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THE TURN TO THE NEIGHBOR: EMMANUEL LEVINAS'S CONCEPTUAL  
AFFINITIES WITH LIBERATION THEOLOGY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and  
Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Alain Mayama

December 2007

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Alain Mayama

2007

THE TURN TO THE NEIGHBOR: EMMANUEL LEVINAS'S CONCEPTUAL  
AFFINITIES WITH LIBERATION THEOLOGY

By

Alain Mayama

Approved November 28, 2007

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## **ABSTRACT**

### THE TURN TO THE NEIGHBOR: EMMANUEL LEVINAS'S CONCEPTUAL AFFINITIES WITH LIBERATION THEOLOGY

By

Alain Mayama

December 2007

Dissertation Supervised by Dr. Marie L. Baird, Ph, D.

My dissertation establishes some conceptual affinities between the philosophical project of Emmanuel Levinas and liberation theology. I analyze Levinas's work by comparing it to two important liberation theologians, Gustavo Gutiérrez and Jon Sobrino, whose work, like his, needs to be brought into greater contemporary debate about the subject's encounter with the other. I argue that fundamental to Levinas, Gutiérrez, and Sobrino is the fact that they all bring forth one major characteristic: the dimension of the divine opens forth in the human face. For Levinas, Gutiérrez and Sobrino, commitment to the neighbor is the necessary context for "understanding" God. They posit the human other as the possibility of the subject's subjectivity. To be human is to act with love toward one's neighbor.

Using an analytical-comparative method and without claiming a perfect matching between Levinas's philosophy and liberation theology, my dissertation demonstrates that

the dialogue between these two approaches addresses the insufficiency of the modern philosophical turn to the subject to appropriately address the question of the non-recognition of the human other in history; I also assert that their unwavering commitment to the human neighbor reveals something of postmodern sensitivity defined, in this study, in terms of otherness and difference, relationality and interdependence. I contend that Levinas's transcendental ethics provides liberation theology with a viable philosophical framework that is compatible with the truth of Christianity: the concern for the neighbor. On its part, liberation theology's conversion to the neighbor bears witness to Levinas's ethical responsibility in the real time of history. In order to show the relevance of Levinas's philosophy for Christian theology in general, I discuss three Christian scholars, Enrique Dussel, Jean-Luc Marion, and Michael Purcell, who, while challenging some aspects of Levinas's philosophy, still see its significance for Christian theological anthropology.

This dissertation concludes by proposing Levinas's philosophy and liberation theology's turn to the neighbor as significant for addressing contemporary sub-Saharan Africa socio-political and ethnic conflicts. I also point out a couple of concrete historical examples of this turn to the neighbor which, if followed, could lessen the degradation of the human other in sub-Saharan Africa and in the world in general.

## **DEDICATION**

To the victims of human's inhumanity to humans

And to those whose daily life is an enduring turn to the other/neighbor

## **Acknowledgement**

This research project is about Emmanuel Levinas's conceptual affinities with liberation theology. It articulates a possibility to read Levinas's transcendental ethics of responsibility in terms of liberation theology's love of neighbor in the real time of history. Many people could be mentioned and thanked here for their encouragement and assistance. However, a few of them have to be mentioned because of their direct involvement in this project. I wish to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to Dr. Marie L. Baird, my dissertation director, who deepened my appreciation of Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy. Her depth of insight and knowledge of Levinas's thought and Christian theology, have helped me remain focused during the entire project. I thank her for her availability, support, patience, and challenging conversations that helped me get the most out of this research. My appreciation and gratitude also extend to Dr. William M. Thompson-Uberuaga and Dr. George Worgul, the two other readers of this dissertation for their time and continuous commitment to the Theology Department. I would also like to thank Dr. James Hanigan, as department chair, for his assistance and advice during my first two years at Duquesne. Special thanks to Dr. Anne Clifford for her encouragement and advice. Thanks and gratitude are also due to the Theology Department staff, faculty, and colleagues at Duquesne University. I express my sincerest gratitude to Duquesne University's President and the Holy Spirit Congregation (Eastern and Central Africa Provinces) for the opportunity to study at Duquesne and for personal and tuition assistance. Finally, thanks also to friends and family all over the world.



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## Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation is to show how Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy shares some conceptual affinities with liberation theology – as represented by Gustavo Gutiérrez and Jon Sobrino. It will articulate a possibility to read Levinas's transcendental ethics of responsibility as a revalidation of one of the truths of Christianity: the concern for humanity of every human person as expressed in Christian theology in general and liberation theology in particular. By looking at Levinas's conceptual affinities with liberation theology, this work hopes to be a modest contribution to the ongoing dialogue between Christian theology and postmodern philosophy. The Christian theological tradition has a long history of finding in some philosophers genuine valued dialogical partners. This dissertation finds in Levinas a valued dialogical partner whose work could benefit Christian theology in general and liberation theology in particular.

What is most essential for Levinas's philosophy and liberation theology is that they both bring forth one major point: the dimension of the divine opens forth in the human face. God's transcendence emerges in love of one's neighbor but not in the hatred of the human other. This dissertation will demonstrate that the dialogue between these two approaches, based on the turn to the neighbor, will prove fruitful in addressing the inadequacy of the modern philosophical turn to the subject to properly deal with the questions of poverty, violence, and oppression in today's world.<sup>1</sup> It will also argue that

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<sup>1</sup> Although Levinas himself refuses to make the Holocaust the subject of his thinking, we would argue with Jacob Meskin that “there can be no doubt that both Levinas's life and his philosophy were deeply shaped by the trauma of Nazi genocide.” See Jacob Meskin, “The Jewish Transformation of Modern Thought: Levinas and Philosophy after the Holocaust,” *Cross Currents* 47, 4 (1997/1998): 507. Thus, it is our contention in this dissertation that both Levinas's philosophy and liberation theology can be read as a response to the tragic legacy of an unchecked twentieth century ill-treatment of the human other.

Levinas, Gutiérrez, and Sobrino's commitment to the neighbor reveals something of postmodern sensitivity defined, in this work, in terms of otherness and difference, relationality and interdependence.

In Descartes, Kant, Husserl and Heidegger, as well as in the philosophical tradition, the question has been almost entirely about how the human subject knows the existence of the other person and how the other person enters into the consciousness of the subject.<sup>2</sup> This philosophical discourse, governed by the primacy of being, forces every other discourse to validate itself before philosophy.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the turn to the subject, as well as the belief in sameness that characterizes the modern era, was embraced by modern thinkers as the "ideals in modernity's working out of its unique history."<sup>4</sup> This was the beginning of an exceptional awareness about the self and the world around the self. Most twentieth century works in philosophy and theology have been based on the heritage of the eighteenth and nineteenth century transcendental and ontological tradition that privileged and celebrated the uniqueness of the thinking subject and the primacy of being;<sup>5</sup> the development of the fundamental task of theology testifies to this fact.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Robert J. S. Manning, *Interpreting Otherwise than Heidegger: Emmanuel Levinas's Ethics as First Philosophy* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1993), 182.

<sup>3</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, "God and Philosophy," in *The Levinas Reader*, edited by Séan Hand (Cambridge MA: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 167.

<sup>4</sup> David Tracy, "Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity," *Theology Today* 51, 1 (1994): 104.

<sup>5</sup> Immanuel Kant is the central figure in the philosophical tradition on the issue of the thinking subject. This tradition was initiated in the West by Francis Bacon and René Descartes. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965); *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics* (Indianapolis/New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc, 1950). Some twentieth-century philosophers and theologians influenced by Kant: Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, Joseph Maréchal, Karl Rahner, Henri de Lubac, Jean Daniélou, M.-D. Chenu, Yves Congar, Lonergan, and Edward Schillebeeckx.

<sup>6</sup> For a helpful discussion on the development of the fundamental task of Christian theology, see Joseph A. Komonchak, "Defending Our Hope: On the Fundamental Tasks of Theology," in *Faithful Witness: Foundations for Today's Church*, eds. Leo J. O'Donovan and T. Howland Sanks (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 14-26. Marie L. Baird's remarks with regard to the influence of Greek thought on Christian theology are helpful here. She writes, "The extent to which Christian theology is rooted in Greek philosophical assumptions and conceptual categories is the extent to which such theology also reflects the

Contrary to this trend, the examination of conceptual affinities between Levinas's philosophy and liberation theology will show that the turn to the other/neighbor, which runs through their respective work, emerges as "a resistance to the same unquestioned sameness of the modern turn to the subject, the modern over-belief in the search for the perfect method, the modern social evolutionary narrative whereby all is finally and endlessly more of the self-same."<sup>7</sup> Here the Cartesian ego that influenced the disciplines of philosophy and theology, which systematically incorporated numerous individual human beings in a process that consumed their individuality, seem unbearably inappropriate in the face of the extreme degradation of human dignity in history. This is a failure of thought to grasp or comprehend the other, a failure to see the unthought in the history of philosophy and theology – that knowing takes place always within the context of the intersubjective relation. Our "free-thinking" culture is often suspicious of anything that might impose itself on our lives or threaten our individual freedom. We like to stay in "control" of the world as critical, independent, self-empowered subjects, and we refuse to reach out beyond ourselves toward the degradation of the dignity of the other in history. In this new trend of thought, the subjectivity and uniqueness of the subject is not about free-thinking, self-empowerment, and individual freedom; it is rather a turn to an infinite responsibility for the other prior to being for oneself. In some sense, this issue of an authentic self-other relation provides an invaluable purpose for the present study, because it suggests finding "some way to use rationality and reflection to take the Cartesian ego beyond rationality and reflection, leading it to register or recognize

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primacy of ontology as the conceptual basis for the Christian theological project." See her article, "Revisioning Christian Theology in Light of Emmanuel Levinas's Ethics of Responsibility," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 36, 3-4 (1999):341-351, especially 344.

<sup>7</sup>Tracy, "Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity," 108.

another, oscillating, enigmatic sort of ‘ethical’ truth”<sup>8</sup> that constitutes a central response to the question of human existence and authenticity.

Levinas’s philosophy and liberation theology, each in its own right, by positing the human other as the possibility of the subject’s subjectivity, invite humanity to situate the other/neighbor at the center of the definition of human subjectivity. To be human, therefore, is to act with love toward one’s neighbor. While not denying the suitability of the subject’s identity, unique conscience and sanctified dignity, it only finds its existential and fundamental meaning, this dissertation will argue, through love, relationship and solidarity with other humans. Levinas’s philosophy and liberation theology find in the turn to the other, who is both God’s mystery and the face of the neighbor, a promising avenue for the radical re-imagining of the world.

Chapter one focuses on the ethical relationship in Levinas’s transcendental ethics. It will begin with an examination of the advent of Levinas on the scene of Western philosophy. It will show how Levinas takes issue with Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology for not giving a satisfying account of intersubjectivity and responsibility for the other. Specifically, we will examine why, for Levinas, ethics should replace metaphysics as first philosophy by analyzing the major concepts of his philosophy: the encounter with the other, the face, the trace, substitution, proximity, sensibility, responsibility, hostage, vulnerability, principle and anarchy, the Saying and the Said, and the third party. Since Levinas held that philosophical thought was rooted in pre-philosophical experiences, and recognized the place of Jewish history as part of his life, this chapter will also examine Jewish aspects in Levinas’s thought, especially the

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<sup>8</sup> Meskin, “The Jewish Transformation of Modern Thought: Levinas and Philosophy after the Holocaust,” 510.



influence that the Torah, the Talmudic tradition, and the Holocaust have on his philosophy. We will show the philosophical stirrings, subtle or overt, in his work, which will serve to put his position in dialogue with liberation theology's perspective.

The second chapter will be in two parts. The first part will provide core elements of Gustavo Gutiérrez's theology of liberation. The second part will address Jon Sobrino's theological approach. This chapter will examine both theologians' social, cultural, and ecclesial background and theological perspectives. It will also show that for Gutiérrez and Sobrino the human person, the poor, the stranger, the widow, the oppressed, the homeless, etc is the place for a possible revelation from God. Since Gutiérrez and Sobrino analyze the human person in the light of the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, this chapter will discuss their anthropologies, as inspired by their Christologies and the experience of their social locations. It is in the works of justice, in loving one's neighbor, that transcendence is encountered.

The third chapter is the pivotal chapter of the dissertation as it focuses on the affinity between these two approaches. It will seek to establish that Levinas's philosophy and liberation theology both view the turn to the other/neighbor as a power of genuine love, opening new avenues for the radical re-imagining of the world. They respond to the degradation of the human person's life in history in a comparable way; search for the divine transcendence in a life of commitment to the other human person; find in the Judeo-Christian wisdom a distinct way of thinking of the subject-other relationship; and call for love of neighbor and justice. While calling for a redefinition of human subjectivity in terms of love of neighbor, these two approaches present also some divergences, which we will argue, offer an opportunity for dialogue. Levinas's

philosophy provides liberation theology with a viable philosophical framework that would enrich its theological anthropology. Liberation theology, on its part, bears witness and historicizes Levinas's philosophy in terms of *conversion to the neighbor*. In the end, this chapter will argue that the turn to the neighbor in Levinas and liberation theology is a precondition for peace, justice, and good social order.

The fourth chapter will discuss how such similarities hold up in the view of some Christian scholars who have dealt with Levinas's philosophical project. Three respected contemporary scholars have been selected: Enrique Dussel, Jean-Luc Marion, and Michael Purcell. These scholars, although interpreting the relevance of Levinas for theology along divergent lines, outline the basic themes of Levinas's thought and the ways in which it might be deployed in fundamental, practical and philosophical theology of liberation. Dussel, Marion, and Purcell will helpfully serve the goal of this dissertation because they see the importance of Levinas's philosophy for theological anthropology.

Chapter five will bring together arguments of the previous chapters. It will propose Levinas's thought and liberation theology's turn to the neighbor as critical for addressing contemporary sub-Saharan Africa socio-political and ethnic conflicts. Socio-political and ethnic conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa are mostly due to the struggle for political and economic power for one's own self realization and/or one's ethnic group. Levinas's philosophy and liberation theology's redefinition of human subjectivity as the one for the other is pertinent to the issue of excesses of political power, poverty, and frequent ethnic conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa. It is an invitation to all sub-Saharan Africans to rise beyond socio-political and ethnic boundaries and build unified nations. For the purpose of fostering an appreciation of the potential that Levinas's philosophy

and liberation theology's turn to the neighbor offer to sub-Saharan African society, this chapter will point out a couple of concrete historical examples of this turn to the neighbor in the sense of Purcell's *being otherwise* or of what we would describe in this dissertation as *affective responsibility*. This chapter will suggest that Levinas's philosophical project and liberation theology are significant for dealing with the sub-Saharan Africa socio-political and ethnic situation. The emphasis here is on the ethical engagement with the human other that makes the subject fully human.

# CHAPTER ONE

## Emmanuel Levinas's Transcendental Ethics of Responsibility

### Introduction

Regardless of what one thinks, the fact remains that everyone thinks and speaks within some particular context which shapes one's thought process, and contributes to the conclusions one articulates. Emmanuel Levinas is no exception to this contextual characterization of all human thought. Since this is an acknowledged part of our understanding of knowledge today, the task of this first chapter is to understand – not only the context from which Levinas's philosophy developed – but also the originality of his method as he attempts to transform philosophy and move it beyond the borders of the conventional ways of reasoning.

In order to achieve a clear understanding of Levinas's philosophical project, this chapter will begin by situating Levinas's thought within the phenomenological tradition of Continental philosophy. It will give an overview of Husserl's and Heidegger's occupation with ontology, and show how Levinas takes issue with Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology for not giving a satisfying account of intersubjectivity and responsibility for the other. This chapter will also examine Levinas's transcendental ethics of responsibility in order to illumine his enduring concern about the primacy of the ethical relation to the other person.

Specifically, this study will examine why – for Levinas – ethics should replace traditional metaphysics as first philosophy by analyzing the major concepts of his philosophy: the encounter with the other, the face, the trace, the infinite, transcendence

and time, the Saying and the Said, and the third party. The encounter with the other calls the ethical subject to responsibility to the point of substitution, proximity, obsession, sensibility, hostage, vulnerability, maternity, etc. Since Levinas held that philosophical thought was rooted in pre-philosophical experiences, and recognized the place of Jewish history as part of his life, this chapter will also examine Jewish aspects in Levinas's thought, especially the influence that the Torah, the Talmudic tradition, and the Holocaust had on his philosophy. This work will show the philosophical stirrings – subtle or overt – in his work, which will serve to put his position in dialogue with liberation theology's perspective. In the presentation of this material this study will rely on Levinas's own texts as well as on a number of secondary sources.

### **I. Situating Emmanuel Levinas within the Metaphysical Tradition**

Emmanuel Levinas has been acknowledged as one of the most significant European philosophers of the last few centuries. This can be attributed – not only to his radical critique of Husserl, Heidegger and the entire Western philosophy for their *oubli de l'autre or égologie* – but most especially, to the momentum he was able to give to philosophical thought in explaining its metaphysical and ethical structures. This is demonstrated by fact that he has been the topic of numerous articles, books, and dissertations around the globe.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Burggraeve, *Lévinas: Une bibliographie primaire et secondaire (1929-1985) avec complément 1985 -1989* (Leuven: Peeters, 1990), 11. Burggraeve's book gives an excellent primary and secondary bibliographical resource on Emmanuel Levinas up to the year 1989. For a comprehensive primary and secondary sources on Levinas to the present, see data base online at <http://www.uvh.nl/levinas/>

Elements of his biographical details<sup>2</sup> tell us that he was born on January 12, 1906 in Kovno, Lithuania. He was raised in a Jewish family and his parents were committed members of a significant Jewish community well-known for its inflexibility in the practice of Judaism. During the First World War, his family was forced to immigrate to Kharkov, Ukraine, and then back again after the German defeat. Levinas's intellectual career began with his studies in philosophy in Strasbourg, France in 1923. From that moment his entire life was connected to a number of French intellectuals of the twentieth century such as Charles Blondel, Henri Carteson, Maurice Halbwachs, Maurice Pradines, and Maurice Blanchot.<sup>3</sup>

Between 1928-1929 he made a research trip to Freiburg, Germany, and studied under Husserl and later under Husserl's successor, Martin Heidegger. Having obtained his *license* in philosophy, Levinas began his study of Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, and wrote his thesis on *La théorie de l'intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* (1930). Martin Heidegger, however, had a great impact on Levinas through his teaching and work, especially *Being and Time*. He placed Heidegger in the ranks of Plato and Kant; even though in his first essay, "De l'évasion," published in 1935, he will attempt to distance himself from Heidegger's notion of Being.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For a full-length biography of Emmanuel Levinas, see Salomon Malka, *Emmanuel Levinas: la vie et la trace* (Paris: J-C Lattès, 2002) and Marie-Anne Lescourret, *Emmanuel Lévinas* (Paris: Flammarion, 1994). The bibliographical notes presented here are representative of works consulted from the following sources: Emmanuel Levinas, "Signature," in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, translated by Seán Hand (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990), 291-295; Adriaan Theodor Peperzak, *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 1-6; Michael B. Smith, *Toward the Outside: Concepts and Themes in Emmanuel Levinas* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 1-16; Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, eds, *The Cambridge Companion To Levinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), xv-32.

<sup>3</sup> Peperzak, *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Peperzak, *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, 1-2.

Both Husserl and Heidegger can be seen to have influenced Levinas's first two major publications: *Existence and Existents* (1947), and *En Découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* (1949). Furthermore, Levinas became influential in France for his translations of Husserl and Heidegger into French. It is widely agreed that he was responsible for the introduction of Husserl's and Heidegger's phenomenology to France.

Following his marriage and naturalization as a French citizen (1930) – and after his military service in Paris – Levinas worked at Ecole Normale Israélite Universelle, a Jewish organization that prepared teachers for the Alliance Israélite Universelle, where he was appointed the director. During World War II (1940), he was a prisoner of war in a German camp along with the other French officers of his regiment. During his time in the military prisoners' camp, he served as an interpreter of Russian and spent most of his time reading and discussing Hegel, Proust, Diderot, Rousseau, and others while tragically most members of his family in Lithuania were assassinated by the Nazis.<sup>5</sup> Levinas, though Jewish, was protected by the French uniform, and was not exterminated along with six million other Jews. This memory of the Holocaust has always played a major role in his thinking, and was without a doubt a causal issue in his long-lasting concern for the primacy of the ethical relation to the other person.

In his book, *Existence and Existents* (1947), Levinas manifestly asserted the need for a thought beyond ontology, opposing *ipso facto* Heidegger's thought that aimed at transcending the metaphysics of beings to Being. He points to another transcendence, the Good, which commands a movement beyond the limits of Being. It was not until the late

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<sup>5</sup> Peperzak, *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, 2.

1950's and early 1960's that he began to develop his own philosophy - critiquing Heidegger, prior phenomenologists and Western thinking in general.<sup>6</sup>

Levinas's explicit critique of Heidegger's project is presented in his 1951 article, "L'ontologie est-elle fondamentale?" His essay, "Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity," published in 1967, was an appropriation of the concept of infinity from Descartes, anticipating many of the theses he later developed in *Totalité et Infini: Essai sur l'extériorité* (1961), (*Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, 1963). With the publication of *Totalité et Infini*, Levinas established his philosophical and global fame which led to invitations and the publication of a great number of philosophical papers. He taught philosophy at the University of Poitiers in 1961 and at the University of Paris-Nanterre in 1967. In 1973 he moved to Paris VI (Sorbonne), and became an honorary professor in 1976. The publication of *Totalité et Infini: Essai sur l'extériorité*, 1961 constituted the turning point of his philosophy. In this book, he suggested a new orientation in phenomenology and in the whole history of European philosophy, from Parmenides to Heidegger. He criticized Western civilization for its dependency on Greek philosophy that laid too much emphasis on the thinking subject and encouraged a system of totalization. He proposed to go beyond the conventional and ethically Western totalization, and addressed the problematic of ontology by analyzing the self-other relation. The other is not known as such, but calls into question and confronts the self-righteousness of the self through desire, language, and the concern for justice. Ethics for Levinas begins with the encounter with the other while maintaining that such a relation

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<sup>6</sup> Peperzak, *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, 3.



cannot be simply reduced to a symmetrical relationship. It cannot be localized historically or temporally.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, Levinas asserted that ethics calls into question the “Same.” Here, the encounter with the other has no empirical basis as an event or non-event in linear time, nor is there a “self” that exists *a priori* to the encounter which may choose to avoid the traumatic experience of alterity. The encounter, a discovery of alterity in itself, is an original and essential moment through which the self comes into being – it precedes freedom and determinism, action and passivity. This encounter has always taken place already, and its terms make up a central paradox in Continental philosophy.

Levinas’s second major book, *Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence* (*Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*) was published in 1974. This book asserts Levinas’s intention for a philosophy that goes beyond ontology, using Plato’s categorization of the Good as beyond the *ousia*. Suddenly new descriptions are given, which are entirely absent from *Totalité et Infini*. The relation between the other and self is explored in terms of asymmetrical proximity, vulnerability, responsibility, substitution, hostage, obsession, and persecution; and the concept of Time is carefully examined as fundamental diachrony. The other the subject encounters is both the other human being and God. Yet, Levinas’s God is never present in the time of history; his God always passes by into an immemorial past, a passing that leaves a trace from which the human other emerges as primary command.<sup>8</sup>

The postwar years were marked by his meeting with the Talmudic scholar Monsieur Chouchani, with whom he studied. These studies resulted in a series of five

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<sup>7</sup> Peperzak, *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, 4-5.

<sup>8</sup> Peperzak, *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, 4-5.

volumes of Talmudic readings. The last of these readings, *Nouvelles Lectures Talmudiques*, appeared shortly after his death. At the time Levinas was writing this work he was actively involved with the Colloque des Intellectuels Juifs de Langue Française, and the majority of his Talmudic studies originate in lectures he presented there. His Talmudic commentaries include *Quatre lectures Talmudiques* (1968), *Du sacré au saint* (1977), and *L'au-delà du verset* (1982). Levinas published a great deal of other books and articles before his death on Christmas day of the year 1995, after a long period of illness. The funeral oration, 'Adieu', was given by Jacques Derrida at the funeral on 28 December 1995.

The biographical details presented above show that Levinas developed his ethical philosophy by challenging the phenomenological method that attempts to understand human experience in terms of rationality. It is an approach that limits an analysis into human experience on consciousness and denies any significant relationship with something beyond self-consciousness. Obviously, at the start, Levinas's critique seems problematic. How does reason prevent relationship beyond consciousness? The answer to this critical question could be found in the tradition that originates in Descartes and Kant, even though it takes proper shape in Husserl and Heidegger. Since Levinas's philosophy begins from his critique of this tradition, it is in order to begin this study with a review of the metaphysical and phenomenological tradition. Here this work will focus only on Descartes and Kant as it will address Husserl's and Heidegger's occupation with phenomenology later on in the chapter.

### *René Descartes and Rational Subjectivity*

Descartes begins his study of rational subjectivity by trying to distance himself from the philosophical tradition before him that presented the unity between thinking and being as the ultimate philosophical question. He starts his *Meditations* by questioning all that can convincingly be questioned with the hope to establish a solid philosophical foundation upon which will be based all future philosophical knowledge. Descartes launches his inquiry into rational subjectivity by wondering whether things are as they appear. Is it possible that human perception of reality might as well be images in a dream? And if so, is it not also right to wonder whether what comes to human perception might not be as it appears. This for Descartes could be an obstacle to the rational inquiry into the philosophy of knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, having posited this fundamental doubt, Descartes realizes that the existence of the being who doubts is a prerequisite for the meaningfulness of the fundamental doubt. For in order for a being to think, one thing must be true: this being must exist. The implication is that one cannot meaningfully claim that he/she doubts that he/she exists without first existing. Hence, for Descartes, the existence of a being who doubts can be said to be a claim beyond doubt. Now, for Descartes, this being who doubts is the same that understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions. And all these faculties that are active within the mind of this being are called acts of thinking or ideas.<sup>10</sup> Now these acts of thinking and

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<sup>9</sup> On René Descartes' rational subjectivity, I am indebted to Anthony F. Beavers, *Levinas Beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism: An Inquiry into the Metaphysics of Morals* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 7-14, 7-8. All references to Descartes' work will be to René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, translated and edited by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

<sup>10</sup> Beavers, *Levinas Beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism*, 8-9.

the being that make them possible constitute what Descartes calls rational subjectivity (*ego cogito*). Rational subjectivity is a world of self-centeredness in which a thinking subject is in control and nothing other than the self can exist. This is an ideal world, a world constituted through the act of the thinking subject and in which the ideas that belong to this subject appear to be like the world of sensible experience. Descartes, however, later argues that the foundation of philosophical knowledge requires the existence of another world apart from the ideal world of the thinking subject, because the task of philosophical knowledge is to determine the exact relationship between these two worlds.<sup>11</sup>

Having posited the concept of rational subjectivity – constituted by a thinking subject and the field of its ideas – Descartes will now attempt to establish a proof for the independent existence of infinite being. In this process, he begins by exploring the ideas that belong to the mind of this thinking subject. These ideas may be considered in two ways. First is to take them formally or actually as ideas and second is to examine the object in them.<sup>12</sup> For him, “in so far as the ideas are considered simply as modes of thought, there is no recognizable inequality among them: they all appear to come within me in the same fashion.”<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, “in so far as different ideas are considered as images which represent different things, it is clear that they differ widely.”<sup>14</sup> Obviously, there is in Descartes’ view a conviction that objects in ideas fall into three metaphysical

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<sup>11</sup> Beavers, *Levinas Beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism*, 9.

<sup>12</sup> Beavers, *Levinas Beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism*, 10.

<sup>13</sup> Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 2, 27-28.

