the region.

The activists shared their experiences of working in the humanitarian field, with most having dedicated between 6 to 20 years as activists. Activist A reflected on the challenges of remaining true to the core values of activism, noting a tendency for some activists to focus narrowly on specific cases while losing sight of the broader organizational spirit. For him, activism is driven by the principles he upholds, not just the emergence of isolated issues. Activist B emphasized that his identity as an activist offers continuous opportunities for learning—not only to acquire new experiences and skills but also to build extensive networks. He highlighted the importance of collaboration, explaining that both he and his organization are expected to work with diverse stakeholders. Activist C expressed joy in her activism, particularly because it allows her to form meaningful friendships, gain insights into various issues, and actively contribute to defending the public interest. For Activists D and E, their commitment to activism stems from their deep, long-term connection to Papua, having lived there for nearly 40 years. Their experiences have shaped their dedication to addressing the region's humanitarian challenges and

fostering solidarity with its people. “The experience of encountering the poor, whose basic rights are neglected, who lack access to justice, whose voices are silenced, malnourished children, pregnant women unable to receive medical care, and children out of school because their schools are closed—that is what inspires and drives me to engage in humanitarian activities in Papua.” These life experiences have brought her to a profound realization that Jesus in Papua is the crucified Jesus. Activist F, on the other hand, focuses on education, drawing from her background as a teacher and book author. Her close interaction with rural communities shaped her commitment to continue teaching and empowering the local population, aiming to address their pressing educational and social needs.

Activists often face pressure or even terror from various parties or circumstances, particularly when they are actively assisting communities in addressing specific issues (C). In some cases, local officials are responsible for intimidation, though this may cease when reported and mediated through higher authorities (B). However, instances of intimidation and terror—such as those carried out by the military or unknown individuals—often remain unresolved. Activist D, for example, shared her harrowing experience: “The worst experience I ever faced was receiving phone calls and being terrorized by the security forces and military. This is an experience I will never forget in my life.” She left her statement unfinished, reflecting the gravity of the ordeal. On the other hand, activist A considered herself fortunate to have received support from her superiors and colleagues, who helped shield her from external threats. Beyond the physical intimidation and terror, she also recounted the emotional toll of seeing agreements made in discussions with the government and military ignored or left unimplemented after meetings (A). Another painful experience shared by activist E was learning about fellow activists who either died mysteriously or at a young age, which she perceived as another form of intimidation. Despite being aware of the risks, Activist E remained steadfast in her commitment to the humanitarian cause. As an activist devoted to supporting individuals living with HIV/AIDS, he often feels deep sadness when encountering stigma, not only directed at the sufferers but also at himself as their companion. Similarly, activist F, a teacher, shared her struggles with the burden of taking on additional responsibilities beyond teaching. These extra duties significantly impact the quality of teaching and learning activities.

Metz’s concept of interruption resonates deeply with the existential experiences of humanitarian activists in Papua. While many remain indifferent to the suffering of others, these activists are present and deeply engaged in responding to the crises around them. Their commitment reflects a readiness to be interrupted by others—especially those whose suffering disrupts the comfort of their own lives. This interruptive disposition lies at the heart of Metz’s thought, for he believes that the true vocation of a human being is to mirror Christ, who allowed himself to be disturbed by the suffering of others.

For activists, success lies not merely in achieving the final goal but in the journey and the process itself (A). This perspective is crucial because activism is not a periodic effort but an ongoing commitment. Furthermore, the success of activist initiatives relies heavily on collaboration with multiple stakeholders. The outcomes also depend on the dedication of other partners involved (B). When a case is successfully resolved, there is a sense of accomplishment, often accompanied by gratitude from those they have assisted. Typically, the individuals they help reach out to express their thanks (C). Activist E shared a particularly memorable aspect of her work: “The most meaningful part of assisting people with HIV/AIDS since the beginning has been listening to their stories.” She noted that these individuals face diverse struggles, including self-identity, sexual orientation, economic challenges, social pressures, and sexual behavior issues. Similarly, Activist F described a positive experience from her role as a teacher: “Teachers in rural areas are highly valued because they hold strong symbolic capital in the eyes

of the community.” She expressed joy in knowing her presence brings meaningful benefits to the local community.

The experiences of these activists reinforce Metz’s argument that the presence of committed subjects can be a manifestation of God’s own presence. God never abandons His people. He does not act sporadically, for He exists in eternity. Within that eternal presence, God accompanies, strengthens, and remains intimately close to His creation. Metz emphasized that the foundation of Christian solidarity does not lie in the logical frameworks of various schools of thought, but rather in the source of faith itself—namely, the reflection on humanity as *imitatio Christi*. To live as *imitatio Christi* means to act in the manner of Christ, who stood in solidarity with the full breadth of human struggle. Christ’s presence reveals a deep concern for every person, treating each individual as a subject with inherent dignity. The essence of solidarity occupies a central place in Metz’s thought, particularly in light of the human tendency toward apathy and selective concern for the suffering of others.