<sup>14</sup> Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 2, 27-28.

classes: the ideas of modes or accidents, the ideas of finite substances, and the idea of an infinite substance.<sup>15</sup>

Now, for Descartes the idea of an infinite substance is more perfect than the ideas of modes and finite substance, because “something cannot arise from nothing, and also that what is more perfect – that is, contains in itself more reality – cannot arise from what is less perfect.”<sup>16</sup> This means that the effect of a cause can never have more reality than its cause. Thus, necessarily, the objective reality in the ideas of a mode and finite substance, originate from the idea of the infinite substance. Hence, “the cause of a finite substance must be a finite substance or an infinite substance. It cannot be a mode, because a mode contains less reality than a finite substance. Since this maxim is true for things taken formally, Descartes thinks, it must also be true for objects in ideas.”<sup>17</sup>

Descartes’ argument reaches its climax when he addresses the issue of the possible cause of the idea of God in the thinking subject. This possible cause, for Descartes, has to be traced in the infinite substance, which must exist formally in order to cause an idea of an infinite substance taken objectively. And this would suggest that God must exist. Besides, the only way one can possess the idea of God is for God to have put this idea in one’s mind.<sup>18</sup> Descartes writes: “It is true that I have the idea of substance in me in virtue of the fact that I am a substance; but this would not account for my having the idea of an infinite substance, when I am finite, unless this idea proceeded from some substance which really was infinite.”<sup>19</sup> So, one’s awareness of one’s inability to

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<sup>15</sup> Beavers, *Levinas Beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism*, 10.

<sup>16</sup> Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 2, 28.

<sup>17</sup> Beavers, *Levinas Beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism*, 11; see Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 2, 28-29.

<sup>18</sup> Beavers, *Levinas Beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism*, 11.

<sup>19</sup> Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 2, 31.

comprehend God, that is, one's awareness of one's rational limits – its finitude – requires that the idea of God be prior to the idea of oneself. The existence of an idea that contains more objective reality than the finite substance indicates the presence of an idea that the finite substance could not have created for itself, as this idea could only originate from an infinite being that must actually exist. Now, since God exists, the idea of God has to be prior in the subject to the subject's idea of him/herself. Levinas comes up with a more radical conclusion than Descartes. For Levinas, as Beavers argues, "the impossibility of thinking completely the idea of an infinite substance along with the desire to do so indicates that an *encounter* with this infinite substance must be prior to my act of thinking."<sup>20</sup> That is why the idea of face-to-face encounter with the other person in Levinas precedes the entire order of knowledge. Levinas writes:

In the access to the face there is certainly also an access to the idea of God. In Descartes the idea of the Infinite remains a theoretical idea, a contemplation, a knowledge. For my part, I think that the relation to the Infinite is not a knowledge, but a Desire. I have tried to describe the difference between Desire and need by the fact that Desire cannot be satisfied; that Desire is like a thought which thinks more than it thinks, or more than what it thinks. It is a paradoxical structure, without doubt, but one which is no more so than this presence of the Infinite in a finite act.<sup>21</sup>

To the extent that desire cannot be satisfied in Levinas's metaphysical desire for the otherness of the other, he is indebted to Descartes' idea of infinity. The idea of infinity in Descartes is eternal, that is, knows no end.<sup>22</sup> In both Descartes and Levinas, this idea is in the thinking subject (*ego cogito*), transcending the *ego cogito*'s isolation. Thus, in the *Meditations*, Descartes engages in the study of the philosophy of knowledge of the

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<sup>20</sup> Beavers, *Levinas Beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism*, 13. (Beavers' italics)

<sup>21</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, translated by Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 92.

<sup>22</sup> Beavers, *Levinas Beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism*, 13.

known world by first examining the relationship between a finite and infinite being. This is the insight that Levinas would recognize, but which Kant, Husserl and Heidegger would fall short of identifying.<sup>23</sup>

### *Immanuel Kant and the Phenomenal World*

At the starting point of Kant's philosophical project – like Descartes' – is the conviction that the discovery of rational subjectivity necessitates the acceptance of idealism. Yet, Kant does not share Descartes' idea of the isolated mind that does not assume the existence of a prior categorical experience. At the onset of Kant's philosophical project is the reception of idealism which – for him – seems to necessitate a proof for the existence of an external world. He asks a question: how is the experience of objects possible? Kant answers this question by calling on the concepts of *categories*, which must be presupposed prior to experience. For Kant, the ego utilizes the concepts of categories to systematize objects within experience and constitute them in their relationship with one another. In so doing, the ego makes objects ready to be known prior to any experience of them as objects.<sup>24</sup>

Kant's recognition that objects have to be prearranged for experience by the ego situates him on the brink of one of the most important findings in the history of philosophy, namely, that the *real* is phenomenal. For him, the world that is known is only the world of objects as they appear in experience. As any conjecture to what must be the case apart from experience is impossible, Kant is convinced that Descartes' proof for the

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<sup>23</sup> Beavers, *Levinas Beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism*, 14.

<sup>24</sup> Beavers, *Levinas Beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism*, 15.

existence of God is problematic, because it employs the category of cause and effect beyond the realm of appearances.<sup>25</sup>

With this issue about the origin of the concept of causality, Kant begins his Copernican revolution in philosophy by conceiving a relationship between sensibility and understanding that constitutes a key element about the problem of knowledge. For Kant, “objects are *given* to us by means of sensibility, and it alone yields *intuitions*; they are *thought* through the understanding, and from the understanding arise *concepts*.”<sup>26</sup> Thus, for Kant “sensible intuition is the means by which an object, derived from sensation, is situated in immediate relation to knowledge.”<sup>27</sup> Concepts such as causality, Kant would argue, are not drawn from experience, “but sprang from the pure understanding.”<sup>28</sup> Hence, Kant’s assertion in *Critique of Pure Reason* that knowledge is two-fold, comprised both of what human beings receive through their sense impressions and of what their own faculty of knowledge provides from itself. Kant calls the first aspect of knowledge that derives from experience, *a posteriori*, and the aspect of knowledge that our faculty of knowledge supplies from itself, *a priori*, that is to say, knowledge completely autonomous of all experience.<sup>29</sup>

This concept of *a priori* led Kant to reconceive fundamentally the relationship between the subject and knowledge, between the knower and the process of knowing. For Kant, as Robert Manning argues, “the mind is not only the passive recipient of sense impressions, but it supplies to sense impressions its own *a priori* structures, and

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<sup>25</sup> Beavers, *Levinas Beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism*, 15-16.

<sup>26</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1965), 65. (Kant’s italics)

<sup>27</sup> Beavers, *Levinas Beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism*, 17.

<sup>28</sup> Kant, *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*, 8.

<sup>29</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 42-43.



‘supplies’ them in the sense that sense impressions are experienced through these *a priori* structures.”<sup>30</sup> Yet, Kant also admits the limit of this *a priori* knowledge to know external things in themselves. He writes,

...objects in themselves are quite unknown to us, and that what we call outer objects are nothing but mere representations of our sensibility, the form of which is space. The true correlate of sensibility, the thing in itself, is not known, and cannot be known, through these representations; and in experience no question is ever asked in regard to it.<sup>31</sup>

But Kant’s concept of *a priori* knowledge or Copernican Revolution in Philosophy, as Manning has interestingly noted, separated human subjectivity to whatever it came into contact with but that was exterior to it, its other. But Kant would try to break this gap in his book, *Critique of Practical Reason*, but in the end the chasm proved difficult to be bridged.<sup>32</sup> The rift between the subject and its other, not only was manifest in Kant’s work, it also gave the entire continental philosophy its fundamental challenge, namely, trying to overcome Kant’s chasm between subject and object.<sup>33</sup> The greatest challenge to Kant’s notion of the rift between subject and object came from the German philosophers Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger.<sup>34</sup> Husserl takes Kant seriously and creates the phenomenological method to explain consciousness by redefining the world in

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<sup>30</sup> Manning, *Interpreting Otherwise than Heidegger*, 169; Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 20-22.

<sup>31</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 74.

<sup>32</sup> Manning, *Interpreting Otherwise than Heidegger*, 171. For a helpful discussion on the issue of the gap between object and subject in Kant, see Mark Taylor, *Deconstruction in Context* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 7-8. According to Manning, “Mark Taylor states that because in the Second Critique Kant ‘does not reconcile inclination and obligation,’ and because in the Third Critique the reconciliation of opposites is only a ‘regulative idea’ that is never ‘concretely actualized in time and space,’ the last two critiques do not bridge the ‘gap between subject and object that undermines the very possibility of knowledge.” See Manning, 171, footnote 15.

<sup>33</sup> Manning, *Interpreting Otherwise than Heidegger*, 171. Most helpful on Kant’s impact on subsequent continental philosophy, see Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 70; Vincent Descombes, *Le Même et l’Autre*, translated as *Modern French Philosophy*, translated by L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 216; Emmanuel Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 82; Taylor, *Deconstruction in Context*, 4.

<sup>34</sup> Manning, *Interpreting Otherwise than Heidegger*, 172.

terms of experience only. The following section will consider carefully Husserl's and Heidegger's occupation with phenomenology as it provides the impetus for understanding Levinas's own philosophical project.

## **II. An Overview of Edmund Husserl's and Martin Heidegger's Occupation with Phenomenology**

As one cannot begin to consider Levinas's philosophy without acknowledging the phenomenological tradition within which his thought emerges, it is necessary to understand Levinas's relationship to these two great phenomenologists. Levinas has always insisted that – despite fundamental differences from Husserl and Heidegger – his philosophy from the beginning follows in the phenomenological tradition of these great mentors. About Husserl, he comments:

Husserl brought a method to philosophy. It consists in respecting the intentions which animate the psyche and the modalities of *appearing* which conform to these intentions, modalities which characterize the diverse beings apprehended by experience. It consists in discovering the unsuspected *horizons* within which the real is apprehended by representative thought but also apprehended by concrete pre-predicative life, beginning with the body (innocently), beginning with culture (perhaps less innocently).<sup>35</sup>

In Freiburg between 1928 and 1929 he had studied under Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. In 1930, he published the first book on Husserl in French and in 1932 the first substantial article in French on Heidegger's philosophy, and he collaborated on the French translation of Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* (1931). Levinas dedicated much of his early philosophical career to explicating the work and significance of his German teachers. This study will look at Edmund Husserl's phenomenological reduction and Heidegger's critique of representational consciousness. In this way, this work will be able

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<sup>35</sup> Levinas, "Signature," in *Difficult Freedom*, 291-292.

to explain why Levinas takes issue with Husserl and Heidegger, account for his association with phenomenology and explain his steady development of a post-phenomenological ethics which differentiates itself in opposition to the philosophy of Husserl and Heidegger.

### *Edmund Husserl and the Phenomenological Reduction*

Many attempts were made in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to address the Kantian dilemma of the gap between subject and object. From the very beginning, Husserl shared Kant's ideal of making philosophy scientific, yet he distances himself as far as possible from Kant's preoccupation with the independent existence of the external world. Husserl insists that his writings "...are attempts at genuinely executed fundamental work on the immediately envisaged and grasped things; and even where they proceed critically, they do not lose themselves in discussions of standpoint, but rather leave the last word to the things themselves and to the work on them."<sup>36</sup>

Husserl's phenomenological method took shape with his publication of *Ideas Concerning Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* in 1913. In this book, he intended a phenomenology filtered of all claims about reality other than that of intentional consciousness.<sup>37</sup> He alludes to the blossoming apple tree in the garden to elucidate the notion of intentionality.<sup>38</sup> For him, the notion of intentionality asserts that all consciousness is a consciousness of something and that all mental acts have an object.

Husserl's goal has been to give an absolutely secure philosophical foundation to the natural sciences, and this could only be provided – Husserl would argue – by a strict

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<sup>36</sup> Quoted by Manning, *Interpreting Otherwise than Heidegger*, 175.

<sup>37</sup> Manning, *Interpreting Otherwise than Heidegger*, 175.

<sup>38</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, translated by F. Kersten, vol. 1 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1982), 212-215.

reflection on what science does not normally question, that is, the role of the perceiving consciousness in the constitution of the perceived world. Husserl could not, as Levinas puts it, accept as unquestionable the natural attitude of scientific realism, that is, the presumption that the world as we experience it exists outside and independently from consciousness.<sup>39</sup>

Against this natural attitude, Husserl proposes the methodological innovation he called *phenomenological reduction*, or *transcendental reduction*, or the *epoché*. What exactly is Husserl's phenomenological reduction? Husserl's phenomenological reduction is the bracketing of all questions about the reality of things outside consciousness. This includes the existence of the external world, and – significantly – the existence of other consciousnesses. Thus, Husserl's expression to return “to the things themselves” became to return to the consciousness of the subject that is always consciousness of something. Phenomenology is no longer only the science of phenomena in themselves but also the science of ‘pure consciousness.’<sup>40</sup> In other words, for Husserl, as Michael Purcell argues, “before ever there is a differentiation into a subject and an object, there is, on the ‘subjective side’, a consciousness which is never other than a *consciousness of*, and, on

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<sup>39</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern Press, 1973), 3-16. Michael Purcell's comments about Husserl's arguments against natural attitude in *Ideas* 214-215, are here helpful; he writes: “this natural attitude tends to reduce the relationship between an object and a subject to the problem of knowledge, and the ensuing epistemological and ontological difficulty is accounting for the way that the gap between the knowing subject and the object which is known is bridged.” Furthermore, Purcell continues, for Husserl, the difficulty “with ‘natural attitude’ or naive realism, is that the ‘natural’ becomes the model for understanding what is ‘to be,’ and meaning becomes something super added, variable, indeterminate, and susceptible to error. For, if meaning is something super-added to the real, consciousness is only ever given *as...* Being and meaning are co-implicated.” See, Michael Purcell, *Levinas and Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 13-14.

<sup>40</sup> Manning, *Interpreting Otherwise than Heidegger*, 175-176.

the ‘objective side,’ an object which is only ever *perceived as*. This is described in the terms of *intentionality*.”<sup>41</sup>

For Husserl, thought is never without an object, and consciousness always intends something other than itself; it transcends itself. “*Intentionality is for Husserl, a genuine act of transcendence and the very prototype of any transcendence.*”<sup>42</sup> By emphasizing consciousness as a realm of absolute existence, Husserl rises above those who question and doubt the correspondence of knowing and known. For Levinas, Husserl’s affirmation of consciousness as always *a consciousness of* and as an absolute existence, articulates both the unquestionable and definite character of the *cogito*.<sup>43</sup> This underscores a key and significant distinction between Husserl and Descartes. Descartes takes for granted the self-evidence of consciousness, but falls short of cross-examining its sources. Purcell remarks:

Thus, in the Cartesian schema there is the move from the absolute existence of consciousness to the existence of God, whose veracity guarantees the evidence of the senses, and thereafter to the existence of the world which offers itself to consciousness through the senses. The cogito is the foundation from which all else follows. For Husserl, however, consciousness is always and already *consciousness of*...and always and already implicates the existence of a world. Thus, unlike Descartes, existence does not follow from a *cogito*, but rather existence *allows a cogito*.<sup>44</sup>

While Husserl reduces the entire world to human subjectivity, Descartes goes beyond subjectivity toward the infinite as the creator of the entire universe, even of the phenomenal world. The ego creates its world in an act of world-constitution. In this act,

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<sup>41</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 14. (Purcell’s italics). For a helpful detailed analysis on this, see Husserl, *Ideas*, 215; Levinas, *Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, 40-48.

<sup>42</sup> Levinas, *Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, 40. (Levinas’s italics)

<sup>43</sup> Levinas, *Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, 30-31, quoted by Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 19.

<sup>44</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 19-20. (Purcell’s italics)

the entire world is reduced to subjectivity.<sup>45</sup> Husserl writes, “this reduction to my transcendental sphere of particular ownness or to my transcendental concrete I-myself, by abstraction from everything that transcendental constitution gives me as Other, has an unusual sense... I ‘alone’ remain.”<sup>46</sup> The effect of this reasoning is that one consciousness also represents the ‘sense’ of the other person as one who is able to experience the world.

Husserl, by positing the subject’s intentional consciousness as that which defines the other makes this other dependent on the subject. The other, in this intersubjective relationship, is considered present simply in an “objective sense” and constituted as “co-present;” because the other’s coming into the world is contingent to the subject’s intentionality. For Husserl, the other person is not the extra-mental other; it is my consciousness that makes present the other person *there*. He/she is not him/herself there and can never become a him/herself-there.<sup>47</sup> Thus, in Husserl’s analysis of human experience and the constitution of meaning the existential status of objects apart from experience is irrelevant. By implication, the other human person has no role and is irrelevant to the meaning of life, except that in his/her relationships with the subject in the world, he/she is constituted by the subject’s intentionality. So for Husserl, the experienced world and all exterior objects depend on the subject’s consciousness. It is the subject’s very act of knowing that establishes the objects as objects, since they are only objects for consciousness. Hence, in the formation of meaning, the subject only relies on

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<sup>45</sup> Beavers, *Levinas Beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism*, 23.

<sup>46</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, translated by Dorion Cairns (Boston: Nijhoff, 1960), 93.

<sup>47</sup> Beavers, *Levinas Beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism*, 23-24; Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 109.

his/her consciousness, since no object precedes knowledge. Meaning is entirely the result of the subject's action.<sup>48</sup>

Levinas commends Husserl for taking philosophical discourse away from a naturalist conception of being toward a phenomenological one. In the naturalist conception of being, "being and its categories are ascribable only to objects in the known world, much as Kant's categories were."<sup>49</sup> According to Levinas, Husserl's main contribution has been his discovering of the crucial and basic distinction between *being qua consciousness* and *being qua thing*.<sup>50</sup> In Husserl's phenomenological turn, Levinas sees a prospect for a movement from the theory of knowledge to the theory of being.<sup>51</sup> For him, Husserl's phenomenology had the merit of defining subjectivity's intrinsic ontological value and his/her inherent meaning. The subject's existence and experience is what defines his/her significance in life. This is the main goal of Husserl's phenomenological reduction, that is, to present humans with their authentic identity. Yet this presentation, for Levinas, remains inadequate as it mostly focuses on a merely contemplative and speculative view of life but different from it.<sup>52</sup> Levinas also recognizes as implicit in Husserl's theoretical and cognitive dimension of intentionality the notion of knowledge, which focuses on an analysis of cognitive life, but yet does not exhaust all of life. Husserl's non-theoretical acts that are constitutive of objects open up to a new and irreducible ontological structure.<sup>53</sup> There are, therefore, in Husserl's thought

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<sup>48</sup> Beavers, *Levinas Beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism*, 25.

<sup>49</sup> Beavers, *Levinas Beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism*, 25.

<sup>50</sup> Levinas, *Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, 26. (Levinas's italics)

<sup>51</sup> Levinas, *Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, 32.

<sup>52</sup> Levinas, *Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, 149.

<sup>53</sup> Levinas, *Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, 132.

fundamentals that seem to open up a more affluent concept of existence than a simple presence of an object to contemplative consciousness.<sup>54</sup>

Levinas also notes, however, the incompleteness of Husserl's thought, because it takes all relationships to function in a theoretical and intentional manner. The abstract nature of Husserl's phenomenological reduction, according to Levinas, stems from his vacillating conception of consciousness. While Husserl's phenomenological reduction, Levinas argues, may not have the intention of being merely theoretical or speculative, but seeks to discover our truly concrete life, nevertheless, it falls short of grasping the contradiction in the idea of pure immanence and the fact that consciousness will need a world in order to exist.<sup>55</sup> Levinas sees in Husserl's "indecision or rather obscurity in the relation between *hyle* and *noesis*, that the reduction seems to be a return to a consciousness without the world in which the world would have to be constituted on the basis of a pure *hyle*, a type of abstraction in which one seems to see a revival of the sensationalist theses."<sup>56</sup> Here Husserl reduces consciousness to knowing and as a result takes it away from the concrete life as it is lived. Levinas writes:

There is another reason why the phenomenological reduction, as we have interpreted it so far, does not reveal concrete life and the meaning that objects have for concrete life. Concrete life is not the solipsist's life of a consciousness closed upon itself. Concrete being is not what exists for only one consciousness. In the very idea of concrete being is contained the idea of an intersubjective world. If we limit ourselves to describing the constitution of objects in an individual consciousness, in an *ego*, the *egological reduction* can be only a first step toward phenomenology. We must also discover 'others' and the

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<sup>54</sup> Levinas, *Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, 134.

<sup>55</sup> Levinas, *Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, 150. Levinas's comments in the original French text best expresses his dissatisfaction with Husserl's phenomenological reduction. See Emmanuel Levinas, *La théorie de l'intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* (Paris : Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1963), 220 : "La représentation admise comme base de tous les actes de la conscience – voilà ce qui compromet l'historicité de la conscience et confère, par conséquent, un caractère intellectualiste à l'intuition... il n'est pas question, chez Husserl, du rapport de l'historicité de la conscience avec son intentionnalité, sa socialité, sa personnalité."

<sup>56</sup> Levinas, *Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, 150.



intersubjective world. A phenomenological intuition of the life of others, a reflection by *Einfühlung* opens the field of transcendental intersubjectivity and completes the work of the philosophical intuition of subjectivity. Here again, the problems of the constitution of the world will arise.<sup>57</sup>

Levinas criticizes Husserl because his philosophy of the phenomenological reduction leaves unidentified the pre-conditions of the phenomenological reduction. He writes

[D]espite the revolutionary character of the phenomenological reduction, the revolution which it accomplishes is, in Husserl's philosophy, possible only to the extent that the natural attitude is theoretical. The historical role of the reduction and the meaning of its appearance at a certain moment of existence are, for him, not even a problem.<sup>58</sup>

In other words, as Beavers affirms, "Levinas's philosophy is directed precisely at the pre-conditions for the reduction. Prior to the intentional relation, that is, prior to thought, unfolds another kind of meaning that Husserl neglects"<sup>59</sup> – namely – the intersubjectivity and responsibility for the other. To be sure Levinas reproaches Husserl for his intellectualism and for his abstraction of consciousness from history. Husserl's transcendental ego looks at the raw matter of life from a disinterested, uninvolved, ahistorical position. Consciousness is sovereign, responsible only to itself, and free.<sup>60</sup> Martin Heidegger comes to the rescue of Edmund Husserl by trying to extend Husserl's phenomenological reduction to the constitution of human existence rather than restraining it himself to the subject's intentional consciousness. Yet he too, in Levinas's estimation, will not go far enough.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Levinas, *Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, 150-151; *La théorie de l'intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl*, 214-215.

<sup>58</sup> Levinas, *Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, 157; *La théorie de l'intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl*, 222.

<sup>59</sup> Beavers, *Levinas Beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism*, 26.

<sup>60</sup> Levinas, *La théorie de l'intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl*, 214-215, 220.

<sup>61</sup> Beavers, *Levinas Beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism*, 26.

### *Heidegger and Representational Consciousness*

So far we have seen that the key to Husserl's phenomenology lies in its denunciation of the natural attitude and its reducing human experience to the experience of the objects. Husserl takes this stance because of his firm commitment to the doctrine of intentionality. Intentionality is, for him, the characteristic activity of consciousness as it constitutes itself in relation to the world. The division between object and subject can be regarded as one of the ways in which consciousness makes the world intelligible to itself. The world is understood as a compilation of objects thus constituted by the intentional power of consciousness. Here Husserl reduces the world to the transcendental ego.<sup>62</sup>

Heidegger reacts to Husserl's phenomenological reduction by raising a fundamental ontological question of metaphysics in his unprecedented book, *Being and Time*. He asks: What is the meaning of Being in general? Heidegger's effort is geared towards redefining phenomenology in terms of Being.<sup>63</sup> For him, phenomenology is "a method of 'intuitive grasping' of things in their being, a way in which the being of things could be wrested away from their disclosure and hiddenness and laid bare."<sup>64</sup> This, for Heidegger, is nothing other than what Husserl expresses in the maxim *to the things themselves*. Heidegger believes that Husserl's maxim, *to the things themselves*, that is, to the things as they are constituted by and in consciousness, means to the things as they actually are in their being,<sup>65</sup> because Husserl's objects of consciousness are, first and foremost, the beings that one meets in the world. Heidegger therefore posits the meaning of Being in general as the prerequisite for understanding particular beings or entities or

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<sup>62</sup> Beavers, *Levinas Beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism*, 26.

<sup>63</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 49-50.

<sup>64</sup> Manning, *Interpreting Otherwise than Heidegger*, 178. See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 61.

<sup>65</sup> Manning, *Interpreting Otherwise than Heidegger*, 177-178.

what it means for them to exist.<sup>66</sup> This issue has been – for Heidegger – the major failure of the entire philosophical tradition including Kant, that is, “to master the basic problem of Being.”<sup>67</sup> Now, the right way to understand being, Heidegger asserts, is to begin with the examination of the *Dasein*. In his philosophical discourse *Being and Time*, Heidegger offers an existential ontology of selfhood as *Dasein* (being-there) – the concretely existing human being who is there – as part of a world. He writes:

We are ourselves the entities to be analyzed. The Being of any such entity is *in such case mine*. These entities, in their Being, comport themselves towards their Being. As entities with such Being, they are delivered over to their own Being. *Being* is that which is an issue for every such entity.<sup>68</sup>

For Heidegger, *Dasein* exists as an entity which in each case I myself am. What I myself am or, what Heidegger calls *Mineness*, is constitutive of any existent *Dasein* as that which make *Dasein's* two modes of existence – authenticity and inauthenticity – possible.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, in *Dasein's* original disclosedness as Being-in-the-world, one is thrust into the ontological contingency of “Being-in” a milieu and “Being-with” others and with-oneself, which underlies all participation, engagement and concrete involvement with the world that is given in a person’s immediate preoccupations and concerns. Thus, the world itself is constitutive of *Dasein's* Being, and *Dasein* finds itself in the world and is affected by it. *Dasein* is thrown into the world as being-in-the-world. The state of being thrown is an indispensable *a priori*, yet insufficient for totally establishing *Dasein's* Being.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Beavers, *Levinas Beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism*, 26-27.

<sup>67</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 127.

<sup>68</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 67. (Heidegger’s italics)

<sup>69</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 78.

<sup>70</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 79.

Heidegger's conception of *Dasein* as always already Being-in-the world, as an entity concerned about its Being and as a Being who understands the Being of entities enables him to argue that *Dasein* is to be examined prior to any effort to express its Being as 'rational animal.' Human beings are first and foremost concerned about their existence before the search for knowledge and its achievement in representation which are expressions of their fundamental concern about existence.<sup>71</sup> Thus, for Heidegger, prior to the introduction of the categories of subject and object in knowledge there is a relationship between *Dasein* and its world. It is from this relationship that *Dasein*'s Being as concern and his characterization of knowing as a mode of Being takes shape. *Dasein* is principally a Being who acts and only secondarily a Being who knows. Now, the entities *Dasein* encounters in its world are significant in so far as they are useful to *Dasein* for some reason or another.<sup>72</sup> In a way, for Heidegger, "such entities are not thereby objects for knowing the 'world' theoretically; they are simply what gets used, what gets produced, and so forth."<sup>73</sup>

Significant here is the fact that Heidegger – while accepting what his predecessors, Descartes, Kant, and Husserl, have to say about the characterization of reason since it is in reason that *Dasein*'s world comes to a substantial existence as the world of subjects and objects – distances himself from his predecessors on the understanding of knowledge. Knowing, for Heidegger, "is *founded* upon Being-in-the-world, and this means that the world is given in knowledge even if it cannot be conceived and taken up as a theme."<sup>74</sup> Thus, where Husserl limits representation within the

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<sup>71</sup> Beavers, *Levinas Beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism*, 29.

<sup>72</sup> Beavers, *Levinas Beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism*, 31.

<sup>73</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 95.

<sup>74</sup> Beavers, *Levinas Beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism*, 34. (Beavers' italics)

parameters of the transcendental ego Heidegger argues that “prior to representing realities, the human being dwells in the world... knowing is but one way in which the human being exhibits this concern” in the context of life.<sup>75</sup> While Heidegger inherits “from Husserl the method and means of uncovering the transcendental conditions of knowledge”<sup>76</sup> he deems it possible only “by the opaque drama of a concrete existence in a concrete history which cannot be mastered by theoretical evidence.”<sup>77</sup>

Levinas’s discussion with Heidegger has to be understood within the context of Husserl’s phenomenological reduction. Most of Levinas’s critique of Husserl is in every respect Heideggerian, even though he had in the same time published anti-Heideggerian studies.<sup>78</sup> Levinas reproaches Husserl for his intellectualism and for his abstraction of consciousness from history. He discovers in Heidegger a philosophy entirely engaged in the world, in experience and desire, which replaces the Husserlian terms of *noesis* and *noema* (acts and objects of consciousness) with the Heideggerian vocabulary of history, world, and dereliction or thrown-ness.<sup>79</sup>

In a couple of articles, however, Levinas began to express discontent with Heidegger’s work by questioning and contesting the primacy of ontology.<sup>80</sup> Heidegger –

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<sup>75</sup> Beavers, *Levinas Beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism*, 37.

<sup>76</sup> Peperzak, *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, 46.

<sup>77</sup> Peperzak, *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, 46.

<sup>78</sup> Levinas, *La théorie de l’intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl*, 14-15. Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak helpfully comments on this: “to Husserl’s celebration of the free subject which masters the passive synthesis of time and history, Levinas opposes Heidegger’s view that consciousness and the clarity of evident meaning are always already preceded by the opaque drama of a concrete existence in a concrete history which cannot be mastered by theoretical evidence.” See his *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, 46.

<sup>79</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “l’Œuvre d’Edmond Husserl,” in *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, 3<sup>ème</sup> édition (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1974), 48-49.

<sup>80</sup> “Martin Heidegger et l’ontologie,” “L’ontologie dans le temporel,” “De la description à l’existence,” et “L’ontologie est-elle fondamentale?” All these articles could be found in Levinas, *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*. For insightful reflections on Levinas’s critique of Heidegger, see Manning, *Interpreting Otherwise than Heidegger*; Peperzak, *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, 204-217; Smith, *Toward the Outside*, 127-139.

Levinas contends – seems to maintain the supremacy of the same over the other. He does not destroy it, but rather he characterizes a whole current of Western thought. *Dasein* that Heidegger puts in the place of the soul, of consciousness, of the Ego, retains the structure of the same.<sup>81</sup> In order to avoid reproducing this primary presumption of Western philosophy, Levinas began to build up his own philosophy in which his debts to Heidegger do not prevent him from suggesting that we must leave Heidegger's thought behind. In the introduction to *From Existence to Existents (De l'existence à l'existant)*, Levinas writes:

If at the beginning our reflections are in large measure inspired by the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, where we find the concept of ontology and of the relationship which man sustains with Being, they are also governed by a profound need to leave the climate of this philosophy [*le climat de cette philosophie*], and by the conviction that we cannot leave it for a philosophy that would be pre-Heideggerian.<sup>82</sup>

Furthermore, in the article “De la description à l'existence,” he questions Heidegger's ontology with the following questions: Is the relation of man to Being uniquely ontology? Does ontology exhaust the possibilities of relationship with Being, or is there something which exceeds ontology? Does the search for the meaning of Being miss something which may be even more fundamental?<sup>83</sup>

In Heidegger's ontology, Levinas refutes the fact that the relationship between beings and Being primarily consists in “comprehension or understanding.”<sup>84</sup> Heidegger understands the entities, beings within the horizon of Being. “In so doing, he rejoins the

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<sup>81</sup> Levinas, *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, 169 : « Le Dasein que Heidegger met à la place de l'âme, de la conscience, du Moi, conserve la structure du Même. »

<sup>82</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1978), 19 ; Emmanuel Levinas, *De l'existence à l'existant* (Paris: Fontaine, 1947), 19.

<sup>83</sup> Levinas, *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, 106 - 107.

<sup>84</sup> Simon Critchley's introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, 11.

‘great tradition of Western philosophy,’ which is to understand ‘the particular, which alone exists,’ within the context of a knowledge of the universal.”<sup>85</sup> Levinas has expressed himself on this in a rather important manner:

The primacy of ontology for Heidegger does not rest on the truism: “to know an *existent* it is necessary to have comprehended the Being of existents.” To affirm the priority of *Being* over *existents* is to already decide the essence of philosophy; it is to subordinate the relation with *someone*, who is an existent, (ethical relation) to a relation with the *Being of existents*, which, impersonal, permits the apprehension, domination of existents (a relationship of knowing), subordinates justice to freedom. If freedom denotes the mode of remaining the same in the midst of the other, knowledge, where an existent is given by interposition of interpersonal Being, contains the ultimate sense of freedom. It would be opposed to justice, which involves obligations with regard to an existent that refuses to give itself, the other, who in this sense of freedom would be an existent par excellence. In subordinating every relation with existents to the relation with Being the Heideggerian ontology affirms the primacy of freedom over ethics.<sup>86</sup>

For Levinas, Heidegger underestimates ethics or the relation to the other. That is, he makes it submissive to ontology. This way of understanding existence does not allow another being (*autrui*) to present him/herself as he or she is. Levinas sees in Heideggerian ontology a penchant which places the relationship with the other to the relation with being in general. This way of thinking unavoidably set the stage for attitudes of domination, violence and tyranny.<sup>87</sup> This argument has been the source and center of Levinas’s transcendental ethics of responsibility, from the 1940s until the publication of *Totalité et infini* in 1961, and his subsequent works.<sup>88</sup> Levinas criticizes

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<sup>85</sup> Smith, *Toward the Outside*, 132.

<sup>86</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 45. (Levinas’s italics)

<sup>87</sup> Smith, *Toward the Outside*, 134.

<sup>88</sup> Peperzak, *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, 51. It should also be noted that Emmanuel Levinas’s critique of Heidegger has also been certainly influenced by the experience of the war and by the attitude of the persecuted Jew towards the German, and Heidegger’s involvement with the Nazis. For instance in *Quatre Lectures Talmudiques* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1968), 56, Levinas writes : “On peut pardonner a beaucoup d’Allemands, mais il y a des allemands à qui il est difficile de pardonner. Il est

Heidegger not only because he falls short of appreciating the transcendence of the other, but also because his notion of being simply ignores the absurdity and the confusion of mere being-*there* (in the sense of *il y a*) and overlooks the dreadfulness of a completely anonymous existence.<sup>89</sup>

For Levinas, Heidegger – who “sets out to solve the problem of solipsism” by grounding knowledge existentially “as one of the many modes of being human”<sup>90</sup> – fails to appreciate the fact that the “contact between the self and the other” [in-the-world] “cannot occur in reason or in function, but in affectivity, which is ultimately tied to sensibility.”<sup>91</sup>

Even though Levinas departs from the tradition of rational subjectivity that began with Descartes and was clarified by Kant, Husserl and Heidegger he is still within the horizon of Cartesianism. This insight into how his philosophy is related to Descartes, Kant, Husserl and Heidegger will enable us to comprehend fully his singular way of doing phenomenology after the manner of Heidegger rather than Husserl. Yet different from them, Levinas asserts that knowing takes place always within the context of the

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difficile de pardonner à Heidegger.” - “One can forgive many Germans, but there are Germans who it is difficult to forgive. It is difficult to forgive Heidegger.” (My translation).

<sup>89</sup> For Levinas, “*il y a* existing without existent is anonymous, impersonal existing before the constitution of the individuated human subject. So at this stage, there is no consciousness to experience this paradoxical stage of existence. For Levinas, consciousness should be understood as hypostasis that is an event whereby something as yet unidentifiable acquires separate existence. In this account, consciousness, along with subjectivity and identity, are secondary, emerging from the *il y a* rather than pre-existing it.” See, Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 10-11; Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, translated by Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 25-26, 45-46, 47. Luk Bouckaert, “Ontology and Ethics: Reflections on Levinas’ Critique of Heidegger,” *International Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 10,3 (1970): 402, comments on this as follows: “In his first writings Levinas refers to an experience of being in which being is no longer, as with Heidegger, given to human thinking (*Dasein*) as light and world, but in which this thinking loses its initiatives and turns, as it were, into the object of a wholly anonymous and impersonal happening, which Levinas calls the *il y a*, an experience without world, a night without beings. In connection with this experience of being Levinas describes the origin of the subject not directly as an ecstasy towards the world and as ontological concern, but first and foremost as hypostasis (*repli de soi*) and enjoyment (*la jouissance*).”

<sup>90</sup> Beavers, *Levinas Beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism*, 1.

<sup>91</sup> Beavers, *Levinas Beyond the Horizons of Cartesianism*, 2.



intersubjective relation. The issue of the other becomes now the central theme of his philosophy. Levinas's philosophical enterprise will then be dominated by one question: what does it mean to think of the other as other? This leads us to the examination of Levinas's transcendental ethics of responsibility.

### **III. Emmanuel Levinas's Ethics of Responsibility**

The previous section of this chapter discussed how the philosophical project of Levinas developed out of a confrontation with the phenomenological tradition of Western philosophy. This philosophy, Levinas observes, is dominated by the distinction between existents and existence and is concentrated on the thinking existence. Levinas reverses the course and moves it to a new direction: "from existence to the existent and from the existent to the other, a path which delineates time itself."<sup>92</sup> Levinas seeks to develop a phenomenological alternative to the ontology of Husserl and Heidegger which reduces the subject's relation to otherness to comprehension or understanding. The central task of Levinas is to attempt to describe a relation with the other person that cannot be reduced to comprehension. He argues that ethics, that is, intersubjectivity and responsibility for the other, should replace traditional metaphysics as first philosophy.

In this section, we would like to shed some light on Levinas's ethics of responsibility. This exposition will be far from exhaustive, but it will help situate Levinas's philosophy within the context of this work. We will begin by looking at Levinas's understanding of ethics as first philosophy in order to appreciate that which is beyond being, the ethical command. The ethical command – which precedes all knowing, choosing, willing, or even Being – is demanded by the encounter with the other through

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<sup>92</sup>Levinas, "Signature," in *Difficult Freedom*, 292.

the face, the trace, and the infinite. The encounter with the other calls the ethical subject to responsibility to the point of substitution, sensibility, hostage, proximity, and vulnerability. It is this encounter with the other that constitutes the central point of Levinas's thought. Indeed, it is only through the ethical command – prior to free choice and to any ontological thematization – that we experience the trace of the divine other, God. Furthermore, in order to clarify the relationship between the ethical command which is diachronic and pre-ontological, and its expression in the thematized world, we will examine Levinas's understanding of transcendence and time, the Saying and the Said, and the third party. In the end, we will establish the impact of Judaism and the Holocaust on his thought.

### *Ethics as First Philosophy*

Levinas's thesis, *ethics is first philosophy*, stems from his resolve to leave the climate of Husserl's idealism and Heidegger's thinking toward the ethical issue of the meaning of being, obtainable in the face-to-face relation. The essential task of his work becomes an effort to describe a relation with *autrui*, the other person that cannot be abbreviated to knowledge. *Autrui* is certainly Levinas's key term in all of his work. It signifies the human other, the other person who can never be represented in a theme or a concept in his/her relationship with the subject because he/she is beyond comprehension of Being.<sup>93</sup>

Levinas's philosophy exalts ethics, making the ethical relation the most central definition of philosophy. Our ethical duty to one another, he maintains, must be considered first philosophy and the central truth that heads as sovereign over the rest of

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<sup>93</sup> Simon Critchley's introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, 11.

philosophy. The question might then be how does Levinas arrive at this priority of ethical relation over ontology? The answer has to be found in his understanding of the self – other relationship.

In *Totality and Infinity* - which sets his whole philosophical agenda - Levinas presents how the self first comes to ascertain its identity as the same not only by its opposition to an other, but from out of its concrete egoism in relation to the world. In this relation to the world, the egoist self remains free, dominating and mastering what is other without being determined by it. And the *moments* in the self's sojourn in the world in which it first establishes its identity are, enjoyment, dwelling, labor and possession, and representation.<sup>94</sup> These, for Levinas, are the moments through which the constitution of the self of interiority and economy are articulated.<sup>95</sup> Here, the self gets separated from totality by retiring to the interiority of a home where everyone is at home: *chez soi*.

As soon as Levinas introduces the face of the other totality breaks into pieces. The face of the other plays a central role because “the gleam of exteriority or of transcendence”<sup>96</sup> happens in the face of the other, requiring a new thinking in the face of the other. Levinas describes the appearance of the absolute other – who is the infinite – in terms of desire and the face. My relation to the other – he argues – is desire, not need, because “over him I have no power.”<sup>97</sup> One cannot comprehend the other, confine him/her, and place him/her within a context in order to get a handle on him/her. The other is ungraspable. The other and self are radically separated from one another. The other

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<sup>94</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 35-40. (My italics)

<sup>95</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 109-183.

<sup>96</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 24.

<sup>97</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 39.

does not limit the self; the other allows the self to transcend itself to reach to the heights to be better than it is.<sup>98</sup>

Ultimately the ethical relationship, for Levinas, does not stem from an individual conscious choice confronted with the face of the other. Ethics does not first arise in the context of knowledge and freedom of an intentional consciousness. Ethics precedes ontology, not in a synchronic, but in a diachronic way. In a diachronic way the face of the other commands me, prior to any commitment on my part, to responsibility. Levinas writes:

Responsibility for the Other, for the naked face of the first individual to come along. A responsibility that goes beyond what I may or may not have done to the Other or whatever acts I may or may not have committed, as if I were devoted to the other man before being devoted to myself. Or more precisely, as if I had to answer for the other's death even before *being*. A guiltless responsibility, whereby I am none the less open to an accusation of which no alibi, spatial or temporal, could clear me...A responsibility stemming from a time before my freedom - before my (*moi*) beginning, before any present...Responsibility from my neighbor dates from before my freedom in the immemorial past, unrepresentable past that was never present and is more ancient than consciousness of...A responsibility for my neighbor, for the other man, for the stranger or sojourner, to which nothing in the rigorously ontological order binds me – nothing in the order of thing, of the something, of number or causality. It is the responsibility of a hostage which can be carried to the point of being substituted for the other person and demands an infinite subjection of subjectivity.<sup>99</sup>

The ethical imperative is so primordial that one always is late in one's response to the ethical command of the face that calls one to responsibility. The subject is always first and foremost "the servant of a neighbor, already late and guilty for being late... [the subject is structured] from the outside, traumatically commanded, without interiorizing

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<sup>98</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 187-240.

<sup>99</sup> Levinas, "Ethics as first philosophy," in *The Levinas Reader*, 83-84.

by representation and concepts the authority that commands him/her.”<sup>100</sup> He/she is always in a state of *insomnia/wakefulness* (impossibility of sleep), that is, always in perpetual responsibility for the other.<sup>101</sup> One’s responsibility for the other pre-exists any self-consciousness, and it is unconditional. It is enactive of subjectivity and transcends all emotional, historical or social unforeseen events which could limit it. The other’s face is real humanity and carries with it the idea of infinity rather than totality. For Levinas, “the other becomes my neighbour precisely through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question.”<sup>102</sup> Thus, for Levinas, *what constitutes the human person’s very humanity is the concern for the death of another, not its concern for its own death.* The philosophical question *par excellence* is no longer “why being rather than nothing, but how being justifies itself.”<sup>103</sup> For philosophy to regain its credibility, Levinas argues, it has to substitute ontology with the ethical relation, for “ethics is not a moment of being; it is otherwise and better than being, the very possibility of the beyond”<sup>104</sup> that points to the Good. Ethics is first philosophy.

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<sup>100</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 87.

<sup>101</sup> Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 65ff; Emmanuel Levinas and Richard Kearney, “Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas,” in *Face to Face with Levinas*, edited by Richard A. Cohen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 30 (My italics).

<sup>102</sup> Levinas, “Ethics as first philosophy,” in *The Levinas Reader*, 83.

<sup>103</sup> Levinas, “Ethics as first philosophy,” in *The Levinas Reader*, 86. (My italics)

<sup>104</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “God and Philosophy,” in *The Levinas Reader*, 179. Richard Cohen’s comments are helpful here; he writes: “Levinas insists on ethics, on a metaphysical responsibility, an exorbitant and infinite responsibility for other human beings, to care not for being, for the unraveling of its plot, but for what is beyond and against being, the alterity of the other person. ‘Do I have,’ he asks, ‘the *right* to be?’” See his introduction to *Ethics and Infinity*, 3.

*Ethical Subjectivity: Encounter with the Other, the Face, the Trace, and the Infinite*

We established above that Levinas's ethics as first philosophy was the result of his determination to distance himself from his mentors who gave priority to the comprehension of being, making it more central to the definition of philosophy itself than the ethical relation with the other. This ethical encounter with the other – pre-thematic and pre-ontological – constitutes the center and principal originality of Levinas's analyses. Levinas associates this other with the other person and, in the form of *illegitimacy*, with God.<sup>105</sup> The other for Levinas is the absolute other that the same/self cannot comprehend, or place within a context in order to get a handle on him. He or she is completely ungraspable.

Levinas's philosophical ethics takes place in the context of non-intentional consciousness which is a form of *mauvaise conscience*.<sup>106</sup> *Mauvaise conscience* is the non-intentional consciousness of the ethical subject, an identity without identity of the ethical subject, a feeling of never being responsible enough. It is “a fear for all the violence and murder my existing might generate, in spite of its conscious and intentional innocence. A fear which reaches back past my ‘self-consciousness’ in spite of whatever moves are made towards a *bonne conscience* by a pure perseverance in being.”<sup>107</sup> Hence, ethical subjectivity is understood in terms of an asymmetrical proximity, vulnerability, responsibility, substitution, hostage, obsession, persecution, maternity, etc. Levinas

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<sup>105</sup> Alphonso Lingis's introduction to *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, xxxiii.

<sup>106</sup> Most helpful on Levinas's thought about *mauvaise conscience/bonne conscience*, see his “Ethics as First Philosophy,” 80-82. (Levinas's italics). Marie L. Baird's explanation on the difference between *mauvaise conscience* and *bonne conscience* is helpful. She writes: : *mauvaise conscience* “is not simply ‘bad conscience’ but rather a ‘timid’ conscience that is innocent yet ‘accused’ and ‘responsible’ because its very existence usurps another's right to be. It is ‘homeless’ because it has not yet acceded to the positivity of personal identity and egoic-self-concern. . . *mauvaise conscience* is fearful of occupying the place of another which becomes justified with the rise of the intentionality-driven ego.” See her *On the Side of the Angels: Ethics and Post-Holocaust Spirituality* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 69-70.

<sup>107</sup> Levinas, “Ethics as First Philosophy,” in *The Levinas Reader*, 82. (Levinas's italics).

argues that “the other remains infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign; his face in which his epiphany is produced and which appeals to me breaks with the world that can be common to us, whose virtualities are inscribed in our *nature* and developed by our existence.”<sup>108</sup> The other *appears* to me as the face of the other, the trace and the infinite. The face, for Levinas, does not just mean the physical and visible face. It exceeds one’s gaze by which one would objectify it. He writes:

The way in which the other presents himself, exceeding *the idea of the other in me*, we here name face. This *mode* does not consist in figuring as theme under my gaze, in spreading itself forth as a set of qualities forming an image. The face of the Other at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me, the idea existing to my own measure and to the measure of its *ideatum* – the adequate idea.<sup>109</sup>

Here Levinas supports the ethical subject’s relation to a transcendence that is outside of the system of objectifying thought. This transcendence is that of the face of the other, as she/he reveals her/himself to me in his/her absolute otherness – which is outside of any context – because the face of the other never appears to one’s intentional consciousness. It never appears within the time of history. Yet, it addresses the situation of inhumanity in history in time that goes contrary to the synchronic time. The other’s face expresses his/her uncontaminated exposure; his/her mere presence addresses a silent request to the subject not to kill him/her. The face reveals to the subject the reality of the other human person in his pure humanity, beyond all the socio-political and economic roles. It calls into question the insensitivity of the self, and validates the uniqueness of the subject as that which is irreplaceable in responsibility. The distinctiveness of the subject rests in the

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<sup>108</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 194. (Levinas’s italics). It is important to note that for Levinas “the other does not purely and simply negate the I; total negation, of which murder is the temptation and the attempt, refers to an antecedent relation. The relation between the Other and me, which dawns forth in his expression, issues neither in number nor in concept.” 194.

<sup>109</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 50-51. (Levinas’s italics)

fact that no one can answer for him/her. The face is what is against the violence intrinsic in the totalization of being in which the other is reduced to the same. It commands the expression “Thou shall not kill” and calls the ethical subject to exposure and vulnerability.

A further important element in the understanding of the face is that the other always meets the ethical subject from an *immemorial past*, considered as a never-ending responsibility, otherwise than the time of representation, that calls forth the ethical subject’s submission to the face of that other who both orders and begs. This face, Levinas argues, passes away in this unrepresentable time as a *trace*. He writes:

A face is a trace of itself, given over to my responsibility, but to which I am wanting and faulty. It is as though I were responsible for his morality, and guilty for surviving. A face is anachronous immediacy more tense than that of an image offered on the straightforwardness of intuitive intention. In proximity the absolutely other, the stranger whom I have “neither conceived nor given birth to,” I already have on my arms, already bear, according to the Biblical formula, ‘in my breast as the nurse bears the nursing.’<sup>110</sup>

For Levinas, the trace of the other is what is left of the other for us in the other’s absence – an absence which nothing can reverse as it refers back to what is beyond the face – to absolute exteriority. The fact that the face is an unrepresentable trace calls forth in Levinas’s thought the idea of transcendence which goes beyond every closed structure of totality in which every other relation is linked in terms of either knowledge or power. It is this transcendence of the ethical relation that Levinas calls the infinite. He writes “the face of the other in proximity, which is more than representation, is an unrepresentable trace, the way of the infinite.”<sup>111</sup> The question for Levinas is whether or not, beyond being, a meaning might not show itself whose priority, translated into ontological

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<sup>110</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 91.

<sup>111</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 116.



language, will be called prior to being.<sup>112</sup> Levinas sees in the face of the other, the trace of God, who is never there. And God – to be sure – is only *revealed* through his trace. At this point we might as well ask how precisely this infinite of the other bears the infinity of God. The answer, for Levinas, has to be found in the ethical subject's turn to the face of the other. Thus, "the ethical subject's responsiveness to the face of the other is always already a desire for the infinite of God."<sup>113</sup> This desire "is beyond satisfaction, and, unlike a need, does not identify a term or an end. This endless desire for what is beyond is *dis-interestedness*, transcendence – desire for the Good."<sup>114</sup> From this point of view, God for Levinas "remains near because God's trace passes in the face of the other. Yet God is also utterly transcendent calling upon the ethical subject to 'what is non-desirable, the undesirable par excellence – the other' enacted as responsibility for that other."<sup>115</sup> Levinas – as Marie Baird would argue – "posits a sort of a triangular relationship to divinity mediated through the ethical relation: 'The goodness of the Good...inclines the movement it calls forth, to turn it from the obliqueness that goes higher than straightforwardness'."<sup>116</sup> Levinas asserts:

To be good is a deficit, waste and foolishness in a being; to be good is excellence and elevation beyond being. Ethics is not a moment of being; it is otherwise and better than being, the very possibility of the beyond. In this ethical reversal, in this reference of the desirable to the non-desirable, in this strange mission that orders the approach to the other, God is drawn out of objectivity, presence and being. He

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<sup>112</sup> Levinas, "God and Philosophy," in *The Levinas Reader*, 168.

<sup>113</sup> Baird, *On the Side of the Angels*, 77.

<sup>114</sup> Levinas, "God and Philosophy," in *The Levinas Reader*, 177. Stéphane Mosès's comments on Levinas's idea of *dis-interestedness* are here helpful. He writes: "Against the being that fills all space of thought and that even fills the still-subsisting intervals of nothingness which any metaphysics leaves – against the '*esse* (Being) that appears as '*inter-esse*' (Interest) – Levinas opposed the 'Dis-interest' by means of which subjectivity withdraws from the concern of seizing the real so as to understand and dominate it. This *dis-interest* expresses the priority for man of another concern, that of the 'for-another,' which is located beyond the principle of the persistence of Being which dominates ontology." See his "Emmanuel Levinas: Ethics as Primary Meaning," in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*, edited by Claire Elise Katz with Lara Trout, vol. I 48 (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 332.

<sup>115</sup> Baird, *On the Side of the Angels*, 77.

<sup>116</sup> Baird, *On the Side of the Angels*, 77; Levinas, "God and Philosophy," in *The Levinas Reader*, 178.

is neither an object nor an interlocutor. His absolute remoteness, his transcendence, turns into my responsibility – non-erotic par excellence – for the other...<sup>117</sup>

Levinas's comments are helpful in establishing the fundamental connection between the face, the trace and the infinite. He affirms the fact that the ethical relation is “the irruption of God within being, or the bursting out of Being towards God in the desire for the infinite that is enacted as responsibility for the other.”<sup>118</sup> Hence, the absolute otherness of another, envisioned as absence, communicates to the trace of God in man. “God thus *falls into meaning* or *comes to the idea* in the infinity of an ethical obligation in response to the face of the other.”<sup>119</sup>

To be sure, in Levinas, the ethical enactment as bearing the trace of God focuses on two aspects of God. On the one hand we have “the absolutely transcendent God, YHWH or the kabbalistic *Ein-Sof*, who remains completely outside of and unaffected by the world”<sup>120</sup> (God and Philosophy). On the other hand, there is also the immanent God, *Elohim* (the kenotic God), “who, like a soul of the world, maintains the existence, light, power and holiness of the world, in the form of continuous creation.”<sup>121</sup> So what we see

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<sup>117</sup> Levinas, “God and Philosophy,” in *The Levinas Reader*, 179.

<sup>118</sup> Levinas, “Revelation in the Jewish Tradition,” in *The Levinas Reader*, 202; see also Baird, *On the Side of the Angels*, 77. Marie Baird rightly points out the fact that “‘the irruption of God within Being’” for Levinas, “is not limited in its temporal structure to the ‘beyond’ of an immemorial past or unconceptualizable. As altogether otherwise than the time of representability, such an irruption as enacted in the ethical relation is a ‘rupture of the natural order of being’ that does not come to halt with the death of this or that ethical subject. To posit such a terminus would consign the ethical subject to the status of an ‘individual’ imbued with an intentionally representable identity that constitutes him or her as a ‘subject’, understood in its ontological sense. For Levinas the ethical subject is simply never done with the other. The endless commitment that responsibility for the other entails is a rupture of being that calls forth the ‘*super-natural*’ – whence comes,” as Levinas affirms, “the ‘recognizing’ and naming of God in every possible Revelation.”

<sup>119</sup> Baird, *On the Side of the Angels*, 77.

<sup>120</sup> Baird, *On the Side of the Angels*, 78.

<sup>121</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Judaism and Kenosis,” in *In The Time of the Nations*, translated by Michael B. Smith (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 122. Levinas found this

in Levinas's conception of God is the interplay of these two aspects. Levinas, however, focuses more on *Elohim*, the kenosis of God, because of his association with the worlds and humans. He writes:

[T]here is a privileged relationship between the human soul, the soul of Israel, and God. There is a connaturality between man and the manifold entirety of creature on one hand, and a special intimacy between man and *Elohim* on the other. This intimacy is characterized both by *Elohim*'s superiority to man, who is a part of creation, and by the dependency, intended by *Elohim*, of *Elohim* on man with respect to everything concerning the association of *Elohim* with the worlds, i.e., everything concerning the very existence and devotion of the worlds. Man, by acting in agreement with the Torah, *nourishes* the association of God with the world; or, by his transgression, he exhausts the powers of that divine association.<sup>122</sup>

Again, in the same vein he continues:

God associates with or withdraws from the worlds, depending upon human behavior. Man is answerable to the universe! Man is answerable for others. His faithfulness or unfaithfulness to the Torah is not just a way of winning or losing his salvation: the being, elevation and light of the worlds are dependent upon it. Only indirectly, by virtue of the salvation or downfall of the worlds, does his own destiny depend on it. As if through that responsibility, which constitutes man's very identity, each one of us were similar to *Elohim*.<sup>123</sup>

Hence, for Levinas, "the very being of the world is thus dependent upon the model of ethical responsibility"<sup>124</sup> exemplified by the prophet's answer: 'Here I am.' This prophetic approach is "a moment of the human condition itself" that concerns every human person; no one is exempt from this moment.<sup>125</sup> The subject, therefore, is always summoned up to a responsibility he/she never bargained for; a responsibility engraved in the infinity of the face of the other. He/she realizes him/herself in extreme passivity that

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conceptualization in the book of Rabbi Haim of Volozhin (1759-1821), *Nefesh Hahaim (The Soul of Life)*. For more details, see Levinas, "Judaism and Kenosis," 122-127; Baird, *On the Side of the Angels*, 78.