Solidarity

Solidarity among activists often stems from their personal experiences before and during their involvement in activism. For Informants B and E, the seeds of activism were planted early, as they were introduced to the activist world through their extended families during their elementary school years. After completing their university education, both chose to pursue activism because they found fulfillment in it. Activist B, who comes from a privileged background and studied abroad, reflected: “If I worked solely for the demands of a job, I would find more financial benefit in other sectors, such as companies, banks, or government offices, which offer greater opportunities for financial security.” Meanwhile, activist C developed an early interest in journalism and activism, which eventually led him to embrace the activist path. He chose this direction out of a strong sense of solidarity with the vulnerable and those often victimized by others. These shared experiences highlight how personal values and early exposure shape the commitment and unity among activists. Activists A and D began their advocacy work openly when it was mandated by their respective institutions. Over time, their experiences brought them face-to-face with powerful stories of suffering. Activist D recounted a particularly impactful experience:

One meaningful experience during my time as an activist was meeting refugees from East Aifat and listening to their stories. They shared their struggles, fleeing their hometowns due to the conflict between the Papuan National Liberation Army and the Indonesian Military. They spoke about the hardships of living as refugees, struggling to find food and shelter for survival. They described sleeping on tree roots and in small caves in the forest, and how pregnant women had to flee and even give birth in these difficult conditions.

The positive impact of social media has been strongly felt by activists B and F. Activist B noted that issues shared on social media often receive rapid responses from various members of the activists’ coalition. This has significantly contributed to building broader public solidarity around humanitarian issues in Papua. However, she observed a seasonal trend in solidarity, where support intensifies during crises but diminishes once the situation stabilizes, with everyone returning to their individual priorities. To address this, she emphasized the need for consistent effort and strategic collaboration. Meanwhile, activist F leverages his role as a teacher to go beyond merely delivering academic material. He actively engages in economic empowerment initiatives by using technology to promote local products created by his students and villagers. This approach not only enriches the local economy but also showcases how technological advancements can support broader community development efforts.

The solidarity exhibited by activists extends universally across all groups. Activist E explained,

Since 2006, I have worked at the grassroots level with vulnerable groups, victims of human rights violations, and refugees, but also at the policy-making level with village, district, and provincial governments. My work spans engaging with the poor, whose basic rights are often neglected, as well as with political elites and those in power.

She emphasized that the greatest challenge in activism lies in maintaining “commitment and loyalty to always stand with the victims, the poor, the marginalized, and the voiceless, without expecting financial compensation.” Recognizing that the poor lack access to essential resources such as a stable economy, education, and healthcare, she asserted that activists cannot demand anything in return from those they serve. This highlights the selfless dedication required in advocacy for vulnerable communities.

This solidarity is not the product of bureaucratic strategy, but the fruit of a spirituality rooted in faith in a God who takes the side of the oppressed. As Metz argues, *memoria passionis*—the act of remembering suffering that the world prefers to forget—becomes a prophetic force within the praxis of the individuals in this study. They are open-eyed mystics who do not turn away from the harsh realities of the world; rather, they dwell within them, bearing witness to the presence of God in the faces of the marginalized. In addition to *memoria passionis*, Activist B illustrates that solidarity is also rooted in human tradition. He chose to become an activist and advocate for the marginalized because he had been exposed to activism through his parents and family from an early age. The spirit of activism, nurtured since childhood, is difficult to abandon—even in the face of enticing alternatives. There is a deep sense of loyalty embedded in the habits and values formed early in life.

Building a Papua That Embraces Humanity

Indigenous Papuans face severe racism and discrimination, which deeply affects their communities. Their villages are often neglected in critical areas such as education, healthcare, and economic empowerment. A harmful stereotype persists, propagated by state authorities and outsiders who come to Papua, that associates Indigenous Papuans—characterized by their black skin and curly hair—with separatism, ignorance, drunkenness, and troublemaking. This prejudice has contributed to a lack of serious and sustainable development efforts in Indigenous Papuan communities and villages (E). Addressing these injustices requires a committed effort to dismantle stereotypes, prioritize equitable development, and foster a Papua that values and respects humanity.