<sup>122</sup> Levinas, "Judaism and Kenosis," in *In The Time of the Nations*, 124-125.

<sup>123</sup> Levinas, "Judaism and Kenosis," in *In The Time of the Nations*, 125.

<sup>124</sup> Baird, *On the Side of the Angels*, 78.

<sup>125</sup> Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 113.

precedes and questions all freedom.<sup>126</sup> Hence, in the subject's ethical encounter with the other, the infinity of the other bears the trace of the infinity of God. And the trace for Levinas "is not just one more word: it is the proximity of God in the countenance of my fellowman."<sup>127</sup>

The subject is distressed, confronted, called out of its naïve, calculating sleep, awakened to its injustice and welcomes the other into its world. For Levinas, the ethical relation of infinite responsibility for the other is that which endorses the human person into subjectivity itself. He characterizes ethical subjectivity and responsibility as "maternity in the complete being 'for the other' which characterizes it" or "having-the-other-in-one's-skin."<sup>128</sup> As for Levinas humanity at its best is an act rather than a state of being, human responsibility becomes passivity in action. Thus, to be human is to act ethically. The human person *rightly understood* is fundamentally responsible prior to any commitment in relation to the other human person.

*The Temporality of the Ethical Encounter: Transcendence and Time, the Saying and the Said, and the Third Party.*

The foundation of Levinas's philosophy is the ethical encounter between the *moi*, (self) and *autrui*, (the other). This relation is considered in terms of sensibility, vulnerability and exposure, proximity, the face, hostage, obsession, trauma, persecution, substitution, obligation and responsibility. It is within this context that Levinas lays out his own basic approach concerning the temporality of the ethical encounter and his own account of its construction and meaning. To talk about the temporality of the ethical

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<sup>126</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, "A Man-God?" in *Entre Nous: On thinking-of-the Other*, translated by Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 58.

<sup>127</sup> Levinas, "A Man-God?" in *Entre Nous: On thinking-of-the Other*, 57.

<sup>128</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 108, 115 respectively.

encounter supposes an understanding of Levinas's idea of time. The notion of time, in Levinas's project, is deep-seated in the asymmetrical straightforwardness of the subject-other relationships, and it constitutes the basic configuration of being. This notion is both ethical and intersubjective.<sup>129</sup> Thus the ethical encounter for Levinas takes place in *atemporal temporality*. In this section of the work, we will have a closer look at concepts such as transcendence, Saying and Said, and the third party in relation to the temporality of the ethical encounter.

### *Transcendence and Time*

Key to Levinas's understanding of subjectivity is the notion of *separation*<sup>130</sup> between alterity and the same. It expresses otherness and difference between the subject and the other, and insists on the fact that the other remains absolutely transcendent and infinite with respect to the subject. For Levinas, as Michael Purcell comments, "subjectivity is 'the-Other-in-me,' experienced not in itself ... but in the responsibility for-the-other which is provoked and evoked in me."<sup>131</sup> What is at stake in Levinas's philosophy is the dimension of alterity of the other human person that has to be understood in terms of that which exceeds comprehension totally, that which is higher to the horizons of being, the truth of being, and precedes the grounds of philosophy. Now, what is higher than being, comprehension, and philosophy is the priority of ethical order

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<sup>129</sup>Richard A. Cohen, *Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 133. For a fuller grasp of Levinas's notion of time, read 133-161. With regard to Levinas's notion of time, Cohen writes: "While the topic of time is central to *Time and the Other* ... each of Levinas's works presents or assumes a distinctive analysis of time, and each of these analyses is progressively more radical than the ones before it. This is because Levinas links time to the alterity of intersubjectivity; as his theory of intersubjectivity becomes progressively radicalized in his work as a whole, so does his theory of time." 137.

<sup>130</sup> Michael Purcell, *Mystery and Method: The Other in Rahner and Levinas* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1998), 171. (Purcell's italics)

<sup>131</sup> Purcell, *Mystery and Method: The Other in Rahner and Levinas*, 181.

and the infinite responsibilities that stem from it.<sup>132</sup> Hence, the *surplus* or *extra* to which Levinas draws attention in terms of infinity is “transcendent exteriority.”<sup>133</sup> What then is transcendence for Levinas?

The idea of the infinite, for Levinas, has to do with height, nobility, and transascendence.<sup>134</sup> Transcendence, for Levinas, is characterized by a relationship with the other in his or her verticality. The move toward the other in terms of his or her verticality introduces the dimension of height, not as principally a position in being, but an ethical relation.<sup>135</sup> Levinas writes:

Transcendence designates a relation with a reality infinitely distant from my own reality, yet without this distance destroying this relation and without this relation destroying this distance as it would happen with relations within the same; this relation does not become an implantation in the other and a confusion with him, does not affect the very identity of the same, its ipseity, does not silence the *apology*, does not become apostasy and ecstasy.<sup>136</sup>

What really happens in the relation between the self and the other is that the other is always on high, and his appeal is always by way of command and injunction. Levinas’s other always presents itself as the absolutely other, the transcendent human other (*autrui*) who shows a face and opens a dimension of *height*, that is to say, it *infinitely* overflows the bounds of being and knowledge. And “the epiphany of the Absolute Other is a face by which the Other challenges and commands me through its nakedness and destitution.”<sup>137</sup> The other challenges the subject from its humility and height, provokes this ethical movement, disturbs its good conscience with a surplus inadequate to

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<sup>132</sup> Cohen, *Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, 150. (Cohen’s italics)

<sup>133</sup> Purcell, *Mystery and Method: The Other in Rahner and Levinas*, 181.

<sup>134</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 41.

<sup>135</sup> Purcell, *Mystery and Method: The Other in Rahner and Levinas*, 188.

<sup>136</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 41- 42.

<sup>137</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Transcendence and Height,” in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, edited by Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 17 (My italics)

intentionality. Thus, “because of this inassimilable surplus,” Levinas comments, “we have called the relation which binds the I to the other (*Autrui*) the *idea of the infinite*.”<sup>138</sup> The subject is put into question by the other in an elevation, where the subject’s consciousness finds in itself more than it can contain. Before the other (*autrui*), the subject is infinitely responsible.

Levinas’s approach can be called transcendental, better, *diachronically transcendental*<sup>139</sup> - as Charles Reed argues - because, it “is produced on the basis of exposure rather than evidence... [and] ...operates within a new notion of temporality.”<sup>140</sup> Here, temporality is “understood as time opened up by and for the ‘ethical adventure’ of the relationship to unassimilable, incomprehensible other person.”<sup>141</sup> The other who is totally other has always already transcended, disturbed the imaginary self-centered totality of the same, in a time that goes contrary to the linear, synchronic time of being and history. Levinas’s affirmation of the priority of the other takes place in *diachronic temporality*.<sup>142</sup> It is in this time that the self transcends itself, that the infinite comes to

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<sup>138</sup> Levinas, “Transcendence and Height,” in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 19. With regard to the idea of the Infinite, Levinas writes: “the idea of the infinite is not an intentionality for which the Infinite would be the object. Intentionality is the movement of the mind adjusted to being. It takes aim and moves toward a theme. In the theme, being comfortably accommodates itself. Being is the “thematizable” par excellence; the proposable, thethetic...the idea of the infinite consists precisely and paradoxically in thinking more than what is thought while nevertheless conserving it in its excessive relation to thought...the idea of the infinite consists in the impossibility of escaping from responsibility; it consists in the impossibility of coming to rest and in the absence of any hiding place, of any interiority where the I could repose harmoniously upon itself...” 20-21.

<sup>139</sup> Expression used by Charles Reed, “The Problem of Method in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas,” (Ph. Diss., Yale University. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1983), quoted by Michael Purcell, *Mystery and Method: The Other in Rahner and Levinas*, 55.

<sup>140</sup> Reed, “The Problem of Method in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas,” 255-256, quoted by Purcell, *Mystery and Method: The Other in Rahner and Levinas*, 55.

<sup>141</sup> Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 32, quoted by Purcell, *Mystery and Method: The Other in Rahner and Levinas*, 55.

<sup>142</sup> I have borrowed this expression from Steve Tangney, “Countercurrents: The Self-Other Relation in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas,” (Ph. Diss., Duquesne University, 1996). 12. (My italics)

pass and that the self is related to the other.<sup>143</sup> The encounter between the self and the other, therefore, takes place in the time of transcendence. This is a time that is not able to be recovered by memory or represented, known and mastered, for it comes from the other.

### *The Saying and the Said*

In order to appreciate the nature of responsibility of the subject vis-à-vis the other, it might be helpful to analyze how Levinas expresses this relationship in terms of the concept of Saying and the Said. Levinas develops his argument about ethics as first philosophy by positing the notion of the Saying and the Said (*le dire et le dit*).<sup>144</sup> Alphonso Lingis explains it in these terms:

Levinas several times proceeds by way of language to these positions. In general a language, the said, is the medium of simultaneity, the field where everything past or to come can be presented into a system, that establishes togetherness, that institutes synchrony. Space, the sphere of the simultaneous, is itself a work of temporalization, constituted and fixed, maintained logos itself is sustained by the saying that is a relationship with alterity.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Tangney, “Counter currents: The Self-Other Relation in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas,” 2-3; 13-14. Tangney argues that, “according to Levinas’ analysis, diachronic temporality does not follow the course of the traditional, synchronic, linear time of being, which goes continually forward from a beginning point. Rather, it cuts across this line, goes backward, countercurrent, inverting the traditional order. While the self is an origin, diachronic temporality, the time of the other, reaches back before the beginning point of the self, disrupting the synchronic unity of the same, and allowing for the priority of the other. It is through diachronic temporality that the original interest in and for oneself is undercut and supplanted by the ethical claim on the self by the other, prior to any origin.” 3.

<sup>144</sup> Simon Critchley, in his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, helpfully gives us a sense of how Levinas develops the distinction between the Saying and the Said (*le dire et le dit*) as a response to the critique of Derrida in “Violence and Metaphysics,” who accuses Levinas of contradicting himself, “where that which is meant to escape ontology is still expressed in ontological language. [Derrida argues that] Levinas’s attempt to leave the climate of Heidegger’s thinking was doomed from the start because he still employs Heideggerian categories in the attempt to exceed those categories... Accepting Derrida’s point, Levinas writes in “Signature,” that “the ontological language which is still used in *Totality and Infinity* in order to exclude a purely psychological signification of the proposed analyses is henceforth avoided (DF 295).” Again, Levinas reiterates his point that “*Totality and Infinity* was my first book. I find it very difficult to tell you, in a few words, in what way it is different from what I’ve said afterwards. There is the ontological terminology. I have since tried to get away from that language.” (PM 171). Hence, it is in his second major book, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, that Levinas would try “to avoid this problem of ontological language, in a sinuous self-critique, by coining the distinction between the Saying and the Said (*le dire et le dit*)” – Saying is ethical and Said is ontological. See, 17.

<sup>145</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, xxix.



Here, Levinas inserts the subject's address to the other into a communication in which the Saying is already active prior to any Said since the relationship between the Saying and the Said is not synchronic, but diachronic. "[T]herefore the Saying is beyond the possibility of thematic exposition in the Said."<sup>146</sup> The Saying can never be reduced to the Said, and remains beyond the ontological play of being or beyond essence. Saying is "the pure surplus over evidence, theme and logic. It is the positive production of the other *as* other (*autrui*), and it is this which gives all significations its significance."<sup>147</sup> To illustrate the connection between Saying and ethical responsibility, Levinas writes:

Saying is a denuding, of the unqualifiable one, the pure someone, unique and chosen; that is, an exposedness to the other, where no slipping away is possible. In its sincerity as sign given to another, it absolves me of all identity... This absoluteness reverses essence. It is not a negation of essence, but a disinterestedness, an "otherwise than being" which turns into a "for the other," burning for the other, consuming the bases of any position for oneself and any substantialization which would take form in this consummation, consuming even the ashes of this consummation, in which there would be a risk that everything be born again.<sup>148</sup>

Levinas presents the Saying as that which is prior to its thematization in the Said. The Saying is the ethical relation, the responsibility the subject has for the other who faces him or her. By contrast to the Saying, the Said is the realm in which themes are stated and disclosed. It is the realm of ontology and phenomenology – of what shows itself. The Said establishes meaning and identification; it is the thematization of meaning and consciousness, "a statement, assertion or proposition of which the truth or falsity can be ascertained.... One might say that the content of my words, their identifiable meaning, is the said."<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Purcell, *Mystery and Method: The Other in Rahner and Levinas*, 38.

<sup>147</sup> Purcell, *Mystery and Method: The Other in Rahner and Levinas*, 39.

<sup>148</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 50.

<sup>149</sup> Simon Critchley's introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, 18.

In the relation between the Saying and the Said, however, Levinas is faced with a difficulty, namely, how to conceptualize the ethical Saying within the ontological Said. Levinas admits the fact that the Saying, at some point, has to be thematized into ontology through the Said. Hence, he maintains the interruption of the ethical Saying within the ontological Said.<sup>150</sup> The Said is the thematization of the Saying, without exhausting it in this thematization. The Saying while entering in the Said maintains its alterity and diachrony and its primacy of the ethical command. Levinas writes:

When stated in propositions, the unsayable (or the an-archival) espouses the forms of formal logic; the beyond being is posited in doxic theses, and glimmers in the amphibology of *being* and *beings* – in which beings dissimulate being. The *otherwise than being* is stated in a saying that must also be unsaid in order to thus extract the *otherwise than being* from the said in which it already comes to signify but a *being otherwise*.<sup>151</sup>

The Saying, which signifies the otherwise than being, is transformed into a Said, which conveys just a being otherwise. Yet the Saying, ultimately, cannot be contained in or comprehended by the Said for it exceeds the Said.

In this “ethical event of communication,”<sup>152</sup> in which language enables the subject to approach the neighbor, “the first word says only the saying itself before every being and every thought in which being is sighted and reflected.”<sup>153</sup> Furthermore, in the responsibility for the other, “the saying in being said at every moment breaks up the definition of what it says and breaks up the totality it includes.”<sup>154</sup> The Saying expresses, therefore, the moment at which God comes to mind in the trace seen in the face of the other. This trace comes from an immemorial past, a past which was never present, the

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<sup>150</sup> Simon Critchley’s introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, 18-19.

<sup>151</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 7. (Levinas’s italics)

<sup>152</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Language and Proximity,” in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 125.

<sup>153</sup> Levinas, “Language and Proximity,” in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 126.

<sup>154</sup> Levinas, “Language and Proximity,” in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 126.

realm of the Saying, the first Saying. Levinas argues that “the first saying is to be sure but a word. But the word is God.”<sup>155</sup>

### *The Third Party*

In the ethical relationship the subject is responsible for the neighbor prior to any choice, action or decision that would commit the subject to this relationship. It is a relation prior to freedom. After reviewing the duo self – other, Levinas finds that they remain undisturbed by concern for the rest of humanity. The ethical subject once only confronted with the face of the other that called him or her to responsibility, now has also to take into account the arrival of the third party on the scene.

If proximity ordered me only to the other alone, there would not have been any problem, in even the most general sense of the term. A question would not have been born...The responsibility for the other is an immediacy antecedent to questions, it is proximity. It is troubled and becomes a problem when a third party enters.<sup>156</sup>

With the third party Levinas announces the *birth* of consciousness. He states:

Consciousness is born as the presence of the third party. It is in the measure that it proceeds from it that it is still disinterestedness. It is the entry of the third party, a permanent entry, into the intimacy of the face to face. The concern for justice, for the thematizing, the kerygmatic discourse bearing on the said, from the bottom of the saying without the said, the saying as contact, is the spirit in society.<sup>157</sup>

Three main accounts on the role of the third party in Levinas’s philosophical project suggest that the third party is the place of the passage to justice and human fraternity in the political sphere.<sup>158</sup> In Levinas’s writings, the relationship between ethics and politics

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<sup>155</sup> Levinas, “Language and Proximity,” in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 126.

<sup>156</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 157.

<sup>157</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 160.

<sup>158</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Le moi et la totalité,” *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 59 (1954) : 353-373; Levinas, “The Ego and the Totality,” in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 25- 45 ; Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et Infinité* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961), 187-190; Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 212-214;

is announced by this entrance of the third party, *le tiers*. The other and the third party, my neighbors, contemporaries of one another, put distance between me and the other and the third party. He writes:

The third party introduces a contradiction in the saying whose signification before the other until then went in one direction. It is of itself the limit of responsibility and the birth of this question: What do I have to do with justice? A question of consciousness. Justice is necessary, that is, comparison, coexistence, contemporaneousness, assembling, order, thematization, the visibility of faces, and thus intentionality and the intellect, and in intentionality and the intellect, the intelligibility of a system, and thence also a copresence on an equal footing as before a court of justice.<sup>159</sup>

Levinas introduces the third party into the face of the other to prevent the complicity of a private relation. The third party, Levinas argues, as he/she looks at the subject in the eyes of the other, evokes the language of justice, because the appearance of the other as face opens humanity. The other's face in his/her exposure as a face presents to the subject the misery of the poor one and the stranger.<sup>160</sup> Robert Bernasconi expounds upon what this means:

The face of the other does not ask only for him-or her-self, as if there were only two of us in the world. My responsibility to the other does not allow me to put aside my responsibility to the others. However, even if there is thereby already implied a questioning of my relation to the other – for example, as to whether it is too exclusive or consuming – Levinas's focus falls on the way the face to face provides the basis for an ethical questioning of the political.<sup>161</sup>

In his own words, Levinas writes: "In the measure that the face of the other relates us with the third party, the metaphysical relation of the I with the other moves in the form of

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Emmanuel Levinas, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (The Hague : Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 195-207 ; Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 153-162.

<sup>159</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 157.

<sup>160</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 213.

<sup>161</sup> Robert Bernasconi, "The Third Party: Levinas on the Intersection of the Ethical and the Political," in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*, vol. 1, 48.

the We, aspires to a State, institutions, laws, which are the source of universality.”<sup>162</sup> The absence of the third party in the subject’s face to face encounter with the other human person, not only would permit the complicity of private relation, but also would present a risk of absolving the subject from all his/her commitments and obligations to everyone else.<sup>163</sup> Hence, “the presence of the face, the infinity of the other, is a destituteness, a presence of the third party (that is, of the whole humanity which looks at us) and a command that commands commanding.”<sup>164</sup>

Levinas insists on the fact that this third party is not merely a multiplication of the other. From the outset the third party is concurrently different from the other, and makes the subject one among others. This quality or condition of being other is itself primarily ethical, not merely in a mathematical sense, but in the sense of a relation of demand and conflict.<sup>165</sup> In the confrontation with the third party the other whom the subject is responsible for is also responsible for another. He writes: “the third party is other than the neighbor, but also another neighbor, and also a neighbor of the other, and not simply his fellow...the other stands in relationship with the third party, for whom I cannot entirely answer, even if I alone answer before any question, for my neighbor.”<sup>166</sup>

A further aspect with regard the arrival of the third is the use of the word *illeity*. Illeity is “that which preserves the specific signifyingness of a trace in each trace of an empirical passage, over and above the sign it can become.”<sup>167</sup> This illeity addresses, for Levinas, the same issue to which the third party is directed, that is, it prevents a

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<sup>162</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 300.

<sup>163</sup> Bernasconi, “The Third Party: Levinas on the Intersection of the Ethical and the Political,” 48.

<sup>164</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 213.

<sup>165</sup> Alphonso Lingis’ introduction to *Otherwise than being or Beyond Essence*, xxxv.

<sup>166</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 157.

<sup>167</sup> Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 106.

possibility of a private relation; yet more than the third, it breaks off the face to face relationship and initiates justice.<sup>168</sup> For Levinas, Bernasconi contends,

Illeity is ... not only ‘the fact that the others show themselves in their face.’ Illeity also has certain ‘indirect ways’ that through ‘the presence of a third party alongside of the neighbor’ lead one along the path of thematization and consciousness to that comparison of the incomparable that is necessary for justice and that is usually assigned to the third person perspective. Illeity is the condition for irreversibility, the irreversibility of time and of the relation with the Other.<sup>169</sup>

At the intercession between the ethical and the political, Levinas places the third party or the *interhuman* which corresponds to what he calls *fraternity*.<sup>170</sup> Fraternity, for Levinas, is not motivated by resemblance in human race or biological genus in human society; it is not an adequate ground upon which to base the subject’s responsibility for the other human person who is separated from him/her. Because, “the biological human brotherhood – conceived with the sober coldness of Cain – consists in conceiving responsibility as proceeding from freedom or in terms of a contract.”<sup>171</sup> Rather, fraternity which Levinas talks about is the way in which the subject’s relation with one human other already opens up to the relation with other human others. He affirms:

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<sup>168</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 150; *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, 201; Bernasconi, “The Third Party: Levinas on the Intersection of the Ethical and the Political,” 51.

<sup>169</sup> Bernasconi, “The Third Party: Levinas on the Intersection of the Ethical and the Political,” 51-52; See also Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 158, 13, 16. For Bernasconi, illeity is the place of God in Levinas’s philosophy, but it is not a theological notion. It is the condition of the irreversibility of the face to face. It would be possible to read that the relation to illeity is “personal and ethical” and to overlook the fact that it also addressed the political. However, Levinas wrote of the Judeo-Christian God in “Meaning and Sense” that “He shows himself only by his trace as is said in Exodus 33. To go toward Him is not to follow this trace which is not a sign; it is to go toward the others who stand in the trace of illeity. It is through this illeity, situated beyond the calculations and reciprocities of economy and of the world, that being has a sense. A sense which is not a finality. For there is no end, no term. The desire of the absolutely other will not, like need, be extinguished in a happiness.” see *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 107.

<sup>170</sup> Bernasconi, “The Third Party: Levinas on the Intersection of the Ethical and the Political,” 53. (My italics)

<sup>171</sup> Levinas, “God and Philosophy,” in *The Levinas Reader*, 180; Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 10. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 213-214; Levinas, “Useless Suffering,” in *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-Other*, 100-101; Bernasconi, “The Third Party: Levinas on the Intersection of the Ethical and the Political,” 53-55.

[T]he relation with the face in fraternity, where in his turn the Other appears in solidarity with all the others, constitutes the social order, the reference of every dialogue to the third party by which the *We* – or the party – encompasses the face to face opposition, opens the erotic upon a social life, all signifyingness and decency, which encompasses the structure of the family itself.<sup>172</sup>

The word justice in Levinas's thought stems from the other's close relationship with the third party and it is centered on love. Now, since love calls for justice, the subject's relation with the other human person, the neighbor cannot but involve other neighbors or third parties whom the subject's neighbor maintains a relationship with.<sup>173</sup> One can argue that the entrance of the third party on the scene in Levinas's thought is brought about by his desire to emphasize the relevance of his thought for concrete human community. For him society must be a fraternal community to be commensurate with the straightforwardness and the primary proximity in which the face presents itself to one's welcome. His thought – as he himself pointed out in the preface of *Totality and Infinity* – is a response to a Western philosophical understanding of the human being that has led to war and to the directly and indirectly oppressive penchant of human institutions.<sup>174</sup>

Levinas's philosophy does not hang in the air on the level of spiritual desire, but rather, challenges empirical situations. Levinas himself describes it in these words: “The fact that the other, my neighbor, is also a third party with respect to another, who is also a neighbor, is the birth of thought, consciousness, justice and philosophy.”<sup>175</sup> This fact would be made clearer with the analysis of the impact of the Jewish aspects in Levinas's philosophy to which we now turn.

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<sup>172</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 280.

<sup>173</sup> Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 18 ; Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficile Liberté : Essais sur le Judaïsme*, 2<sup>ème</sup> édition (Paris: Albin Michel, 1976), 34.

<sup>174</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 21.

<sup>175</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 128.

## VI. The Influence of Jewish Aspects in Emmanuel Levinas's Philosophy

Any attentive reader of Levinas's work would agree with the fact that Levinas's declared philosophical ambition was influenced by his Jewish background and heritage. He was born in Kovno, one of the places in Lithuania that was the center of Ashkenazi Jewish learning. "The Lithuanian Jews were famous for their insistence on rigorous argument, and their contempt for the enthusiastic and charismatic religiosity with Hassidism."<sup>176</sup> Most scholars of Levinas seem to note two main sources from which Levinas draws his inspiration: the experience of Jewish life through his familiarity of the Hebrew Bible and Greek/European philosophy and literature. Levinas's life, however, has also been influenced by the feeling and the remembrance of the Nazi horror. This section examines the role Jewish thought and the Shoah played in Levinas's philosophical project.

### *Levinas and Judaism*

We have noted that Levinas's work was enriched by the Hebrew Bible and Greek philosophy. Levinas's thought is profoundly rooted in Judaism yet it remains philosophical. The Jewish aspect of Levinas's thought is noticeable through his resistance to Western philosophy expressed through the opposition between Jerusalem and Athens. Jews are reminded of the conflict each year at the feast of Hanukkah which celebrates their recurrent and astonishing victory over Hellenic universalism.<sup>177</sup> Levinas expresses this clash on the intellectual level by opposing "the absolute transcendence of the other person encountered ethically and the relative transcendence of the truth of being determined as presence, especially as found in the phenomenology of Husserl and

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<sup>176</sup> Hilary Putman, "Levinas and Judaism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, 60, footnote 25.

<sup>177</sup> Cohen, *Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, 127.



Heidegger.”<sup>178</sup> Hence, Jewish aspects in Levinas’s work must clearly be understood in relation to his critique of Western thought.<sup>179</sup> Opposing the primacy of Knowledge, Levinas proposes an ethical priority that recalls the overall different priority articulated in the well-known response of the Jewish people at Mount Sinai: “We will do and we will listen.”<sup>180</sup> Thus, as Richard Cohen argues,

Levinas’s entire philosophy can be understood as but another layer of meaning attached to Sinai, another interpretation – priority of the other, conscientiousness before consciousness, ethics before reason – exalting and penetrating to the heart of one of the greatest moments in the religious history of the world.<sup>181</sup>

Therefore, the Judaism Levinas draws from “is one that speaks to Jews, opens a space for their difference”<sup>182</sup> and then speaks to all humanity. “It is a Judaism ... that teaches humanity its humanism, the absolute transcendence that opens up between people united ethically.”<sup>183</sup> This is a Judaism characterized by the fundamental obligation which we find in the Jewish Bible, namely, the *hineni* (here I am) of Abraham. Abraham is offering himself here to God unreservedly. Levinas speaks of this expression when he writes:

The subjectivity of the subject, as being subject to everything, is pre-original susceptibility, before all freedom and outside of every present. It is accused in uneasiness or the unconditionality of the accusative, in the “here I am” (*me voici*) which is obedience to the glory of the Infinite that orders me to the other...it is one absolved from every relationship, every game, literally without situation, without dwelling place, expelled from everywhere and from itself, one saying to the other “I” or “here I am.” The ego stripped by the trauma of persecution of its scornful and imperialist subjectivity, is reduced to the “here I am,” in a transparency without opaqueness, without heavy zones propitious for evasion.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Cohen, *Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, 126-127.

<sup>179</sup> As it was argued earlier, for Levinas, as Peperzak asserts, “Western philosophy from Parmenides to Heidegger is characterized by an *egology*, [that is, an expression of] a universe centered on an ego that not only functions as subject of the *cogito* but also as the center and end of the world and the source of all its meaning.” See his *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, 8.

<sup>180</sup> Cohen, *Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, 127.

<sup>181</sup> Cohen, *Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, 127.

<sup>182</sup> Cohen, *Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, 128.

<sup>183</sup> Cohen, *Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, 128.

<sup>184</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 146.

For Levinas, therefore, “to be a human being – to be what Jews call a *mensch* – involves recognizing that I am commanded to say *hineni*,” because what is essential is the relationship with the other.<sup>185</sup> Levinas universalizes the traditional Jewish teaching which argues that obedience to the divine command is the source of dignity for a Jew. He applies it to all humans, arguing that humans find their dignity by observing God’s original ethical command to say *hineni* to the other. To say *hineni* is to respond to the call for infinite responsibility for the other.<sup>186</sup>

What Levinas does in using his Jewish heritage to expound his philosophical thought is precisely to emphasize the “underivability” of the fundamental obligation, *hineni*, from any epistemological source. Concepts such as infinite responsibility, face, trace, height, etc, connect “with his two fundamental ideas that ethics is based on obligation to the other, not on any empirical or metaphysical ‘sameness’ between myself and the other and that this fundamental obligation is asymmetrical.”<sup>187</sup> For instance, with regard to the infinite responsibility, Levinas follows “an ancient Jewish principle that says every Israelite is responsible for every other. The corresponding Levinasian claim is that every human being is responsible for every other.”<sup>188</sup> In the face of the other, there is an elevation, a height that makes the other higher than I am. And God is without content apart from the relation to the other. God for Levinas appears in the ethics and justice of

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<sup>185</sup> Putman, “Levinas and Judaism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, 39.

<sup>186</sup> Putman, “Levinas and Judaism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, 39.

<sup>187</sup> Putman, “Levinas and Judaism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, 43.

<sup>188</sup> Putman, “Levinas and Judaism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, 40-48; Levinas, “The Pact,” in *The Levinas Reader*, 225-226. Levinas writes: “A moment ago, we saw a part played by something resembling the recognition of the Other, the love of the Other. To such an extent that I offer myself as guarantee of the Other, of his adherence and fidelity to the law. His concern is my concern. But is not my concern also his? Isn’t he responsible for me? And if he is, can I also answer for his responsibility for me? *Kol Yisrael ‘arevim zeh lazeh*, ‘All Israel is responsible one for the other’, which means: all those who cleave to the divine law, all men worthy of the name, are responsible for each other.”

the relation of one person to another, in the one for another. In reading Levinas one is struck by many mentions of the Jewish Bible and the Talmud. He writes:

The great miracle of the Bible lies not at all in the common literary origin, but, inversely, in the confluence of different literatures toward the same essential content. The miracle of this confluence is greater than the miracle of the unique author. Now the pole of this confluence is the ethical, which incontestably dominates this whole book.<sup>189</sup>

Levinas sees in the Bible and the Talmud the sources of ethical knowledge to which all humans should refer. He goes as far as proposing the wisdom of the Talmud as “an excellent source of experiences, food for philosophers.”<sup>190</sup> One clear example of Levinas’s texts where his thought and religious idea converge is in the preface to *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*:

The main intent here is to try to see ethics in relation to the rationality of the knowledge that is immanent in being, and that is primordial in the philosophical tradition of the West; even if ethics – ultimately going beyond the forms and determinations of ontology, but without rejecting the peace of reason – could achieve a different form of intelligibility and a different way of loving wisdom, and perhaps even – but I will not go that far – the way of Psalm 111:10.<sup>191</sup>

In addition there is a noticeable and productive crossing point between Levinas’s writings in *Difficult Freedom* and his philosophical works. These confessional writings continue to a certain extent Levinas’s meditations on the face. They are considered essential to a serious appraisal of his work as a whole. They make explicit a dimension in Levinas’s work – his inspiration in or reference to Judaism – that is only implicit in the philosophical work. About the influence of Jewish thought on Levinas’s work, Richard Cohen interestingly notes: “the ethics Levinas finds in Jewish texts is, of course, the face-

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<sup>189</sup> Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 115.

<sup>190</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Quatre Lectures Talmudiques* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1968), 12.

<sup>191</sup> Levinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, xi.

to-face dialogical metaphysics that he elaborates in his properly philosophical work.”<sup>192</sup> Strangely enough, it was exactly through Judaism that Levinas believed he could designate a locus beyond cultural relativity: that domain was, for him, the ethical. Perhaps the most articulate feature of Levinas’s Judaism is voiced in his preface to *Difficult Freedom* when he says: “The other’s hunger – be it of the flesh, or of bread – is sacred; only the hunger of the third party limits its rights; there is no bad materialism other than our own.”<sup>193</sup> We would say with Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak that the fundamental message of Jewish thought in Levinas’s vision can be summarized by the following:

It ties the meaning of all experiences to the ethical relation among humans: it appears to the personal responsibility of man, who, thereby, knows himself, irreplaceable to realize a human society in which humans treat one another as humans. This realization of the just society is *ipso facto* an elevation of man to the society with God. This society is human happiness itself and the meaning of life. Therefore, to say that the meaning of the real must be understood in function of ethics, is to say that the universe is sacred. But it is sacred in an ethical sense. Ethics is an optics of the divine. No relation to God is more right or more immediate. The divine cannot manifest itself except through the neighbor. For a Jew, incarnation is neither possible, nor necessary. After all, Jeremiah himself said it: “To judge the case of the poor and the miserable, is not that to know me? says the Eternal.”<sup>194</sup>

Levinas’s Jewish-Talmudic writings imply a philosophical dimension, and both can be used at the same time, each clarifying the other. An attentive reader would recognize in Levinas’s philosophy, references, examples and phrases that stem from the deepest themes in Jewish ethics and spirituality. In his metaphysical ethics, as Richard Cohen argues,

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<sup>192</sup> Cohen, *Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, 129.

<sup>193</sup> Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, xvi.

<sup>194</sup> Peperzak, *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, 29. See Levinas, *Difficile Liberté*, 209.

Levinas weaves the specifics of the moral and holy language of Judaism into a compelling and critical web with the most advanced issues and idioms of contemporary continental philosophy...He persuades not by citing proof-texts, which would have no force in philosophical discourse in any event, but by giving voice to the prior and discordant claims of morality, to the very priority of its claim, as exerted by the one who faces, the other person to whom the morally elected self is obligated, the ‘orphan, widow, and stranger,’ for whom and to whom one is responsible unto death.<sup>195</sup>

### *Levinas and the Holocaust*

There seems to be in Levinas’s major philosophical works a sense of urgency to prevent some catastrophe or war due to the drama of the metaphysical interest in human beings. He writes in the preface to *Totality and Infinity* that:

Everyone will readily agree that it is of the highest importance to know whether we are not duped by morality. Does not lucidity, the mind’s openness upon the true, consist in catching sight of the permanent possibility of war? The state of war suspends morality; it divests the eternal institutions and obligations of their eternity and rescinds ad interim the unconditional imperatives. In advance its shadow falls over the actions of men. War is not only one of the ordeals – the greatest – of which morality lives; it renders morality derisory. The art of foreseeing war and winning it by every means – politics – is henceforth enjoined as the very exercise of reason. Politics is opposed to morality, as philosophy to naïveté.<sup>196</sup>

This picture of war is taken up again and amplified in *Otherwise than Being*, in the following terms: “War is the deed or the drama of the essence’s interest. No entity can wait its hour. They all clash, despite the difference of the regions to which the terms in conflict may belong. Essence thus is the extreme synchronism of war.”<sup>197</sup> This sentiment will eventually play a major role in all aspects of his thought. For Levinas, “war leaves nothing exterior to it and changes the other to the same. Is this not another way of

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<sup>195</sup> See Richard A. Cohen’s chapter on “Post-Modern Jewish Philosophy,” in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, edited by Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (New York: Routledge, 1997), 880. Roger Burggraeve makes the same argument as Cohen, see his *The Wisdom of Love in the Service of Love: Emmanuel Levinas on Justice, Peace, and Human Rights*, translated by Jeffrey Bloechl (Marquette: Marquette University Press, 2002).

<sup>196</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 21.

<sup>197</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 4.

expressing the Hitlerian directive, the *Gleichschaltung*, a command that the entire Reich was to think and act in unison?”<sup>198</sup> In 1934, reflecting on the doctrine of Hitlerism, Levinas wrote a short note to the editors of the Catholic journal, *Esprit*, not only to condemn the barbarism of National Socialism, but also to denounce Western philosophy’s emphasis on the radical freedom of human beings.

The article stems from the conviction that the source of the bloody barbarism of National Socialism lies not in some contingent anomaly within human reasoning, nor in some accidental ideological misunderstanding. This article expresses the conviction that this source stems from the essential possibility of *elemental evil* into which we can be led by logic and against which Western Philosophy has not sufficiently insured itself.<sup>199</sup>

From this we see clearly how Levinas distances himself from Western philosophy “which has transformed its radical freedom into gratuitous play (or a game: *un jeu*), preferring to retain its freedom by not choosing anything rather than considering it the prelude to a commitment.”<sup>200</sup>

The Holocaust is, of course, the most important historical event that most influenced Levinas. Its impact on Levinas’s life and philosophical thought cannot be missed. Michael Smith helpfully comments on this: “The rise of anti-semitism in the 1930s, the threat of totalitarianism, and the Holocaust itself not only ‘mark’ Levinas’s work, they set in motion a complex intertwining of his philosophical reflection with the state of the world in which it unfolded.”<sup>201</sup> He himself rightly pointed out in his essay “Signature” that his entire life has been influenced by the feeling and the memory of the

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<sup>198</sup> Smith, *Toward the Outside*, 113.

<sup>199</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism,” *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1990): 63. The article itself is on 64-71. For detailed analysis, see Howard Caygill, *Levinas & the Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 5-48, especially 29-40. Caygill’s book *Levinas & the Political* gives a very systematic presentation of the link between philosophical and political aspects of this period of Levinas’s thought.

<sup>200</sup> Smith, *Toward the Outside*, 112.

<sup>201</sup> Smith, *Toward the Outside*, 109.

Nazi horror.<sup>202</sup> Worst still, members of his own family were victims of this anti-semitism. Questions of religious faith after the Holocaust, the meaning of Judaism and the relation between being and beyond being turn out to be crucial to Levinas's personal experience and thought. In his own words he expresses it this way:

When one has that tumor in the memory, twenty years can do nothing to change it. Soon death will do no doubt cancel the unjustified privilege of having survived six million deaths. But if, during that stay of grace, life's occupations and diversions are filling life once more...nothing has been able to fill, or even cover over, the gaping pit. We still turn back to it from our daily occupations almost as frequently and the vertigo that grips us at the edge is always the same.<sup>203</sup>

In the same vein, he continues quoting Shmuel Agnon, the Nobel Prize-winning Israeli novelist:

Six million Jews murdered by the Gentiles among us. A third of Israel has been killed, and the other two-thirds orphaned. There is no one in Israel who does not have several dozen dead among his or her close relatives...It was a great thought that He who lives eternally had, to have chosen us from among all the people, to give us the Torah of Life, although it is a little difficult to understand why he created, facing us, a kind of human being that would take our lives because we observe the Torah.<sup>204</sup>

With the inscriptions at the beginning of *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, Levinas's perception of the Holocaust takes an universal dimension to include the non-Jewish, the victims of the same anti-Semitism: "To the memory of those who were closest among the six million murdered by the National Socialists, and the millions upon

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<sup>202</sup> Levinas, "Signature," in *Difficult Freedom*, 291. The Hebrew inscriptions at the bottom at the beginning of *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, provides us with Levinas's personal testimony. He remembers members of his family who were assassinated. It reads: "To remember the soul of my father, my teacher, Rabbi Yechiel, the son of Rabbi Abraham Halévi; my mother, my teacher, Deborah, the daughter of Rabbi Mosche; my brothers, Dov, the son of Rabbi Yechiel Halévi, Aminadab, the son Rabbi Yechiel Halévi; and my father-in-law, Rabbi Shmuel, the son of Rabbi Gerschon Halévi, and my mother-in-law, Malcha, the daughter of Rabbi Haim. May their souls be bound."

<sup>203</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, "Nameless," in *Proper Names*, translated by Michael B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 120.

<sup>204</sup> Levinas, *Proper Names*, 15.

millions of all confessions and all nations, victims of the same hatred of the other man, the same anti-Semitism.”<sup>205</sup>

For Levinas, anti-Semitism is the equivalent of anti-humanism. In this context the Holocaust is absolute and useless human suffering, an event that sides itself with the worse order of human catastrophe.<sup>206</sup> After such a disaster, the alternative is to leave the world of theodicy – the “vindication of divine justice in the face of the existence of evil”<sup>207</sup> – and “assume a full responsibility for human behavior that is not the product of my freedom but ironically its condition that is given in the created fabric of the world.”<sup>208</sup> For Levinas, it is time that humans take responsibility rather than redirecting it onto the divine. This sentiment leads him to focus on Jewish texts in search of new priorities in life, because, for him, there are no institutions left to count on. All human values have been swept away and human beings have embraced warlike virtues. He recommends giving priority to inner life and advocates the values of Judaism as the way out of this unbearable situation. Judaism, he suggests is humanity on the brink of morality without institutions.

How does Judaism conceive of humanity?... by experiencing the presence of God through one’s relation to man...The way that leads to God therefore leads *ipso facto* – and not in addition – to man...the fact that the relationship with Divine crosses the relationship with men coincides with social justice...epitomizes the entire spirit of the Jewish Bible.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Levinas’s preface to *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*.

<sup>206</sup> Sandor Goodhart, “*Conscience, Conscience, Consciousness: Emmanuel Levinas, the Holocaust and the Logic of Witness*,” in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*, vol. 3, 146.

<sup>207</sup> On Levinas’s approach to theodicy after the Holocaust, see a helpful overview by Sandor Goodhart, “*Conscience, Conscience, Consciousness: Emmanuel Levinas, the Holocaust and the Logic of Witness*,” 147.

<sup>208</sup> Goodhart, “*Conscience, Conscience, Consciousness: Emmanuel Levinas, the Holocaust and the Logic of Witness*,” 147.

<sup>209</sup> Goodhart, “*Conscience, Conscience, Consciousness: Emmanuel Levinas, the Holocaust and the Logic of Witness*,” 147. Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 16.



For Levinas, Goodhart comments, “all responsibility is in our hands, not because there is no God or because God has concealed or veiled His Face but because... God is otherwise than being, a God who demands of us nothing less than shouldering God’s own responsibility for others, for their lives, for their responsibility, even for their deaths.”<sup>210</sup>

### *Conclusion*

In the present chapter we have offered a review of Levinas’s philosophy which centers on his transcendental ethics of responsibility. This consideration is essential for any discussion of his thought in relation to liberation theology. We situated Levinas’s thought within the phenomenological tradition of Continental philosophy. We further gave an overview of Husserl’s and Heidegger’s occupation with ontology, and showed how Levinas took issue with Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology for not giving a satisfying account of intersubjectivity and responsibility for the other.

The examination of Levinas’s transcendental ethics of responsibility led us to appreciate his enduring concern about the primacy of the ethical relation to the other person. In order to further clarify Levinas’s assertion that ethics should replace metaphysics as first philosophy, we analyzed major concepts of his philosophy: the encounter with the other, the face, the trace, the infinite, transcendence and time, the Saying and the Said, and the third party and its call to justice. We also noted that the encounter with the other, in Levinas’s thought, calls the ethical subject to responsibility to the point of substitution, proximity, obsession, sensibility, hostage, vulnerability, maternity, etc. Given that Levinas held that philosophical thought was rooted in pre-philosophical experiences – and recognizing the place of Jewish history as part of his life

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<sup>210</sup> Goodhart, “*Conscience*, Conscience, Consciousness: Emmanuel Levinas, the Holocaust and the Logic of Witness,” 147.

– we also looked at Jewish aspects in his thought, especially the influence that the Torah, the Talmudic tradition and the Holocaust have on his philosophy.

This review has established that for Levinas the appropriate basis for philosophy lies not so much in the conjecture which gives rise to reflection, but “in a cry of ethical revolt, bearing witness to responsibility. It begins in prophecy.”<sup>211</sup> Levinas presents the meeting with the face of the other as the suitable context in which to glimpse the trace of the divine. God is encountered in the ethical command of “Love thy neighbor.” The subject emerges as human in and through the ethical relation understood as love of the other as neighbor. Here “there is only ‘me’ who bears the other ‘in my skin’ with the unique irreplaceability implied in this position.”<sup>212</sup> These philosophical stirrings – subtle or explicit – will serve to put his position in dialogue with liberation theology’s standpoint. It is to liberation theology’s perspective that we now direct our consideration.

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<sup>211</sup> Levinas, “God and Philosophy,” in *The Levinas Reader*, 185. With regard to Levinas’s view of philosophy as prophetic, Purcell writes, “Levinas views philosophy as prophetic, for philosophy’s task today is essentially a placing in question of the dominance of ontology and assessing ethics as first philosophy. The assertion of the primacy of the ethical and the challenge to the totalizing system is the role of the prophet. The prophet is related to ‘a surplus always exterior to the totality, as though the objective totality did not fill out the true measure of being, as though another concept, the concept of infinity were needed to express this transcendence with regard to totality, non-encompassable within a totality and as primordial as totality.’ The prophetic experience is situated within the totality and history, but it disrupts that totality.” See, Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, 218, footnote, 5.

<sup>212</sup> Baird, “Divinity and the Other: The Ethical Relation as Revelatory of God,” 105.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **The Neighbor as Liberation Theology's Point of Departure: Gustavo Gutiérrez and Jon Sobrino**

#### **Introduction**

The rise of modernity had a serious impact in the church's theological approach.<sup>1</sup> Most contemporary theologians, since the Age of the Enlightenment, seem to take as their point of departure the challenge raised by the modern spirit, which proposes experience as essential for human understanding, while questioning the spiritual world and requiring of it a purification and revitalization.<sup>2</sup> The substance of this experience includes all that is encountered in existence, because the experiential is always related to society, the place of human encounter with the *others*.

One of the major tasks of theology became to reflect on experience, that is, the bringing together of human experience and the Christian story.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the need for

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<sup>1</sup>The term modernity can be rather slippery because it can describe a wider range of periods. As it applies to this dissertation, this term means the Cartesian-Kantian model of thought that places the human subject at the center of all knowing and meaning. This helps to characterize the major contours of Emmanuel Levinas's and liberation theology's critique of modernity that tends to measure everything from the turn to the subject, the independent, the free and self-sufficient individual.

<sup>2</sup>Some twentieth century theologians influenced by the modern spirit include, to name but a few: Karl Rahner, Henri de Lubac, Jean Daniélou, M.-D. Chenu, Yves Congar, Bernard Lonergan, and Edward Schillebeeckx.

<sup>3</sup>Wilhelm Breuning, "Experience of God," in *Handbook of Catholic Theology*, edited by Wolfgang Beinert and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 248; Ellen Leonard, "Experience as a Source of Theology," in *Sources of Theology: Current Issues in Theology 3, Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, 43 (1998): 44-45. Gerald O'Collins has argued that, Roman Catholic fundamental theology has only recently incorporated the language of "experience" into its theology. The term was avoided by most Catholic theologians before the Vatican II Council (1962-1965); see his article "Experience," in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, edited by René Latourelle and Rino Fischella (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 306. For discussion on the role of human experience in theology, see Henri Bouillard, "Human Experience as the Starting Point of Fundamental Theology," *The Church in the World: Theology in the Age of Renewal. Concilium* (New York: Paulist, 1965), 79-91. Donald L. Gelpi, *The Turn to Experience in Contemporary Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1984), 90.

fundamental theology, not only to incorporate experience into its project, but rather to begin its venture with human experience. This turn to experience resonated with many Catholics to the point that they were convinced – over and against the resistance and the obstinacy of some popes, namely Pius VI and later Pius IX – that turning to the new world was for the church the only option left, leading to the new era called *new evangelization*. The new era began during the pontificate of Leo XIII, who with the publication of the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* laid the foundations for the option for the poor that became explicit under John XXIII.<sup>4</sup>

Vatican II's "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern world" (*Gaudium et Spes*) expresses the urgency for a real solidarity of the Church with the whole human family, specially, with those "afflicted in any way."<sup>5</sup> The document affirms the Church's responsibility and function of analyzing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel.<sup>6</sup> It encourages Christians, especially pastors and theologians, to seek a balance between modern spirit and traditional themes, and begin a constructive dialogue with the contemporary world regarding the lasting questions of living the faith.<sup>7</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the Council, the eighteenth

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<sup>4</sup> José Comblin, *Called For freedom: The Changing Context of Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1998), 1. For a helpful study on the rise of the expression "New Evangelization," read 1-21.

<sup>5</sup> "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," *Gaudium et Spes* 1, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery, vol.1, New Revised Edition (New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* 4.

<sup>7</sup> Dennis P. McCann, "Signs of the Times," in *The Modern Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought*, edited by Judith A. Dwyer (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1994), 882. The Second Vatican Council began the official reinstatement of experience in sacred theology by vindicating some of the concerns and insights of the Modernists. The Council used the actual term experience in its teaching even if it was only carefully employed in the documents *Gaudium et Spes* and *Dei Verbum*. *Dei Verbum* speaks of the "intimate sense of spiritual realities which Christians experience." See, Gerald O'Collins and Edward Farrugia, "Modernism," in *A Concise Dictionary of Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 145; "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation," *Dei Verbum* 8, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery, vol.1, New Revised Edition (New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1998).

century turn to the subject became part of the Roman Catholic fundamental theological agenda. Human subjectivity and history became the fundamental ground for an epistemological theology. The starting point in theological method was no longer God, but the human person and his/her *sitz im leben*.<sup>8</sup>

In a continent such as Latin America, the challenge to Christian theology became the political oppression and the socio-economic plight of “the ‘non-persons,’ those who are not recognized as humans by the social order: the poor, the exploited, those systematically and legally deprived of their status as human beings, those who barely realise what it is to be a human being.”<sup>9</sup> Liberation theology invites Christian theology to leave the climate of the turn to the subject and move a step forward toward a consideration of the *turn to the other* that constitutes the truth of Christianity: the concern for the humanity (dignity) of every human being created in God’s image. This theology argues that God’s transcendental power is *seen* in human historical reality. To be sure, for Gutiérrez, Sobrino, and all liberation theologians, the opening to transcendence is the opening to history, such that the concepts of the kingdom of God and soteriology are linked to the creation of a better society and ethics. God’s transcendence and mystery are made visible only in human historical experience of love and responsibility for the neighbor.

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<sup>8</sup> Theologians date the turn to the subject to the seventeenth and eighteenth century Enlightenment (Kant and Descartes). The influence of this turn to the subject on Christian theology took another two centuries. For Catholic theology, the crucial moment was the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s. For a good survey of this turn to the subject, see Komonchak, “Defending Our Hope: On the Fundamental Tasks of Theology,” in *Faithful Witness: Foundations for Today’s Church*, 18-19; Gelpi, *The Turn to Experience in Contemporary Theology*, 90.

<sup>9</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, “The Task and Content of Liberation Theology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, translated by Judith Condor and edited by Christopher Rowland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 28.

The stress here is on the neighbor's humanity as a first moment in the process of theological reflection. The humanization of the victims of this world through the principle of love of neighbor as taught by Christianity characterizes Gutiérrez's and Sobrino's theological enterprise. It is a theology that stems from the meaning of love of neighbor in Christianity in the midst of the tragic human situation. It searches for the divine transcendence in a life of commitment to the other human person, and calls for justice and love of neighbors.

This chapter aims at discussing Gutiérrez's and Sobrino's theological contribution to Catholic theology. After discussing the emergence of liberation theology in the context of both modernity and sacred theology, this chapter examines Gutiérrez's and Sobrino's social, cultural, and ecclesial background and their major theological themes. Lastly, this chapter will show that the central insight of Gutiérrez's and Sobrino's theological models repose on the human neighbor. The human person, the neighbor, the poor, the stranger, the widow, the oppressed, the homeless, etc is the place for a possible revelation from God.<sup>10</sup> For Gutiérrez and Sobrino, it is in the works of justice, in loving one's neighbor, that transcendence is encountered. Thus, salvation cannot be dissociated from the real historical humanity in which humans live. This soteriological perspective takes its content from Jesus' command of love of neighbor, his ministry to the poor and his opposition to oppression. Notwithstanding possible reservations in terms of the method

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<sup>10</sup> James Gustafson gives a strong criticism of liberation theology in terms of a lack of subordination of human piety and ethics to God and God's purposes. As a matter of fact, Gustafson criticizes a great deal of Christian theology for the same reason, of making human existence the measure of the content of religious piety; see his *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 22-25. Other articulations of the same suspicion are in terms of a reduction of the vertical dimension of Christian faith to the horizontal. For an overview of some criticisms of liberation theology, see Arthur F. McGovern, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics: Toward an Assessment* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989), 11-14, 47-50; Dennis P. McCann, *Christian Realism and Liberation Theology: Practical Theologies in Creative Conflict* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1981).

used to articulate this thought in the concrete situation, this chapter would argue that the foundation of liberation theology, that is, *the turn to the neighbor*, has a continuing relevance for the critical issues of Christian life and witness in our postmodern wounded world, and share some conceptual affinities with Levinas's philosophical turn to the other. Gutiérrez, Sobrino, and Levinas – as it will be shown in the third chapter – argue that the other human person or the neighbor is the condition for the possibility of the subject's subjectivity, and that humans relate to God as subjects of a historical world.

### **I. The Emergence of the Theology of Liberation**

The historical roots of liberation theology are to be found in the earliest colonial days in Latin America, namely, at the time of Conquista. At the time of the crossing of the Atlantic Ocean by Columbus, the Conquistadores and the missionaries, religion and state, were working hand in hand. Christ's images that were developed took the line to suit the colonialist propaganda interests; Christ was presented as a dying man and as a heavenly ruler (1492).<sup>11</sup> In a sense, Christology, instead of being liberative, was developed as a tool for oppression. Prophetic missionary voices questioned the Church's position and the ill treatment of indigenous Indios. The names of Bartolomé de Las Casas<sup>12</sup> (1484-1566), Antonio de Montesino, and others stand as figures of the opposition

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<sup>11</sup> Volker Küster, *The Many Faces of Jesus Christ: Intercultural Christology* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 2001), 41- 42. Küster Volker is a lecturer in the history of religion, mission and ecumenics in the University of Heidelberg. His book, *The Many Faces of Jesus Christ*, offers a good overview to the theologies of the Third World. It focuses on commonalities and differences of Third World Christologies, and on their significance for ecumenism.

<sup>12</sup> The positive role Bartolomé de Las Casas played in setting the stage in which liberation theology was built does not mean that we overlook his initial participation in the colonial system. He later converted and freed his Indio slave so as to stop the system.

to the systematic killing of the Indios. For these missionaries, the Indios became the poor of whom the scriptures speak about.<sup>13</sup>

The most notable fact about the emergence of liberation theology in Latin America, however, is the cultural challenge that modernity posed to traditional Christianity in the late 1960s. This was not a new phenomenon. Already in the early days of the church, Christians were to defend and explain their faith in their cultural milieu. They found in the neighboring cultures *logoi spermatikoi* (germinal intelligibilities) that enabled them open up their faith to the new cultural realities. This incorporation of the cultural in the ecclesial was so effective that in the twelfth and thirteenth century the church established universities as a means to a necessary cultural commitment. There surfaced a few daring figures, most outstandingly Thomas Aquinas.<sup>14</sup> In that sense, Kenneth L. Schmitz is right to argue that one would be right while discussing liberation theology to use Aquinas as a reference point, because at the basis of his theology lies human historical experience (human active intellect).<sup>15</sup> Pope Leo XIII, in his time, presented Aquinas to the world as a guide in this very praxis, because Aquinas developed

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<sup>13</sup> Küster, *The Many Faces of Jesus Christ*, 42, 45.