Development in Papua must prioritize respect for local wisdom and incorporate an understanding of Papuan anthropology that fosters growth rather than destruction (A). Achieving this requires all parties to actively listen and learn from one another. Peaceful dialogue, free from pressure and mutual suspicion, is essential to building a more harmonious Papua. Poverty remains a significant challenge, driven by the disparity between migrants and Indigenous Papuans. Addressing this issue demands efforts to prepare better human resources for the future (C). A collective commitment to improving the quality of education is vital, with the government bearing the greatest responsibility. Leaders in Papua must embody two critical qualities to succeed: 1) a fear of God, and 2) a heart committed to service. Without these foundational principles, even the most capable leaders risk failing to create meaningful and lasting change. Indigenous Papuans require more than just physical development, such as roads, airports, ports, plantations, and rice fields. They need efforts that touch the heart and foster meaningful connection—engaging in dialogue that speaks to their lived experiences and emotions. A strong and effective

education system is key, as it will produce individuals capable of critical thinking and self-development (B). However, good education relies on the foundation of a well-structured system and collaborative efforts among all stakeholders to meet the needs of the community (F). Building a better Papua requires all individuals—guided by intelligence, virtue, and compassion—to create a peaceful, safe, and prosperous environment. Furthermore, true progress in Papua means eliminating conflicts and addressing human rights violations. All human rights issues must be resolved with dignity, ensuring fairness, equality, and respect for every individual (D).

Up to this point, efforts to build a Papua that embraces humanity have seen limited but meaningful progress, marked by increased awareness of the injustices faced by Indigenous Papuans and a growing call for more inclusive development. However, significant challenges remain. Deep-rooted racism, persistent stereotypes, and unequal access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and economic opportunities continue to marginalize Indigenous communities. While some infrastructure development has taken place, it often lacks cultural sensitivity and fails to address the deeper, systemic issues affecting Papuan society. Dialogue between communities and the government is still constrained by mistrust and unequal power dynamics, and the quality of education—crucial for long-term empowerment—remains inadequate due to systemic weaknesses and lack of coordination. Although there are voices advocating for justice, peace, and respectful engagement rooted in local wisdom, these aspirations have yet to translate into sustained, transformative policy. Thus, while the vision of a Papua that fully values humanity is clearly articulated, the realization of that vision is still in its early stages and requires a stronger, more unified commitment from all sectors of society.

The activists' hopes for a brighter future underscore the importance of listening to the voices of the voiceless. As Metz emphasizes, the "North" remains too dominant over the "South"—a term he uses to highlight social inequality and the modern world's condescending view of those deemed underdeveloped. Modernity is marked by rivalry and competition, driven by the pursuit of self-sufficiency and the interests of exclusive groups. In this system, human beings are often reduced to objects of utility, and others are frequently sacrificed for personal or collective gain. Competition enables the powerful to prosper, while the weak are left marginalized and deemed of little worth in the life of the community. In response to this condition, Metz proposes a renewed understanding of post-bourgeois individualization in light of the Gospel. He insists that even the poorest and most helpless person is more valuable than any totalizing economic or social system (Metz, 1981: 74). Like Metz, the activists reject the either/or dichotomy often found in eschatological thought—between a "presidential" eschatology that seeks to preserve the present as if it were eternal, and a "passive" eschatology that merely waits for God's coming in the future. In contrast, Christian eschatology, according to Metz, must be active, productive, militant, and political. It calls believers to begin realizing the values of eternity and salvation here and now, in the midst of a suffering world.

Conclusion

This research builds upon the discussion of J.B. Metz's concept of solidarity, offering new insights by exploring how individuals embody and practice this concept in their daily lives. The findings highlight the lived experiences of activists and their efforts to foster solidarity through their actions and commitments. From this research, several key conclusions can be drawn:

First, humanitarian activists in Papua play diverse and vital roles in addressing the ongoing humanitarian crisis. They engage in a broad range of activities, from human rights advocacy and support

for political prisoners to healthcare education, refugee assistance, and rural education. These activists, coming from varied backgrounds—including religious, gender, health, and educational sectors—contribute by empowering communities, raising awareness, challenging unjust policies, and directly supporting vulnerable groups like HIV/AIDS patients and displaced persons. Their work reflects a deep commitment to upholding justice and human dignity in an environment marked by systemic neglect and violence.

Second, however their efforts are met with significant challenges. Many activists face intimidation, surveillance, and even threats of violence—often from state actors or unidentified groups. Such hostility can result in emotional trauma, fear for personal safety, and feelings of isolation. In some cases, agreements made with authorities are ignored or undermined, leading to disillusionment. Despite these pressures, activists persist, grounded in personal convictions, spiritual strength, and solidarity with the people of Papua. They often carry a heavy emotional burden, particularly when witnessing systemic neglect or the death of fellow activists, yet they remain dedicated to their cause.

Third, solidarity, as practiced by these activists, takes on tangible and transformative forms. It manifests not just in words or symbolic gestures, but through concrete actions like policy advocacy, educational outreach, economic empowerment, and accompaniment of marginalized individuals. Solidarity is rooted in personal experiences and relationships, often shaped from a young age or through direct encounters with suffering. It is expressed through listening, sharing stories, and walking alongside those in pain. By embracing both grassroots involvement and institutional engagement, these activists demonstrate that solidarity is not a one-time act, but a continuous and evolving commitment to justice, dignity, and shared humanity.

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