<sup>14</sup> Komonchak, "Defending Our Hope: On the Fundamental Tasks of Theology," 15-16. Komonchak writes: Thomas Aquinas "not only took up the challenge of writing new works *contra gentiles* (against the pagans) but even borrowed from the new languages and methods to construct the great new *summae theologicae* (theological synthesis)... Unfortunately, the same thing cannot be said about the succeeding ages when challenges became far more radical and fractured over centuries the social and cultural unity of the Christendom. In the face of the complex developments that occurred during the Renaissance and Reformation, the scientific revolution, the Enlightenment, the economic and social revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the rise of historical consciousness, the church desperately needed imitators of Aquinas, people with his ability, confidence, modesty, and respect. But it seldom found them. Instead, particularly after the French Revolution, most of these developments were interpreted as a demonically inspired apostasy from the former ideal ... But instead of launching a confident evangelizing effort, [the church] created a distinct Catholic subsociety, inspired by a distinctly antimodern subculture," 16. It was not until the Second Vatican Council that these cultural elements were taken into consideration in Catholic theology.

<sup>15</sup> Kenneth L. Schmitz suggests following Thomas Aquinas' point of view that "the evidential role of experience in Thomas points towards experience as prelude to conceptualization." By conceptualization Schmitz does not refer to the formation of abstract concepts, but rather the entire range of the intellectual life of the human person in community and in the world. See his article "St Thomas and the Appeal to Experience," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, 47 (1992) 1-20.



a universal understanding of a particular temporal-historical situation that put into focus a community of beings.<sup>16</sup> Currently, Schmitz contends “the appeal to experience is taken by many to be what gives to meaning its modern currency. Experience so taken becomes the central bank for meaning and for its communication and exchange.”<sup>17</sup> Fulton Sheen observes that experience seeks encounter and relationships rather than arguments;<sup>18</sup> here experience is a direct encounter with reality.<sup>19</sup> Aquinas has provided an intellectually and affectively rich understanding of experience which had proved crucial in the development of Catholic theology’s appeal to experience.

Most contemporary theologians, who took seriously questions raised by modernity, as we shall see below, were imitators of Aquinas. They had talent, self-assurance, humility, and admiration for him; and more importantly, these scholars, both before and after the Council, brought back to Catholic consciousness, the spirit and the determination of the Fathers of the church to face major cultural challenges. This theological orientation had great impact on Vatican II Council’s new reading of the socio-economic and cultural context. Vatican II committed the church to participate not only in the “joy and hope, grief and anxiety” (*Gaudium et Spes, I*) of contemporaries but to join them in the common responsibility of analyzing critically socio-political, economic and cultural issues.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Schmitz, “St Thomas and the Appeal to Experience,” 13.

<sup>17</sup> Schmitz, “St Thomas and the Appeal to Experience,” 1.

<sup>18</sup> Sheen Fulton “Contemporary Conceptions of Religion,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 2 (1926): 76.

<sup>19</sup> For more on this see Werner Schneiders, “Experience in the Age of Reason,” in *Revelation and Experience*, edited by Edward Schillebeeckx and Bas Van Iersel, *Concilium* 113 (1979): 22; also Dietmar Mieth, “What is Experience?” in *Revelation and Experience*, edited by Edward Schillebeeckx and Bas Van Iersel, *Concilium* 113 (1979): 49. For a cautionary perspective on the appeal to historical experience for theology, see David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987).

<sup>20</sup> Komonchak, “Defending Our Hope: On the Fundamental Tasks of Theology,” 17.

Joseph A. Komonchak notes three areas in which modernity challenged classical theology: the epistemological, the historical, and the political. The epistemological inaugurated by Descartes and Kant required that “all knowledge claims be justified critically through an analysis of the structure and dynamics of human consciousness. This ‘turn to the subject’ meant philosophy’s passage from metaphysics to epistemology as grounding discipline, from being to subjectivity as the primary focus, and from nature to history as the primary object.”<sup>21</sup> The historical consciousness has to do with human beings’ responsibility for the ever-evolving history of the world in which they are a part. This means that as they live in history, they exercise their freedom within the limits of the conditions of history and at the same time, have the responsibility, individually and communally, to construct the human future. In other words, they have to adapt to new realities. The socio-political factor represents the third area. Its main concern is the permanent transformation of the socio-political structures of societies. A new socio-political environment forces Christian theology to rethink its presuppositions as these changes effect a displacement of the public function of religion as being part and parcel of human society. The church to remain credible was to face head-on the effect of modernization rather than retreating into a less significant system stimulated by an ideal of the past, which has no connection with credible and relevant new cultural realities.<sup>22</sup>

Vatican II affirms Roman Catholic theology’s relationship with modernity and a great generation of theologians collaborated to bring about this significant encounter. It became important to articulate the meaning of Christian theology by considering the cultural context and the experience of persons to whom and for the sake of whom the

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<sup>21</sup> Komonchak, “Defending Our Hope: On the Fundamental Tasks of Theology,” 18.

<sup>22</sup> Komonchak, “Defending Our Hope: On the Fundamental Tasks of Theology,” 18-19.

gospel is proclaimed. From that moment onward, Catholic theologians made theological anthropology the focal point of fundamental theology. They attempted to show how “the fundamental structure and dynamism of the human consciousness opens itself to the question of God and to a possible revelation from God.”<sup>23</sup> The *anthropocentric turn* became the main “task of Christian theology that of showing how the central Christian doctrines meet the fundamental needs and desires of the human person which the basic anthropology uncovers.”<sup>24</sup>

To be sure, most theologians that articulated this theological anthropology were German and were influenced by the philosophical anthropology of Max Scheler. They included Emil Brunner, Paul Tillich, Friedrich Gogarten, Karl Rahner, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Jürgen Moltmann, and Walter Kasper to name but a few. No one, however, was more prominent in those days than Karl Rahner. Rahner pays attention to the insights of the Greek philosophers, the Bible, the transcendental Thomism of Joseph Maréchal, and the historicity of Heidegger to announce a method that combines *anthropocentrism* and *theocentrism*. Rahner’s task has been to make the truth of Christianity as articulated by the church’s tradition pertinent and connected to human experience.<sup>25</sup> He uses a correlational method that links experience and revelation to show the reasonableness for

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<sup>23</sup> Komonchak, “Defending Our Hope: On the Fundamental Tasks of Theology,” 21.

<sup>24</sup> Komonchak, “Defending Our Hope: On the Fundamental Tasks of Theology,” 21.

<sup>25</sup> Gasper Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God: Political, Liberation, and Public Theologies* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2001), 15. (My italics). For Martinez, “Rahner marks a turning point in Catholic theology because he is able to show the intrinsic connection between human openness to God and human nature as the latter appears in the analysis of experience. That is the reason why Rahner (although he was not alone in bringing about the change, and, therefore, the names of Yves Congar, Henri de Lubac, M.-D. Chenu, Bernard Lonergan, and others should be added to his on that score) is said to have set the agenda for the development of a catholic theology concerned with the realities of history and contemporary society, eager to enter into dialogue with modernity, and called to be socially relevant,” 5. For a valuable *vade mecum* on the theology of Karl Rahner, see *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, edited by Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

theological reflection “from within human experience.”<sup>26</sup> For Rahner, every categorical, concrete experience points always as its condition of possibility to a transcendental experience that is, unthematically but originally, involved in the experience of transcendence. And transcendence, always hinted at in any human experience, is most adequately identified with the triune God of Christian revelation.<sup>27</sup>

Rahner’s theology is important for understanding the emergence of liberation theology. It plays the role of a starting point and opens new ways for subsequent theological currents. Liberation theology, in its determination to make Christianity relevant for human society, shares Rahner’s key principle, specifically, “the intrinsic correlation that exists between human history and the history of salvation.”<sup>28</sup> It is from this heritage that Gutiérrez, Sobrino and other Latin America scholars developed their own theological projects by taking into account their socio-political and economic context of poverty and oppression. The fundamental discontinuity in relation to Rahner is that Latin America Liberation theology takes as its starting point human relationships with one another in society as a place of God’s revelation while Rahner begins with the subject’s transcendental experience with God and then directs that experience to human historical reality.<sup>29</sup> It is not enough to only focus on the philosophical anthropology of the

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<sup>26</sup> Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, 17.

<sup>27</sup> Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, 6-7.

<sup>28</sup> Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, 23.

<sup>29</sup> While there is certainly a need for an explicit and elaborate historical moment in Rahner’s method, we would still think that in his approach to method, anthropology, grace and Christology, Rahner argues for the reciprocal interdependence of transcendental and historical reflection in theology. His recognition of the necessity of furthering justice and peace in the social realm and Christianity’s need to go against the socio-political status quo and protect the poor and rootless, shows his interest with both political and liberation theologies, beyond the transcendental orientation, see his “Thoughts on the Possibility of Belief Today,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 5 (New York: Seabury, 1975), 10, 16; “The Development of Dogma,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1, translated by Cornelius Ernst (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1963), 42, 49, 50, 64.) Furthermore, Rahner’s theological project takes seriously the reality of the love of God and the love of neighbor. Rahner justifies church involvement in social development based on its mandate to love one’s neighbor and on its eschatological hope. (See Daniel T. Pekarske, “Theological Justification of the

subject's openness to the transcendent being, but rather, it is important, liberation theology argues, to realize that the opening to transcendence is the opening to history, such that the concepts of the kingdom of God and soteriology are linked to the creation of a better society and ethics.

After Vatican II, conditions were created within the Church for local churches to find their ways for a new Catholic praxis; hence, a new method of theology was necessary. Reading the signs of the times, Latin American theologians developed a new theological method: social Christianity. The effort since the council, to construct local theologies or social Christianity stemmed from the desire to leave the climate of a generalized anthropology and address, as Komonchak contends, "questions of meaning and value posed by individuals living in particular places at specific times, confronting concrete personal and social challenges with the resources mediated by their societies and culture."<sup>30</sup>

Social Christianity, which began in the 1930s and continued to have some appeal until the early 1960s, emerged in response to the hardships, uprisings, and repressions of that period. It stressed the duty of lay persons to remedy social ills without waiting for the religious hierarchy, represented by its priests, to act. Although these movements did not advocate change in the basic social and political structure of the country, they did call for improvements. In most Latin American countries between the 1950s and 1960s, populist governments inspired nationalistic consciousness, and significant industrial development benefited only the middle classes and the urban proletariat while a huge sector of the

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Church's Development Work," abstract, *Karl Rahner's Theological Investigations 1-23* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2002), 547-548; For a helpful study on this, see Karl Rahner, "Theological Justification of the Church's Development Work," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 20, translated by Edward Quinn (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981), 66-70, 70-73.

<sup>30</sup> Komonchak, "Defending Our Hope: On the Fundamental Tasks of Theology," 23.

peasantry was forced into a deep rural marginalization. The consequence of this was the creation of strong popular movements seeking profound changes in the socio-economic structure of their countries. In turn, these movements provoked the rise of military dictatorships to safeguard the interests of capital repression and police control of all public demonstrations. In the Church of Latin America, the 1960s' renewal began with a movement whereby lay persons, bishops, priests and religious started taking their social role seriously.<sup>31</sup> In the late 1960s, the social attitudes of the Roman Catholic Church in El Salvador, as elsewhere, were profoundly influenced by Vatican II and the social encyclicals of Pope John XXIII,<sup>32</sup> as well as by the Second Latin American Bishops' Conference held in Medellin, Colombia, in 1968, which addressed the issues of Vatican II from a distinctly Latin American perspective. The Medellin document on poverty begins:

The Latin American bishops cannot remain indifferent in the face of the tremendous social injustices existent in Latin America, which keep the majority of our peoples in dismal poverty, which in many cases becomes inhuman wretchedness. A deafening cry pours from the throats of millions of men, asking their pastors for a liberation that reaches them from nowhere else.<sup>33</sup>

These gatherings, especially the Medellin conference, emphasized the need for a more worldly involvement by the Roman Catholic clergy in the lives and problems of

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<sup>31</sup> Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology: Radical Religion and Social Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 71-88.

<sup>32</sup> For an overview of the impact of both the Vatican II Council and the Medellin conference on the beginning of the liberation theology movement, see Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology: Radical Religion and Social Movement*. According to Christian Smith, "The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) has been called 'the greatest event in twentieth-century church history, an event which caused a 'Copernican shift' in Catholic thought'." 94. *Mater et Magistra* (1961) – Christianity and Social progress: Deplores the widening gap between rich and poor nations, arms race and plight of farmers. Calls Christians to work for a more just world; *Pacem in Terris* (1963) – Peace on Earth: Affirms full range of human right as the basis for peace. Calls for disarmament and a world-wide public authority to promote universal common good.

<sup>33</sup> Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*, 18. For an overview of the Vatican II period leading to Medellin, see 122-164.

parishioners and advocated activist programs to improve the living conditions of the lower class. The document commits the Church to a project of a radical social change “claiming that to create a just social order ... is an eminently Christian task.”<sup>34</sup>

As the Latin American socio-political and economic situation called for actions, liberation theologians introduced a radical interpretation of the Bible that employs Marxist terminology to analyze and condemn the wide disparities between the wealthy elite and the impoverished masses. Hence, a liberating theology was set out in a particular context, a context of poverty and oppression. Gutierrez is seen as the founder of this theological approach in the late 1960's, and since then, one of its proponents. He “proclaims a *prophetic* theology based on the gospel and the experiences of men and women who have committed themselves to the process of liberation in the oppressed and exploited land of Latin America.”<sup>35</sup> For Küster Volker, if Gutiérrez is the father of this new approach to theology in a Latin American context, Leonardo Boff and Jon Sobrino are among those who gave it a systematic direction.<sup>36</sup> Sobrino, confronted with the phenomenon of oppression in El Salvador, sought to reinterpret the spectrum of Christian theology in light of the *real*.<sup>37</sup> This real for Sobrino is what is profound and true, and what touches the inner being of the individual. An option was made in Latin America to recapture the truth of Christianity by showing concern for the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized of the society. And this preferential option for the poor was the germ of what later came to be known as liberation theology – concern for others' humanity.

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<sup>34</sup> Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*, 18-19.

<sup>35</sup> Küster, *The Many Faces of Jesus Christ*, 47. (Küster's italics).

<sup>36</sup> Küster, *The Many Faces of Jesus Christ*, 47-48.

<sup>37</sup> In this regard, Ignacio Ellacuria is influential. In fact, the *real* for Ellacuria is history and/or reality of people's life. For a helpful study, see his “The Historicity of Christian Salvation,” in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, edited by Ignacio Ellacuria and Jon Sobrino (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books/Collins Dove, 1993), 251-289. Here Ellacuria argues for the fundamental unity of the divine and the human in history.

In Latin America, a theology of liberation arises by asking the following questions: “What is the meaning of faith in a life committed to the struggle against injustice and alienation? And what is the meaning of the struggle against an unjust society and the creation of a new man in the light of the Gospel?”<sup>38</sup> How to proclaim God as Father in an inhuman world? “How do we tell the ‘non-persons’ that they are the sons and daughters of God?”<sup>39</sup> How could we explain human suffering before God?

What is at stake here for liberation theology is the humanity of human beings, that is, the place of mediation of God’s revelation. Christianity, Gutiérrez and Sobrino affirm, cannot be dissociated from the real historical fact of humanity: the subject’s encounter with the other who bears the mark of God. Although Gutiérrez and Sobrino, always against the background of Vatican II, had their theology opened up by the same Rahnerian heritage, each developed his theological project in different cultural and social contexts, yet denounced the same human responsibility behind poverty, injustice, and oppression. At this point, we now turn to the analysis of the theology of Gutiérrez and Sobrino, paying special attention to the social, cultural, and ecclesial milieu of each and their major theological themes.

## **II. Gustavo Gutiérrez**

An understanding of liberation theology as a theological movement would be possible only in relation to the characteristics of the society and the church from which it emerges as a way to comprehend Christian faith. In the case of Gutiérrez this context is the Peruvian society and by extrapolation the whole of Latin American society. It is therefore in order to examine here the social, cultural, and ecclesial background from

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<sup>38</sup> Komonchak, “Defending Our Hope: On the Fundamental Tasks of Theology,” 23

<sup>39</sup> Gutiérrez, “The Task and Content of Liberation Theology,” 28.



which Gutiérrez's theology stems. In the process of his thought, religion, faith, and God become part of everyday life, narrowing the gap between the secular and the sacred, between life and faith.

*Social, Cultural, and Ecclesial Background of Gutiérrez Theology*

Gutiérrez is a Dominican priest and theologian born on 8 June 1928 in Peru where he obtained his Bachelor of Science from the National University of Lima in 1950. During his years in Europe (1951-1960), he studied philosophy and psychology in Louvain, and theology in Lyon and Rome. It was not until 1985 that he received his doctorate from the Institut Catholique de Lyon. Gutiérrez has been professor at the Pontifical University of Peru and visiting lecturer at many major universities in North America and Europe. He is John Cardinal O'Hara professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame. Ordained to the priesthood in 1959, he works as pastor in Rimac, Peru, directs the Bartolomé de Las Casas Center in Lima, and has been a member of the Peruvian Academy of Language. Gutiérrez is recognized for his work for human dignity and life in Latin America and the Third World. He has also published in and been a member of the board of directors of the international journal, *Concilium*.<sup>40</sup>

His years of studies in Europe, especially his encounter with *les mouvements spécialisés d'Action Catholique* (Catholic Action's specialized movements) and *la nouvelle théologie*, would have an impact on him and on other Latin American graduate

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<sup>40</sup> Marcella Althaus - Reid, "Gutiérrez, Gustavo," in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, edited by Adrian Hastings, Alistair Mason and Hugh Pyper with Ingrid Lawrie and Cecily Bennett (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 284; Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, 111; See also University of Notre Dame Website at [database on-line] available from <http://www.nd.edu/~theo/faculty/gutierrez.html>, accessed April 27, 2006.

students who came to Europe to study.<sup>41</sup> Proponents of la *nouvelle théologie* called for a theological renewal that would bring the church into contact with the concerns of contemporary society.<sup>42</sup> During those years, according to Muskus, Gutiérrez came into contact with the inspiring intellectual environment of European Catholicism in search of renewal and profound dialogue with modern social sciences. He was also attentive to different philosophical and ideological movements – regarded with suspicion by the church – such as Marxism, Freudianism, the different theories of evolution, etc.<sup>43</sup>

Equally important in that regard is the pastoral consequence that derives from these theological developments, namely, that witness aspect of Christian faith in society. Christians were invited to witness to the values of the gospel of love in their different social milieus. These developments are important to Gutiérrez's theology. His experiences in Europe were translated into the Latin American scene. When he returned to Lima in 1959, he became pastor in a parish and began working as a lecturer in the department of theology and social sciences at the Catholic University of Lima. He also

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<sup>41</sup> Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, 111-112. For an understanding of la *nouvelle théologie*, see Ted Mark Schoof, *Survey of Catholic Theology, 1800-1970*, translated by N.D. Smith (Glen Rock, N.J.: Paulist Newman Press, 1970), 91-121, 194-210. Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*, 86-87.

<sup>42</sup> Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*, 86. Well known among these scholars were “Jean Daniélou, Henri de Lubac, Yves Congar, M-D Chenu, and Henri Bouillard. In the course of time, they developed contacts with Swiss theologians Hans Küng and H. Urs von Balthasar, Karl Rahner of Germany, and Dutch theologians Edward Schillebeeckx and P. Schoonenberg.”

<sup>43</sup> Eddy José Muskus, *The Origins and Early Development of Liberation Theology in Latin America with Particular Reference to Gustavo Gutiérrez* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2002), 4. Muskus's book questions liberation theologians' claim about the originality of their theological perspective. Markus claims to produce important evidence to show that the fundamental tenets of Latin American liberation theology had their origin in Europe. This issue has been a source of divergent views as Martinez would acknowledge. He writes “the relationship between European theology and liberation theology has been the object of controversy and has been very often analyzed either in polemic terms or from the point of view of what makes them different from each other.” See Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, 112. According to Martinez “a well-known polemic arose in the mid-1970s between Miguez Bonino and Moltmann. Miguez Bonino critiqued Moltmann and other European theologians for retreating to a neutral critical function in theology. Moltmann responded by saying that Bonino's theology was based ultimately on the same theological principles of the theologians he was critiquing and that liberation theologians in general did in fact not contribute much to theological enterprise from a strictly Latin American perspective.” cf. footnote 84, p. 287.

became the chaplain of the National Union of Catholic Students, a university branch of Catholic action where he identified himself with the political fight of the people and the extensive number of articles he wrote articulated that profound concern.<sup>44</sup>

While Gutiérrez is acknowledged worldwide as one of the most original and expressive theologians of liberation, few, however, give sufficient attention to the fact that he is a Peruvian theologian who was born among the poor of Peru, and lived in Rimac, Lima, “a gray dirty, noisy slum where residents are anxiously trying to survive, to find or keep a job, to feed and clothe children.”<sup>45</sup> It was in this context of abject poverty in Rimac that Gutiérrez not only worked as pastor and friend of the poor, but also wrote nearly his entire theology. Being a Quechan Indian by birth Gutiérrez is located among the oppressed in Peru who suffered prejudice and discrimination from fellow Peruvians because of their *mestizos*’ heritage. As the people of Peru struggle for hope Gutiérrez puts that hope into theological language.<sup>46</sup>

Peru is situated in western South America, bordering the South Pacific Ocean, between Chile and Ecuador. It is a land of remarkable beauty and complex socio-political problems. Ancient Peru was the seat of several prominent Andean civilizations, most

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<sup>44</sup> Muskus, *The Origins and Early Development of Liberation Theology in Latin America with Particular Reference to Gustavo Gutiérrez*, 4-5. With regard to Gutiérrez’ involvement in the UNEC (Unión Nacional de Estudiantes Católicos), Muskus asserts, quoting Emilio Núñez that “in 1960 the Catholic student movement had opted for Christian Democracy and its ideology of the New Christendom. By 1963 it had changed its emphasis from religious to the political sphere under the influence of Gutiérrez... Garland points out that at that time the doctrinal position of the UNEC became more extreme, emphasizing the Marxist analysis of reality under the guidance of Gutiérrez, who by then began to outline his theology of liberation.” For an understanding of Catholic action in Peru, see Muskus, 100-106.

<sup>45</sup> Curt Cadorette, “Peru and the Mystery of Liberation: The Nexus and Logic of Gustavo Gutiérrez’s Theology,” in *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutiérrez*, edited by Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989), 49.

<sup>46</sup> On the constitutive Peruvian identity of Gutiérrez’s theology, see Curt Cadorette, “Peru and the Mystery of Liberation: The Nexus and Logic of Gustavo Gutiérrez’s Theology,” 49-58, and also Cadorette, *From the Heart of the People: The Theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez* (Oak Park, IL: Meyer-Stone Books, 1988), esp. 30-82. Muskus, *The Origins and Early Development of Liberation Theology in Latin America with Particular Reference to Gustavo Gutiérrez*, 3.

notably that of the Incas whose empire was captured by the Spanish conquistadors in 1533. Peruvian independence was declared in 1821, and remaining Spanish forces were defeated in 1824.<sup>47</sup> After years of military rule, Peru embraced democratic leadership in 1980, but its wealth and economic structure have deteriorated over the years due to a number of factors, including the growth of a violent insurgency.

In Peru it is obvious that poverty, corruption, drugs, and terrorism are interconnected. These are the major problems that the country faces in addition to discrimination and division. The Spanish conquest and the subsequent colonization negatively affected the cultures and traditions of the country.<sup>48</sup> One of the direct consequences of the conquest was the dramatic massacre of the native population and the inhuman working conditions. Even after the independence from the Spaniards, the natives were still being oppressed and discriminated against. They were not consulted in the political process and could not hold public office.<sup>49</sup> The racial structure of the country made up of natives, whites, blacks, mestizos, Chinese and Japanese has created a very complex racial mix in which marginalization and repression were common. For instance, the Indians were excluded and considered as nonpersons; they were disregarded and ill-treated by the ruling white minority.<sup>50</sup> Gutiérrez has constantly stated that in Peru and in many other Latin America countries, both natives and blacks were counted among the

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<sup>47</sup> For an excellent description of the socio-political, cultural and economic situation of Peru, see Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, 89-110.

<sup>48</sup> Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, 92 - 94. According to Martinez, “the lack of solutions to these problems becomes tragic in some cases and begs the question of whether or not some countries have a viable future at all. In South America, Peru, Bolivia, and most of the Andean countries find themselves in such a situation. In Central America, Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador face similar circumstances. Other countries in the world, especially in sub-Saharan Africa have the same problem.” See, 92.

<sup>49</sup> Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, 95- 96.

<sup>50</sup> Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, 97.

nonpersons. For Peruvians the fundamental question has been the question of identity in the land of conquest, poverty, and violence. Cadorette writes

[B]oth in the past and in the present, race, class, and gender determine who will flourish and who will perish in Peru.... The legacy of colonialism is all too tragic: divisive, destructive stratification built into the fabric of the nation's history, immense disparity between rich and poor, male and female, and a painfully ambiguous sense of nationhood. This is the human, historical backdrop of Gustavo Gutiérrez's theology.<sup>51</sup>

The crucial development in recent Peruvian history that constitutes the direct referential point for Gutiérrez's theology, most especially his notion of 'the irruption of the poor in history,' is the population growth in the 1940s. As a result many Peruvians, especially the Sierra and the Selva left the villages to immigrate into the cities, looking for a better life in terms of jobs, services, and social mobility. As this situation could not leave people indifferent, a group of thinkers and politicians came up and proposed a rethinking of the nation and a change in its structures. These intellectuals would eventually have a major influence on Gutiérrez's theological project.<sup>52</sup>

With regard to the role of the church, one could say that the church played a major role in Peru. From the outset the church's role has been confusing because of its close tie with the conquerors. This relationship was part of Alexander VI's papal bull in 1493.<sup>53</sup> The royal patronage of Spain over the church in Peru made the Peruvian church

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<sup>51</sup> Cadorette, "Peru and the Mystery of Liberation: The Nexus and Logic of Gustavo Gutiérrez's Theology," 51.

<sup>52</sup> Gaspar Martinez makes this point by mentioning a couple of towering figures of this generation of intellectuals who influenced Gustavo Gutiérrez: Victor Raúl Haya de la Torre (1895-1979), founder of the political party Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA), José Carlos Mariátegui (1894-1930), founder of the Partido Socialista Peruano (later Comunista) and of the confederation General de Trabajadores del Perú, the poet César Vallejo (1892-1938), the anthropologist José María Arguedas (1906-1969). See his *Confronting the Mystery of God*, 98-99.

<sup>53</sup> Martinez argues that "in 1493, Pope Alexander VI acknowledged in five bulls the right of the Spanish crown to the territories in America under the conditions of evangelizing them. The papal bulls were one of the main elements used by the crown to justify its possessions and the legitimacy of its policies, arguing

submissive to the Spanish crown and the task of evangelization was in the hands of the crown. Instead of denouncing this situation of real exploitation of the local population, the church, in a way, *blessed* the establishment of the law that nearly always privileged the existence of systems that gave the conquerors compensations at the expense of the indigenous.<sup>54</sup>

Notwithstanding the church's involvement and confusing role during this period, some of its members had the courage to denounce the colonial mistreatment of the Indians and defend their right to be considered of equal dignity with the conquerors, also in the name of Christ.<sup>55</sup> For instance Bartolomé de Las Casas, although he never achieved his goal, was outstanding in denouncing the abuses and the illegality of the conquest.<sup>56</sup> As things started changing gradually in the country, the Peruvian church became suspicious of the central government with regards to the people's social plight. This movement seemed to have been generalized in the wider Latin American church. Diverse Christian communities in the Latin America continent came together for the first time in “an attempt to interpret the new social challenges the church had to face in a society that

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that the crown had fulfilled the condition of evangelizing those possessions...In 1505 and 1529 new bulls established the patronage of the Spanish crown over the church in the American territories, meaning that the administration of missionary work (such as the sending of missionaries and the appointment of bishops) was directly under the crown. That determined that the role of the church in America was intrinsic to the advance of the conquest, that the administration of the task of evangelization was in hands of the crown, and that the roles of the church and the crown were not clearly separated.” See, his *Confronting the Mystery of God*, 100-101.

<sup>54</sup> Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, 101.

<sup>55</sup> According to Martinez, “Gustavo Gutiérrez has examined this difficult situation in his historical-theological work on the Spanish missionary Bartolomé de Las Casas” in his *Las Casas: In Search for the Poor of Christ*, translated by Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), see Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, 101. For an overview on the role of the church in this period, see Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, 101-102. “One difficulty in judging the role of the church in the conquest and colonization is,” Martinez writes, “on the one hand, the difference between principles and practice and, on the other hand, the diversity of attitudes and actual behaviors inside the church with respect to that practice.”

<sup>56</sup> Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, 104. Martinez writes, Las Casas “is Gutiérrez’s model both in perspective and in content for liberation theology.” He “brought completely new insights and approaches into the theological discussion, as regards the understanding of human nature, history, and God.”

was becoming more complex and more and more touched by the transformations of modernity.”<sup>57</sup> This began the church’s commitment to take special actions aimed at addressing the very root of unjust situations of poverty and oppression. It was the beginning of a cry for love of neighbor and justice.

In Peru, the opening of the church to the modern world, along the lines of the Vatican II’s *Gaudium et Spes*, exposed the country to its social problems. The reality of the sweeping poverty had challenged the basic premises of the modern hopeful view of the world. Most Latin American countries denounced a relational framework which created an unhealthy dependency of developing nations upon the developed countries. The denunciation was articulated on the model of analysis called the *theory of dependency* which spread throughout Latin America in the late 1960s.<sup>58</sup>

In the same period, Latin American bishops were holding their second general conference in Medellin, Colombia interpreting Vatican II from their own local standpoint. The conclusions of the conference had a tremendous impact on the Latin American church as it took a strong position in opposition to unjust social structures.

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<sup>57</sup> Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, 105. “Some authors,” Martinez argues, “point to certain events as characteristics of the change: the creation of the Christian Democratic Party in 1955, the new current of thought around the social teaching of the church inaugurated by Leo XIII in 1891, and the celebration of the first *Semana Social de la Iglesia* in 1959. During the closure of which the archbishop of Lima, Cardinal Landázuri, advocated greater social justice for workers and governmental measures leading to a redistribution of wealth.”

<sup>58</sup> Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, 106. For Martinez, “the military in Peru, for instance, had come to the conclusion that the country was under foreign (mainly U.S.) control and that the basic industries had to be nationalized. That is what they exactly did when they took over the government in 1968. ..[They resolved to set up innovative] measures aimed at solving the structural problems of the country regarding justice and social integration.” On the theory of dependency, see McGovern, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics*, 125-129. McGovern argues that this theory, which was first formulated in 1969, adopted two different modalities: a radical version given by André Gunder Frank, a thinker raised in the United States who studied economics at the University of Chicago, and a modest and nuanced version given by the Brazilian Fernando Henrique Cardoso. It is also important to note that “this theory was significant on the social analysis of Gustavo Gutiérrez when he first formulated his liberation theology at the end of 1960s. Dependency and liberation, Gutiérrez wrote, are correlative.” See Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, 106. On Gutiérrez’s development on the theory of dependency, see his *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, translated and edited by Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988), 51-54.

Medellin became for the church in Latin America a re-reading of Vatican II's goal of being the universal sacrament of salvation. Medellin's conference by so doing undoubtedly made clear the new orientation of the Latin American church, namely the preferential option for the poor. Such an orientation, Medellin argues, has to be espoused by the universal church.<sup>59</sup> Also crucial in the development of the theology from the *underside of history* was the third conference of Latin American bishops in Puebla, Mexico, in 1979. Puebla proclaimed the preferential option for the poor of the Latin American church.<sup>60</sup> In Peru the church identified itself openly with the cause of the people, especially the poor. Thus, the first steps of Gutiérrez's theology have to be understood against this background.

Gutiérrez's education inspired him to come to grips with those challenges from the poor and the oppressed. His training and encounter with people in Europe made him conscious of the need to take sides with the oppressed and the poor. According to Cadorette, that Gutiérrez knows the people's culture and language and that he shares their hopes and aspirations as part of his heritage are significant elements for whoever who wants to understand him both as a human being and a theologian.<sup>61</sup> The main points of his theology examined henceforth will help to uncover the reason why the experience of the poor and oppressed are important to Gutiérrez's understanding of faith.

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<sup>59</sup> Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, 107.

<sup>60</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History: Selected Writings*, translated by Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983), 169-221.

<sup>61</sup> Cadorette, "Peru and the Mystery of Liberation: The Nexus and Logic of Gustavo Gutiérrez's Theology," 50.



### *Gutiérrez's Major Theological Themes*

Gutiérrez's theology is an attempt at reflection, based on the gospel and the experiences of men and women committed to the process of liberation in the oppressed and exploited land of Latin America. For Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Gutiérrez places at

[T]he center of theological reflection the poor, the 'others,' the nonpersons, who are absent from history. He insists over and against Euro-American 'progressive' theology that the point of departure for Latin American theology is not the question of the modern *nonbeliever* but the struggle of the *nonperson* for justice and freedom.<sup>62</sup>

Gutiérrez's theological themes run through his writings, most especially in his book, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, which introduces the insights, themes, and process of liberation to the rest of the world. For the purpose of this dissertation, our attention will be focused on the following themes because of their relevance: theology as critical reflection on praxis, the fundamental option for the poor, encountering God in history, liberation, development and salvation, spirituality of liberation, and the church as sacrament of history.

#### *Theology as Critical Reflection on Praxis*

In analyzing Gutiérrez's theology the influence of Vatican II and other theological currents that became decisive at that council must be kept in mind. The Council and Gutiérrez's European stage sparked in him a new understanding of what being a Christian means. He became completely influenced by the primacy of pastoral action in his

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<sup>62</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Politics of Otherness: Biblical Interpretation as a Critical Praxis for Liberation," in *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutiérrez*, edited by Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989), 311. (Schüssler Fiorenza's italics). While Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza praises Latin American liberation theology for its effort to center theological reflection on the poor, the "others," she also regrets the fact that it has not sufficiently attended to the fact that the majority of the poor in the world are women and children dependent on women. See 311-325.

reflection and expressed his dissatisfaction with the classical task of theology defined as wisdom and rational knowledge.<sup>63</sup>

Theology for Gutiérrez has to be understood as the critical reflection on the church's action in the light of the revealed word. This means a reflection "on humankind, on basic human principles... [and on a]...clear attitude about economic and socio-cultural issues in the life of the Christian community."<sup>64</sup> As a result, theology would unavoidably "be a criticism of society and the church insofar as they are called and addressed by the Word of God."<sup>65</sup> Thus, "a privileged *locus theologicus* for understanding the faith will be the life, preaching, and historical commitment of the church."<sup>66</sup> Citing the work of Yves Congar, Gutiérrez asserts:

If the church wishes to deal with the real questions of the modern world and to attempt to respond to them ...it must open as it were a new chapter of theologico-pastoral epistemology. Instead of using only revelation and tradition as the starting points, as classical theology has generally done, it must start with facts and questions derived from the world and from history.<sup>67</sup>

This turning to the totality of human history allows theology to realize its significant function vis-à-vis ecclesial praxis without limitation. In this way, Gutiérrez believes theology "fulfils a prophetic role insofar as it interprets historical events with the objective of revealing and proclaiming their profound significance."<sup>68</sup> In the final

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<sup>63</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 4-5. He writes with regard to this classical task of theology that "theology is of necessity both spirituality and rational knowledge. These are permanent and indispensable functions of all theological thinking. However, both functions must salvage, at least partially, from the division and deformations they have suffered throughout history. A reflective outlook and style especially must be retained, rather than one or another specific achievement gained in a historical context different from ours." See also Robert McAfee Brown, *Gustavo Gutiérrez: An Introduction to Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), 75-101.

<sup>64</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 9.

<sup>65</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 9.

<sup>66</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 9.

<sup>67</sup> Yves Congar, *Situation et tâches présentes de la théologie* (Paris : Les Éditions du Cerf, 1967), 72 as quoted by Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 9-10.

<sup>68</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 10.

analysis, theology, understood as a critical reflection on society and the church inevitably calls for a redefinition of the two tasks of classical theology. Wisdom's and rational knowledge's approach to theology ought to have the ecclesial praxis as their point of departure and their context. As Gutiérrez asserts:

It is for all these reasons that the theology of liberation offers us not so much a new theme for reflection as *a new way* to do theology... It is a theology which is open – in the protest against trampled human dignity, in the struggle against the plunder of the vast majority of humankind, in liberating love, and in the building of a new, just and comradely society – to the gift of the kingdom of God.<sup>69</sup>

This kind of theology, emerging from concern for historical events, is both desired and needed.

#### *The Fundamental Option for the Poor*

Poverty, marginalization, oppression, and the new forms of exploitation brought about by capitalism have been the major problems for Latin American countries since the nineteenth century and up to the recent past.<sup>70</sup> This is what Medellín so fittingly describes as “institutionalized violence” on the poor and a systematic violation of the most elemental human rights.<sup>71</sup> It is in view of this that Gutiérrez came to an awareness of the world of the ‘other’ – of the poor, the oppressed, and the exploited class. He questions all the economic, social, and political order that oppresses and marginalizes the poor and proposes a theology of the fundamental option for the poor. He seeks to go to the very root of the misery and injustice in which millions in Latin America and other parts of the world live.

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<sup>69</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 11-12. (Gutiérrez's italics)

<sup>70</sup> Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, 186.

<sup>71</sup> Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, 191.

From the outset, Gutiérrez's theological project is about the life of the poor and oppressed. In the situation where Gutiérrez lives the questions of the meaning of life and God were not posed by intellectuals, but rather by those whom he calls nonpersons, the oppressed, those for whom society has no place. They are indeed treated as such by those with power in society. They wonder how to believe in God in the world that denies their personhood. For Gutiérrez this question concerns the whole human person "who is already wondering how liberation can come and how one can move from being a nonperson to a real person. And this means looking at the political, social, and economic structures of society as the context in which the theological issue is raised."<sup>72</sup>

The characteristic trait in Gutiérrez's theology is the connection between pastoral practice and reflection. This linkage has greatly to do with the spirit of Vatican II which invites Christians to give witness to their faith in society. The Medellín conference in 1968, embracing the spirit of Vatican II, encouraged the Latin American theologians to creatively relate the doctrine of the church to the world in Latin America. An impetus was added with the publication of *Populorum Progressio* and the Third World Bishops' Letter to the Peoples of the Third World. These two documents clearly condemn the exploitation of the poor by developed countries and invite the church to take seriously the plight of the poor and the oppressed.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> McAfee Brown, "Preface: After Ten Years," in Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, viii.

<sup>73</sup> Martínez, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, 121. For a full text of the Third World Bishops' letter, see Alfred T. Hennelly, *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), 48-57. Medellín can be seen as a defining moment for the fundamental option for the poor. For Gutiérrez, "it was the texts of the Episcopal Conference of Medellín which brought to public attention the theme of liberation as the pivot for apprehending faith." See Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Liberation Movements and Theology," *Concilium* 93 (1974): 135-146. According to Martínez, "Medellín wanted to respond to the needs of the poor and oppressed in Latin America, thus shifting the center of the theological discussion with regard to Vatican II and promoting a new line of thought that would come to be known as liberation theology." It "was an ecclesial event in which Gutiérrez played a major role as a theological expert. There

Gutiérrez is looking for a program of transformative action dependent on both the word of God and a right social analysis that effectuates “liberation from every form of exploitation, the possibility of a more human and dignified life, [and] the creation of a new humankind”<sup>74</sup> – all of which passes through the love of one’s neighbor who bears God’s image. For Gutiérrez the existence of poverty is structural and its causes lie in the oppression of some classes by others. Marginalization, oppression, and poverty are rooted in social relations. Any conversation about Christian love must criticize such attitudes and take side with the oppressed. All genuine theology, for Gutiérrez, has to take into consideration the *irruption of the poor* in history by creating thus a new and different society. The task of Christian theology as taken from this fundamental option for the poor is to tell both the oppressors and the nonpersons, that God is love, and that this love makes us all brothers and sisters. Martinez words are here helpful, as they summarize Gutiérrez’s theology:

Gutiérrez’s theology of liberation is a decision to work from the viewpoint of the poor – the exploited classes, marginalized ethnic groups, and scorned cultures. This led him to take up the great theme of poverty and the poor in the Bible. As a result, the poor appear within this theology as the key to an understanding of the meaning of liberation and of the meaning of the revelation of a liberating God.<sup>75</sup>

### *The Encounter with God in History*

The fundamental theological issue in the discussion about encountering God in history is that of the relationship between nature and grace as developed by Karl Rahner. Rahner maintains the essential relationship between nature and grace by arguing that

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is no doubt that his influence at Medellín was decisive to establish the overall orientation and the theological framework of the assembly, and that, in turn, he was confirmed and encouraged by the spirit and the result of the conference in his search for the theology of liberation.” 121. For an analysis of a mutual influence between Medellín and Gutiérrez, see McAfee Brown, *Gustavo Gutiérrez: An Introduction to Liberation Theology*, 11-14.

<sup>74</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 174.

<sup>75</sup> Martínez, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, 120.

God, the holy mystery, is connected to human history by revealing himself in Jesus and he is operative in history through the Holy Spirit. Gutiérrez sees in Rahner's understanding of the relationship between nature and grace an avenue for the assertion of an intrinsic link between human history and salvation history. Thus, in his book, *A Theology of Liberation*, he creatively worked out Rahner's significant view which affirms the constant existence of God's grace in all created reality and the central connection between the history of salvation and history at large.

Gutiérrez constructs his project upon the Rahnerian foundations and must specifically embrace Rahner's anthropological perspective. Yet he also expands Rahner's anthropology by focusing, not on the subject in general, but on the concrete and historical subject's relationship with the other in his/her own society. Gutiérrez's subject is the other, the nonsubject, the neighbor, the other human person utterly poor, oppressed and abandoned.<sup>76</sup> Gutiérrez is eager to show how the human subject relates to God through the encounter with the nonsubjects, the others.<sup>77</sup> This is Gutiérrez's way of answering the question about the meaning of the Latin America struggle. Human history, therefore, is the location of our encounter with God, in Christ.

In history, Gutiérrez argues, the biblical God has always been close and committed to human beings. At the outset of the history of the chosen people, God made a covenant with the people and vowed to live with them forever (Exod. 29: 45-46; 26: 11-12); and God's sanctuary is in the midst of them forever (Ezek. 37: 27-28). The tent, the Ark, and the mountain in the Hebrew Scriptures stressed God's presence sharing in the

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<sup>76</sup> Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, 122.

<sup>77</sup> For a concise and insightful analysis of Gutiérrez's shift in perspective, see Rebecca S. Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering: An interpretation of Liberation and Political Theologies* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1986), 46-63; see also, McAfee Brown, "Preface: After Ten Years," in *The Power of the Poor in History*, xii.

historical life of the people and how he revealed himself in history (Exod. 33: 7-11; Num. 1:1; 10: 35-36; 11:16, 24-26; Deut. 31: 14; 2 Sam. 7: 6-7). Again, in proclaiming the new covenant with his people, God promised to be present in the very heart of every human (Ezek. 36: 26-27; Jer. 31: 33).<sup>78</sup> God's commitment to human beings, however, was totally fulfilled, for Gutiérrez, with the Incarnation of the Son of God who became flesh to dwell among us (John 1:14). "God is visible in the humanity of Christ, the God-Man, irreversibly committed to human history."<sup>79</sup> Christ is God's temple and "the Christian community is a temple of living stones, and each Christian, a member of the Christian community, is a *temple of the Holy Spirit* who should not be destroyed" (1Cor. 3: 16-17).<sup>80</sup>

Gutiérrez asserts also in a more comprehensive way that "not only Christians are temples of God; every human being is."<sup>81</sup> To substantiate this he refers to the episode of Cornelius in the New Testament (Acts 10:45, 47; 11: 16-18 and 15:8). Hence, Jesus Christ is the universalization of the presence of God. "In him, in his personal uniqueness, the particular is transcended and the universal becomes concrete."<sup>82</sup> Now, since humanity – every human person – is the living temple of God, all human actions in history have an effect upon God. As a consequence, "we meet God in our encounter with others; we encounter God in the commitment to the historical process of humankind."<sup>83</sup> That the encounter with God occurs in the neighbor is a traditional biblical theme. Matthew 25: 31-45 is a very good illustration of this, but the whole Hebrew Scriptures teach: to know

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<sup>78</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 107-108; see also *The Power of the Poor in History*, 3-12.

<sup>79</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 109.

<sup>80</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 109. (Gutiérrez's italics)

<sup>81</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 109.

<sup>82</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 109.

<sup>83</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 110. See also *The Power of the Poor in History*, 12-16.

God is to do justice (Jer. 22:13-16). Whatever is done for the stranger, the widow, and the orphan has an effect upon God; those are the three types of poor. With regard to the parable of the final judgment in Matthew 25, Gutiérrez insists that Christ is in the neighbor we encounter daily. Christ teaches us the importance of the other person as the ultimate meaning of human life. He insists “on a love which is manifested in concrete actions, with ‘doing’ being favored over simply ‘knowing’, and the revelation of the human mediation necessary to reach the Lord.”<sup>84</sup>

The love of God for human beings is found incarnated in human love. Gutiérrez gives the example of the Samaritan who approached the injured man on the side of the road to explain that God is loved in the neighbor (Luke 10: 33; 1:7, 8; 7:13; 15:20).<sup>85</sup>

Thus, “the neighbor” Gutiérrez warns:

[I]s not an occasion, an instrument, for becoming closer to God. We are dealing with a real love of persons for their own sake and not ‘for the love of God,’ as the well-intended but ambiguous and ill-used cliché would have it – ambiguous and ill-used because many seem to interpret it in a sense which forgets that the love for God is expressed in a true love for persons themselves. This is the only way to have a true encounter with God. That my actions towards another is at the same time an action towards God does not detract from its truth and concreteness, but rather gives it even greater meaning and import.<sup>86</sup>

A distinct merit of Gutiérrez and the entire liberation theology movement is that it gave renewed attention to the centrality of human mediation as the primary means to reach God, which has strong scriptural roots:

our encounter with the Lord occurs in our encounter with others, especially with those whose human features have been disfigured by oppression, despoliation, and alienation and who have “no beauty, no majesty” but are the things “from which men turn away their eyes” (Isa. 53:2-3)...Our attitude towards them, or rather our commitment to them, will indicate whether or not we are directing our

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<sup>84</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 113.

<sup>85</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 114.

<sup>86</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 116.



existence in conformity with the will of the Father. This is what Christ reveals to us by identifying himself with the poor in the text of Matthew.<sup>87</sup>

For Gutiérrez, “theology of liberation means establishing the relationship that exists between human emancipation – in the social, political, and economic orders – and the kingdom of God.”<sup>88</sup> Martínez’s words excellently illustrate Gutiérrez’s thought on the other human person’s role in our relationship with God:

God is encountered in history because God is irreversibly committed to human history in Christ. Christ is the point of encounter of God and the creature and the expression of the utter importance of human reality and history within the divine plan. It follows then that to believe in God and to encounter God in history through the other are intrinsically linked.<sup>89</sup>

### *Liberation, Development and Salvation*

For Gutiérrez, liberation theology’s emphasis on the turn to the neighbor in the human historical situation cannot remain indifferent to the problems of human liberation and development, because God’s desire to save humankind embraces all human reality. As the world experiences profound and rapid socio-cultural transformation, differences in the transformation process have separated diverse countries, regions, and groups of people on the planet. This situation calls for liberation and development of those less-privileged as a participation in God’s desire to save all humankind.<sup>90</sup> As the evangelical principles are in radical incompatibility with unjust and alienating structures of societies, Christians, in virtue of their faith in the God of love, should be moved to participate in the liberation of the oppressed peoples and exploited social classes.<sup>91</sup> Gutiérrez sees the process of liberation and development as a way to address the most primary human

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<sup>87</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 116.

<sup>88</sup> Hennelly, *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*, 69.

<sup>89</sup> Martínez, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, 120.

<sup>90</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 13.

<sup>91</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 81.

aspirations of liberty, dignity, and the possibility of personal fulfillment for all.<sup>92</sup> He understands the struggle for liberation and development as the breaking of the domination of the rich countries and the misuse of power and wealth by some people in their societies. For Gutiérrez, the process of liberation articulates the unavoidable moment of fundamental change which is unfamiliar to the common use of the term development. For a strategy of development to be effective and meaningful, Gutiérrez insists, it has to take place within the context of liberation.<sup>93</sup>

Gutiérrez views “development [as] a *total social process*, which includes economic, social, political, and cultural aspects, [because] this notion stresses the interdependence of the different factors.”<sup>94</sup> Progress in one area implies a move forward in all areas, while stagnation in one area would hold back the growth of the rest. To view development in this wider context, Gutiérrez affirms, unavoidably calls for an ethical aspect which assumes a concern for human values. Thus, development as economic growth would be meaningful only by embracing a *humanistic perspective*: the concern for human values, most fundamentally the dignity of the human person.<sup>95</sup> For Gutiérrez,

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<sup>92</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 13.

<sup>93</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 17.

<sup>94</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 15. (Gutiérrez’s italics). Gutiérrez borrowed this definition from Helio Jaguaribe, *Economic & Political Development: A Theoretical Approach & a Brazilian Case Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 4. “Development is a total social process, and only for methodological convenience or in a partial sense can one speak of economic, political, cultural, and social development.” See also, Raymond Barre, *Le développement économique: Analyse et politique* (Paris: Cahiers de l’Institut de Science Economique Appliquée, 1958).

<sup>95</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 16. The ecclesiastical magisterium, while stressing the urgency to eliminate the existing injustices and the need for economic development geared toward the service and the total emancipation of humankind, also laments the fact that this liberation is seen only as the fruit of human effort. *Mater et Magistra, Pacem in Terris, Gaudium et Spes, Populorum progressio* are among the documents that give attention to the issue of dependence, development, and liberation. For instance, *Gaudium et Spes* 10 warns that “many look forward to a genuine and total *emancipation* of humanity wrought solely by human effort. They are convinced that the future rule of man over the earth will satisfy every desire of his heart.” Or it is concerned that liberation be reduced to a purely economic and social level: “among the forms of modern atheism is that which anticipates the *liberation* of man especially through his economic and social emancipation.” (20). In the same line, the “Instruction on Certain Aspects of the ‘Theology of Liberation’” published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, Vatican City,

to speak about a theology of liberation and development is to seek an answer to the question: what relation is there between salvation and the historical process of human liberation?<sup>96</sup> The need for liberation and development as a participation in God's desire to save all humankind led Gutiérrez to argue for a close link between salvation and liberation. "Salvation – the communion of human beings with God and among themselves – is something which embraces all human reality, transforms it, and leads it to its fullness in Christ."<sup>97</sup>

The world beyond ours is the transformation and fulfillment of the present life. Hence, as Gutiérrez states, "the absolute value of salvation – far from devaluing this world – gives it its genuine meaning and its own autonomy, because salvation is already latently there."<sup>98</sup> The salvific action of God underlies all human existence, because there are no two histories, one profane and one sacred. "There is one history – a 'Christo-finalized' history."<sup>99</sup> Thus, "salvation embraces all persons and the whole person; the liberating action of Christ – made human in this history and not in a history marginal to real human life – is at the heart of the historical current of humanity; the struggle for a just society is in its own right very much a part of salvation history."<sup>100</sup>

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August 6, 1984, noted certain "dangers" of Liberation theology, especially its use of Marxist ideas and its tendency to see genuine human emancipation as a result of human effort. See Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 22-23.

<sup>96</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 83.

<sup>97</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 85.

<sup>98</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 85.

<sup>99</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 85-86.

<sup>100</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 97.

### *Spirituality of Liberation*

For Gutiérrez history is one, and the history of salvation is at very heart of human history. Human history, therefore, provides the location of the human encounter with God where it can find peculiar expression in contact with others so as to bring about the liberation of humankind. To place oneself in the perspective of the kingdom of God means to participate in the struggle for the liberation of those oppressed by others. Gutiérrez stresses the urgent need for a spirituality of liberation that focuses on a conversion to the neighbor, the oppressed person, the exploited social class, the despised ethnic group, the dominated country.<sup>101</sup> He sees a relationship between spirituality and the content of liberation theology, and insists that human spiritual life cannot be separated from historical life.<sup>102</sup>

Gutiérrez distinguishes three themes of the new spirituality: conversion, gratuitousness, and joy. Conversion means a break with the past, a setting out on a new path. It involves a possibility for a new life, lived in solidarity with others. Moreover, it also has to influence the socio-economic, political, cultural, and human milieu from which conversion comes about.<sup>103</sup> Hence, a real human person is concerned with the life of those of who suffer injustice. A purely interior and spiritual attitude is not enough to become a *new person*. Conversion to the neighbor is significant because it leads to the “knowledge” of God; “to know God *is* to do justice... Hunger for God and hunger for bread, mainly bread for the neighbor, are perpetually interconnected.”<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 118.

<sup>102</sup> McAfee Brown, *Gustavo Gutiérrez: An Introduction to Liberation Theology*, 99. For Gutiérrez extensive treatment on spirituality of liberation, see *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of People*, translated by Matthew J. O’Connell (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984).

<sup>103</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 118.

<sup>104</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 118 (Gutiérrez’s italics). See also McAfee Brown, *Gustavo Gutiérrez: An Introduction to Liberation Theology*, 100.

Gratuitousness has to do with God's gracious love. It is the source of our ability to love, act and commit ourselves to a liberating task. A genuine love begins with an attention to the real need of the other human person, not with an obligation to love.<sup>105</sup> For Gutiérrez "the conversion to one's neighbors, and in them to the Lord, the gratuitousness which allows me to encounter others fully, the unique encounter which is the foundation of communion of persons among themselves, and of human beings, with God, these are the source of Christian joy."<sup>106</sup> Joy as a gift is an expression of life's victory over death. It is already present and not yet present amidst the complexities and worries of the great effort for the construction of a more just society.<sup>107</sup> Joy also articulates the assurance that undeserved oppression and suffering will be surmounted. In the face of this, Gutiérrez argues,

The only joy that can finally sustain is 'Easter joy, joy springing from hope that death is not the final word of history,' and that those who encounter crucifixion can likewise experience resurrection. God's activity can be seen in movements for justice, and human involvement in such movements makes the life of joy possible.<sup>108</sup>

Spirituality as the placing of oneself in the perspective of the kingdom means to join a new way that privileges an option on behalf of life. The option finds expression predominantly in the life of commitment to those who are subject to 'a premature and unjust death.' This attitude of God must serve as a model for all humans.<sup>109</sup> As the prophet Micah puts it, "He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the

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<sup>105</sup> McAfee Brown, *Gustavo Gutiérrez: An Introduction to Liberation Theology*, 100.

<sup>106</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 119.

<sup>107</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 119-120.

<sup>108</sup> McAfee Brown, *Gustavo Gutiérrez: An Introduction to Liberation Theology*, 101.

<sup>109</sup> Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, 100.

Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (6:8).

### *The Church as Sacrament in History*

Any examination of Gutiérrez’s ecclesiology cannot but make reference to the influence of the Second Vatican Council on the church as a whole and the encouragement it gave to the Latin American church. Vatican II documents on the church in the modern world, *Gaudium et Spes*, defined clearly what role the church should play amidst the profound and rapid changes as well as the cultural and social transformations that are evident around the world.<sup>110</sup> During the period of the council, and with the return home of a new generation of priests from their studies in Europe, the Latin American church began to think through ways of launching a discussion on salvation explicitly addressed to the plight of women and men in their part of the world. The aim was to arrive at a common pastoral and theological trend for the Latin American people in the light of their *sitz im leben*. Medellín’s conference theme summarizes well this new orientation: “The Church in the actual transformation of Latin America in the light of the Council.”<sup>111</sup>

As Vatican II was able to set forth a new perspective for the church by speaking of it as a sacrament of salvation whose visibility in history reveals and signifies humankind’s union with God and the unity of all humankind,<sup>112</sup> Gutiérrez called for “a new ecclesial consciousness and a redefinition of the task of the church in a world in which it is not only *present*, but of which it *forms a part* more than it suspected in the

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<sup>110</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* 4.

<sup>111</sup> Muskus, *The Origins and Early Development of Liberation Theology in Latin America with Particular Reference to Gustavo Gutiérrez*, 125.

<sup>112</sup> “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” *Lumen Gentium*, 1, 9 in *Vatican II: The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, New Revised Edition, edited by Austin Flannery (New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1998).

past.”<sup>113</sup> As the universal sacrament of salvation, the church has to be a sign of the reality it proclaims to humankind, that is, its being is not ‘for itself,’ but rather ‘for others.’<sup>114</sup> As a result, the church must cease to see itself as the exclusive place of salvation and instead orient itself towards a new and radical servant of the people. It has to turn to the world, where Christ and his Spirit are continually active for the salvation of all humanity. It should also be evangelized by the world.<sup>115</sup> Gutiérrez writes:

This dialectic relationship is implied in the emphasis on the church as sacrament. This puts us on the track of a new way of conceiving the relationship between the historical church and the world. The church is not a non-world; it is humanity itself attentive to the Word. It is the people of God which lives in history and is oriented toward the future promised by the Lord. It is, as Teilhard de Chardin said, the “reflexively Christified portion of the world. The church-world relationship thus should be seen not in spatial terms, but rather in dynamic and temporal ones.”<sup>116</sup>

Consequently, the church as a sign of God’s presence in history should – in its concrete existence – be a place of liberation both internally and externally. It should break with unjust social orders, commit itself to oppose exploitation and alienation, promote justice on behalf of the nonpersons, and dedicate itself to build a society of solidarity and justice. This is, for Gutierrez and other liberation theologians, the essence of what the church is: to strive to create a human brother/sisterhood. In the context of Latin America, Gutiérrez asserts, the role of the church is to struggle against the radical causes of injustice, oppression, and marginalization of the poor. If it does so, it will play its prophetic role and so be an authentic and effective sign of unity under the universal love of God.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 143.

<sup>114</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 48; Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 147.

<sup>115</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 147.

<sup>116</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 147.

<sup>117</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 148.

Gutiérrez's theology of liberation – as presented in his major theological themes – is a decision to work from the viewpoint of the neighbors, the other human persons, especially those who are oppressed and marginalized. It calls for the 'creation' of new human persons based on God's love for us and the love of neighbor. Jon Sobrino's theological perspective, after Gutiérrez, takes the same direction. It is to Sobrino's theology that we now turn.

### **III. Jon Sobrino**

In the preceding part of this chapter Gutiérrez's theology was analyzed and it became clear that an understanding of liberation theology as a theological movement would be possible only in relation to the characteristics of the society and the church from which it surfaces. A useful place to begin an examination of Sobrino's theological project is the El Salvadoran society and by extension the whole of Central American society. It will therefore be the task of this study to situate Sobrino's thought in his socio-cultural and ecclesiastical context. In the development of his reflection, the humanization of the victims of this world becomes part of everyday life. This lessens the breach between the worldly and the holy and links life and faith.

#### *Social, Cultural, and Ecclesial Background of Sobrino's Theology*

Jon Sobrino, a Spanish-Basque, was born in 1938 and entered the Jesuit order in 1956 at the age of eighteen. He went to El Salvador in 1957 as a nineteen-year-old Jesuit novice, and since then, has belonged to its Central American province. Between 1963 and 1965, he earned a licentiate in philosophy and humanities as well as a diploma in engineering, both from the University of St. Louis. After his ordination to the priesthood in 1969, he continued his studies in theology at the Jesuit College of St. Georgen in



Frankfurt, where he received a doctorate in 1975. His dissertation was on “The Significance of Cross and Resurrection in the Theologies of Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg.”<sup>118</sup>

Upon his return to El Salvador he began editing, along with his Jesuit confrere Ignacio Ellacuria, a collection of books entitled *Mysterium Liberationis*. This series was meant to be the *Summa Theologica* of liberation theology. In November 1989, members of the Salvadoran army murdered Ellacuria and five other Jesuits priests. Apart from the two periods of study in Germany and in the United States, Sobrino has spent his life in El Salvador teaching at the Jesuit University José Simeón Cañas in San Salvador, its capital and largest city.<sup>119</sup> He is one of the many Roman Catholic clergy who have risked their lives by identifying with and defending the Salvadoran poor and oppressed. Sobrino escaped the fate of six of his closest companions who were murdered by the security forces in November 1989, only because he was lecturing in Asia at the time.

The Republic of El Salvador is situated in Central America and it is surrounded on the south by the Pacific Ocean, on the west by Guatemala, and on the north and east by Honduras. It is “the smallest,” “one of the poorest” and “most densely populated republics in Latin America.”<sup>120</sup> According to Peterson the “average per capita gross national product was slightly over one thousand U.S. dollars in 1991, and combined under, and unemployment hovers around seventy percent.”<sup>121</sup> Most Salvadorans have no access to clean water, food, and medical care. There is also a high level of illiteracy.

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<sup>118</sup> Küster, *The Many Faces of Jesus Christ*, 49.

<sup>119</sup> Paul E. Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads: Democracy or Revolution?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 89.

<sup>120</sup> Anna L. Peterson, *Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion: Progressive Catholicism in El Salvador's Civil War* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1997), 24. On the social, cultural and ecclesial history of El Salvador, we have greatly relied on Peterson, *Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion: Progressive Catholicism in El Salvador's Civil War*, 24-42.

<sup>121</sup> Peterson, *Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion*, 24.

Peterson points out that the notable disproportionate sharing of land and revenue has also contributed to the plight of the people, in a society in which most families have traditionally depended on agriculture for their living.

After independence from Spain, indigenous lifestyle was yet to improve. The economic problems and the concentration of land and wealth in the hands of a few was still a major concern. For instance, as Peterson shows “one percent of the population controls seventy-one percent of the farmland, and over ninety-six percent of the rural population has twelve acres or less. Half of the national income goes to only eight percent of the population.”<sup>122</sup> As a result this created a significant economic disparity among the population and has stimulated several revolutions during colonial and postcolonial periods of the country’s history. To the indigenous protests the government and the landowners responded with the formation of militia groups to repress popular protest.<sup>123</sup> While the country seemed to have made some economic progress during the 1950s and 1960s, its overpopulation, economic problems, and inequitable social system led to social and political unrest. By the end of the 1970s, murder and other terrorist acts by leftist guerrillas and especially by right-wing “death squads” had become common.<sup>124</sup> Peterson describes the situation as follows: The

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<sup>122</sup> Peterson, *Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion*, 24.

<sup>123</sup> Peterson, *Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion*, 24-26. According to Peterson, in the early twentieth century, “two Salvadoran leaders both symbolized and helped fix the pattern of repression and rebellion that characterizes modern Salvadoran history. The first was Agustin Farabundo Marti, a communist and leader of the Regional Federation of Salvadoran Workers in the late 1920s, who fought for a time alongside Augusto Cesar Sandino, the Nicaraguan guerrilla leader. The second man, General Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez, claimed power in a military coup d’état in December 1931, initiating a repressive regime that lasted until 1944, after which there was chronic political unrest. Hernandez Martinez helped form the military into a self-conscious caste; prohibited the entry of blacks, Arabs, Hindus, and Chinese; supported fascists in Europe; and dabbled in the occult. His fame stems most, however, from his role in *la matanza*, the massacre of 1932.”

<sup>124</sup> Peterson, *Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion*, 29

[C]entral government remained out of reach of the opposition, political organizing intensified at the grassroots. Spurred by the continued corruption and economic injustices, a number of organizations emerged during the late 1960s and early 1970s to challenge the traditional division of power and resources. In parts of the countryside, peasants organized to demand fairer wages, land distribution, and living conditions.<sup>125</sup>

Peterson also explains that following Vatican II and the Medellin conference, church-based groups in rural areas of El Salvador, such as FECCAS (the Christian Peasant's Federation) and the UTC (Union of Farmworkers) began to reflect on the meaning of the scripture in relation to their situation.<sup>126</sup> These, according to Sigmund, "proposed an agrarian reform program that would respond to the desperate land hunger of an overpopulated country in which most of the land was in the hands of a small, wealthy oligarchy."<sup>127</sup> Quickly, in Peterson's estimation, "these organizations developed leadership skills as well as ideas about social justice and the value of collective action, in base Christian communities, *cursillos*, *encuentros*, and other Catholic educational and pastoral programs."<sup>128</sup> Moreover, these organizations had the support of clergy and religious, and most importantly those connected with the Jesuit institutions in San Salvador which were accused of promoting reform. Included here were obviously Ignacio Ellacuria and Sobrino whose call for the end of injustice and violence led to accusations of leftist sympathies.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Peterson, *Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion*, 30-31.

<sup>126</sup> Peterson argues that "within a few years, [these] two main peasant groups, the UTC and FECCAS, united; in 1975 this coalition (renamed the FTC, or Federation of Farmworkers) joined other popular organizations to form the Popular Revolutionary Bloc (BPR). The BPR and similar groups, such as FAPU, hoped to forge a common agenda and strengthen the opposition's bargaining position vis-à-vis the government." See his *Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion*, 32.

<sup>127</sup> Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads*, 109.

<sup>128</sup> Peterson, *Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion*, 31.

<sup>129</sup> Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads*, 109-110; Peterson, *Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion*, 31.

In El Salvador, social Christianity emerged in the 1930s in response to the hardships, uprisings, and repressions of that period. The movements called for improvements and the respect of the other human person. In the late 1960s, the social attitude of the Roman Catholic Church in El Salvador was profoundly influenced by Vatican II and the social encyclicals of Pope John XXIII.<sup>130</sup> Also influential was the Second Latin American Bishops' Conference held in Medellin, Colombia, in 1968, which addressed the issues of Vatican II from a distinctly Latin American perspective. These gatherings, especially the Medellin conference, emphasized the need for a more worldly involvement by the Roman Catholic clergy with the lives and problems of parishioners and advocated activist programs to improve the living conditions of the lower class.

Sobrino observes that the poor and the outcast are a majority that live in misery because of socio-economic structures, severe repression and political violence. This situation of injustice in El Salvador between the 1970s and 1980s has contributed to his commitment to view the world through the eyes of the poor, the marginalized and the oppressed – the victims of this world. He writes:

I have been asked to write about “how my mind has changed,” and I must say that it has changed indeed – though not just my mind, I hope, but my will and heart as well. Because the changes that I have experienced and will write about have also been experienced by many others in El Salvador and throughout Latin America...I will therefore try to explain the essence of such fundamental change from the perspective of El Salvador, comparing it with another change which is often said to lie at the heart of so-called modern Western civilization. From the time of Kant, such change has been described as an awakening from a “dogmatic slumber” – an awakening that is like the liberation of reason from subjection to authority and which, in turn, gives rise to the dogmatic proclamation that the fundamental liberation of the human being lies in the liberation of reason. In the Third World, the fundamental change also consists of an awakening, but from

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<sup>130</sup> *Mater et Magistra* (1961) – Christianity and Social progress: Deplores the widening gap between rich and poor nations, the arms race, and, the plight of farmers. It calls Christians to work for a more just world; *Pacem in Terris* (1963) – Peace on Earth: Affirms a full range of human rights as the basis for peace. It calls for disarmament and a world-wide public authority to promote universal common good.

another type of sleep, or better, from a nightmare – the sleep of inhumanity. It is the awakening to the reality of the oppressed and subjugated world, a world whose liberation is the basic task of every human being, so that in this way human beings may finally come to be human.<sup>131</sup>

This realization is what Sobrino experienced upon his return to El Salvador in 1974 after his studies in Europe. Many of his Jesuits brothers and others, among them Ellacuria and Archbishop Oscar Romero, had already been awakened from the sleep of inhumanity and had begun to speak of the poor, injustice, and liberation. Gradually, it became clear to him “that truth, love, faith, the gospel of Jesus, God, the very best we have as people of faith and human beings – these were somehow to be found among the poor and in the cause of justice.”<sup>132</sup> In El Salvador, Sobrino argues, he discovered what the cross of Jesus signifies looking at the life of millions of innocent people who die at the hands of executioners, and because of poverty and injustice. He explains:

What characterizes our Salvadoran reality is the unjust poverty of the majority, which produces a slow daily death, to which can be added the speedy and violent death which occurs in the form of repression and war. The world which is more real and more Salvadoran is thus the world of poverty and injustice. This is in a quantitative sense, since the majority are poor, and it is in a qualitative sense, because that poverty is not only one dimension of reality among many, but the one which cries out the most.<sup>133</sup>

Confronted with the phenomenon of oppression in El Salvador, Sobrino – like his Jesuit brothers – could not but begin by asking the questions: Why this oppression and what are its roots? How is it “possible to be a human being and not sometimes feel the shame of belonging to inhuman humanity”?<sup>134</sup> This experiential reality led him to the ideological suspicion of the superstructure, particularly of Christian theology; and so he arrived at a

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<sup>131</sup> Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 1.

<sup>132</sup> Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 3.

<sup>133</sup> Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 174.

<sup>134</sup> Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 6.

new way of experiencing theological reality, which became, in a way, his new hermeneutic.

Sobrino seeks to reinterpret the spectrum of Christian theology in light of the real. The real is, for Sobrino, the historical humanity in which we live. He takes the real for his starting point and rethinks the whole of revelation and the life of the church in a search for the salvation-liberation of the victims of this world. He was relentless in his efforts to develop a systematic Latin-American liberation theology with a Christological perspective. Christology is central to Sobrino's theological reflection as it will be discussed fully below. Influenced by his theological education and journey through his historical-social location, he came to understand Christology as a reflection on praxis, whereby *context precedes the text*.

The world of poverty and crucified peoples has allowed Sobrino to overcome blindness and discover dishonesty. He made an option, above all, to live in the midst of the true Salvadoran reality. This was his fundamental option for the poor, demanded of Christians by the gospel and ethically required by history. But above all, it is a primarily human option to become simply real and more human himself. The emphasis here is on the sufferings of the majority of people, not only in Latin America but all over the world. "Jesus' actions," Sobrino argues, "were designed not only to declare the dignity [of the poor and the oppressed] in the sight of God, but also to mount a radical assault on the causes of their social indignity – the material conditions of their existence and the religious concepts of their time."<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America*, translated by Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987), 142.

### *Jon Sobrino's Major Theological Themes*

The life, death and the resurrection of Jesus stand at the center of Sobrino's hermeneutical approach to theology. His reflection is mainly Christological and endorses the image of Jesus' historical life, his teaching about the kingdom, and his death and resurrection. It is in this Christological approach that his main themes surface: the historical Jesus, the death and resurrection of Jesus, the centrality of the Reign of God, ecclesiology, and spirituality as being human with spirit.

#### *The Historical Jesus*

An important aspect in Sobrino's Christological thinking is the possibility of constructing Christology on the basis of the historical Jesus.<sup>136</sup> In his book *Christology at the Crossroads*,<sup>137</sup> he makes clear that the historical Jesus is the best starting point for developing Christology.<sup>138</sup> He sees the historical Jesus as being concrete and the basic traits of Jesus as key.<sup>139</sup> He argues that "it is access to the concrete Jesus that brings out his universal potentialities in diverse historical situations."<sup>140</sup> Hence, "the historical Jesus is the hermeneutic principle that enables us to draw closer to the totality of Christ both in

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<sup>136</sup> Jon Sobrino, "Systematic Christology: Jesus Christ, the Absolute Mediator of the Reign of God," in *Systematic Theology: Perspectives from Liberation Theology*, edited by Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuria (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), 124 – 145.

<sup>137</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin America Approach*, translated by John Drury (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1978). This book illuminates the presuppositions of liberation theology in general and of Sobrino in particular. It draws on and critiques prominent European theologians such as, Rahner, Pannenberg, and Moltmann. By outlining the different possibilities for approaching Christology and presuppositions underlying both his own and others' theologies, Sobrino makes clear his priorities and those factors which hold the most relevance for him.

<sup>138</sup> Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 1-16. The expression "historical Jesus" is a scholarly theoretical reconstruction (modern construct) of the last three years of Jesus' existence in Palestine. It refers to Jesus' ministry.

<sup>139</sup> Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 9.

<sup>140</sup> Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 10.

terms of knowledge and in terms of real-life praxis.”<sup>141</sup> This is how Sobrino finds the unity of Christology and soteriology.

Sobrino sees Latin American Christology as responding to a concrete situation in the light of the actual history of Jesus of Nazareth. The dominant image is that of Christ as the Liberator. For him, theology goes beyond the role of explanation and focuses instead on developing a concrete praxis for responding to the situation at hand. In this sense, liberation theologians begin with the area in which they see a need for salvation and find in Christ a response. Sobrino also argues that liberation theology’s turn to the historical Jesus as a model is a normative way for Christians and other humans to discern how to act in their own political and social situations.<sup>142</sup>

### *The Death and Resurrection of Jesus*

As the historical reality of the cross of Jesus is critical to the theological notion of Christian resurrection, Sobrino argues that there should be a more concerted emphasis in theology on the cross of Jesus, the scandal of the event, and what it means for today. For Sobrino, Jesus’ crucifixion is at the center of his historical life. This is the central facet of theology as it articulates the genuine originality of the Christian faith.<sup>143</sup> Without the cross, it is impossible to conceptualize the resurrection of Christian people with concrete reality. Sobrino denounces any theological approach that tries to explain away the event of Jesus’ crucifixion by only focusing on the resurrection.

The death of Jesus shows that he truly suffered the same way like those living in poverty and oppression in the present-day Latin America. And as such, it is an important

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<sup>141</sup> Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 9.

<sup>142</sup> Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America*, 55-77.

<sup>143</sup> Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 179.



concrete point of reference for the victims of this world to develop Christology. The theological consideration of the death of Jesus leads to a reformulating of the conception of God. It was on the cross that God himself suffered the death of the Son and took upon himself all the pain and suffering of history.<sup>144</sup> In so doing, God expressed his love for humanity in a historical way. If the cross of Jesus was not a historical reality, the revelation of God in the cross could not have occurred because the death of Jesus on the cross historicizes God's love.<sup>145</sup> As such, the suffering of those oppressed in today's society must be able to relate to the suffering of Jesus in a real way. So the suffering of Jesus on the cross must be a real event of history.

The reality of the cross opens the reality of freedom from oppression for people in the real world. Without the cross being accepted as a real historical event, the reality of salvation through the cross would be impossible to achieve, Sobrino observes. He holds the cross at the center of his theology and feels that it must be viewed as a historical reality. He urges humanity to take the crucified people down from the cross. Finally, he also sees the reality of the cross as the way to political holiness. Because of Jesus, people can die in the hope of resurrection, looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth. Jesus' suffering on the cross shows God's solidarity with the victims of this world.<sup>146</sup>

Sobrino, while understanding Jesus' Resurrection as an eschatological event, also argues that this event, ultimately, has significance in the reality of our history. Faithful to his Christological starting point, he approaches the resurrection event from the perspective of the Third World situation – the victims of this world as a challenge to the

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<sup>144</sup> Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 224.

<sup>145</sup> Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 228.

<sup>146</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological reading of Jesus of Nazareth*, translated by Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh (Maryknoll, N. Y: Orbis Books, 1993), 233-253. For a comprehensive study, read chapters 7-10.

affluent to conversion. The eschatological aspect of the Risen Lord's existence may include some type of breaking into our own history and it may shape our life accordingly. Our experience, although non identical to the original experience, has a "certain repeatability of the Easter experience."<sup>147</sup> What seems more appropriate for Sobrino is "the experience of the irruption of something quasi-eschatological into the human situation."<sup>148</sup> The experiences of the victims of the world are real experiences of finality in history, not mediated by texts but by actual reality: "injustice that generates poverty, violence, lies, and death, but also a situation that generates hope, compassion, justice, and love."<sup>149</sup> These experiences happen, according to Sobrino, in various dimensions: anthropological, theological, and ecclesial.

However, the Christological dimension remains the focal point of these experiences, for the risen Christ is the crucified Jesus. Besides, "the resurrection concentrates God's eschatological action in history on the person of Jesus, and that in this sense present-day experiences are not identical with those narrated in the New Testament... but we can allow ourselves to be given the capacity for remaking – experiences of finality."<sup>150</sup> In spite of everything, there is light and hope in the crucified people. For Sobrino therefore, "Christian faith lives when, throughout history, we not only accept a doctrinal testimony that, coming from outside, remains always something external to us, alien to us, but when we go on remaking this type of experience of finality."<sup>151</sup> The experience of finality is discipleship, the following of Jesus within the

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<sup>147</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims*, translated by Paul Burns (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Book, 2002), 70.

<sup>148</sup> Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 71.

<sup>149</sup> Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 71.

<sup>150</sup> Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 73.

<sup>151</sup> Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 73.

circumstances of history. It is a certain form of fullness not the totality that should change the quality of one's life. To live fully is to live more in the conditions of historical existence through love, triumph, freedom, and joy. Freedom as triumph over selfishness, joy as triumph over sadness. The lives of the victims of this world inspire a new spirit of struggle and new hope in people. Sobrino sees Jesus' resurrection as a Christian response to a lasting human question of justice for the victims of this world.<sup>152</sup>

### *The Centrality of the Kingdom of God*

More than influencing a particular theological treatise, the symbol of the kingdom of God has shaped a way of doing theology and its fundamental character. This is true especially in the case of liberation theology of various provenances and motifs. Jon Sobrino has argued at length, and convincingly, that whereas for Latin American theology the liberation of the poor is the *primacy of reality*, the kingdom of God rather than the resurrection of Jesus is its *eschaton*.<sup>153</sup>

In Sobrino's view, there are several convergences between liberation theology and the theme of the kingdom of God. Liberation theology presupposes a pre-theological option for the poor who are the addressees of the kingdom of God.<sup>154</sup> Furthermore, it has certain formal characteristics which correspond to the symbol of the kingdom of God: it is concerned with historicizing the transcendental realities of faith, with denouncing and unmasking historical sin, with transforming reality, and with making the people the subjects of theology and the agents of faith.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 76-78.

<sup>153</sup> Jon Sobrino, "Central Position of the Reign of God in Liberation Theology," in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, Ignacio Ellacuria and Jon Sobrino, eds. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books/Collins Dove, 1993), 350-352. (Sobrino's italics)

<sup>154</sup> Sobrino, "Central Position of the Reign of God in Liberation Theology," 357.

<sup>155</sup> Sobrino, "Central Position of the Reign of God in Liberation Theology," 352-357.

Jesus' historical life as the mediator of the Father brings about this kingdom of God. Sobrino insists on life as the historical content of the kingdom of God. Because poverty means proximity to death, "life means that, with the advent of the kingdom of God, the poor ceases to be poor."<sup>156</sup> Life is a reality which points to 'more;' "its concept is dynamic and directional,"<sup>157</sup> it unfolds gradually in multiple levels of realization and is always open to the "perpetual element of the 'more' in the concept of the kingdom of God."<sup>158</sup> God becomes the God of those who suffer "lack of life," the victims of this world and this divine solidarity go as far as the Cross. The centrality of the kingdom of God means that God desires life for the poor and delivers them from the anti-kingdom.

### *Ecclesiology*

For Sobrino Christology is not merely anthropological and social in nature, but also theological and ecclesial. The Second Vatican Council's *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* begins with the following words: "Christ is the light of humanity; and it is, accordingly, the heart-felt desire of the sacred Council, being gathered together in the Holy Spirit, that, by proclaiming his Gospel to every creature, it may bring to all men that light of Christ which shines out visibly from the church."<sup>159</sup> This quotation shows the direct link between Jesus and the church; the church exists because Jesus willed it. This helps to understand Sobrino's approach to the reality of the church. At the basis of his ecclesiology, there is the experience of the poor. Sobrino presents a passionate commitment to the poor, not just those who have nothing, but especially those deprived

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<sup>156</sup> Jon Sobrino, "Central Position of the Reign of God in Liberation Theology," in *Systematic Theology: Perspectives from Liberation Theology*, edited by Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuria (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), 67.

<sup>157</sup> Sobrino, "Central Position of the Reign of God in Liberation Theology," 67.

<sup>158</sup> Sobrino, "Central Position of the Reign of God in Liberation Theology," 67.

<sup>159</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

by an unjust global system of the goods to which they are entitled. This point drives his theological reflection on the church. The poor call the church into question, as nothing else does, but they have not been the church's central concern.<sup>160</sup>

The most serious aspect from a theological point of view is that the poor have not come to possess the theological status they deserve according to Jesus. Sobrino, therefore, hopes to shed light on some basic problems faced by a church that desires to be faithful to its Christian nature. He then proposes the historical Jesus as a model of strict theological importance to ecclesiology because "the essence of the church does not exist unless it takes historical form."<sup>161</sup> Although he admits that the church comes into existence after the resurrection event, he nevertheless underlines the correlation of the resurrection to the reality of history, namely the reality of Jesus' ministry to the poor prior to his crucifixion. Jesus' ministry and his crucifixion are continuous images leading to the resurrection. Today the risen Lord has appeared to the church of Latin America to restore it again; He gave the Latin American church the grace of 'seeing' him in the poor, hence the existence of the church of the poor.

For Sobrino, the church of the poor is a church "formed on the basis of the poor and that finds in them the principle of its structure, organization, and mission."<sup>162</sup> It is in this church that one finds the basic substance of ecclesiality, namely, faith, hope, love, the presence of Christ and mission. Furthermore, this church of the poor is not to be identified with the Vatican II understanding of church as the people of God because of

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<sup>160</sup> Jon Sobrino, *The True Church and the poor*, translated by Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984).

<sup>161</sup> Sobrino, *The True Church and the poor*, 3.

<sup>162</sup> Sobrino, *The True Church and the poor*, 93.

the universal vagueness that Vatican II gives to the term people of God.<sup>163</sup> A church of the poor means going beyond a purely universalist, ethical approach of the people of God; it “means that the poor are the authentic *theological source* for understanding Christian truth and practice and therefore the constitution of the church.”<sup>164</sup> These churches are where people should seek and find God.

If this is now the orientation, what then comes of the universality or the catholicity of the church? In response to this question Sobrino affirms that the universality referred to in catholicity is not achieved except through partisanship, which means through

the discovery of the originality and the specificity of the ‘local’ church... There is a good deal of evidence to prove that the church in Latin America is becoming an authentic ‘local’ church and not simply an appendage or prolongation of the churches of the parent countries. This development is a result of the church’s option for the poor.<sup>165</sup>

While Sobrino acknowledges the teaching of the magisterium on ecclesiology as normative, he also insists on the fact that its interpretation cannot but take into consideration the cultural specificity of each milieu. In the case of Latin America, Sobrino would argue, a relevant ecclesiology should be more attentive to the plight of the poor and the oppressed. It is no longer enough to affirm that praxis comes first, but that the historical subject of this praxis, the others, should be taken seriously. By so doing, the church ceases to be abstract but concrete in history and therefore relevant to the people.

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<sup>163</sup> It is important that we clarify this point. Sobrino does not deny the contribution of Vatican II, but he does underline the limitations of the concept “people of God”.

<sup>164</sup> Sobrino, *The True Church and the poor*, 93 (Sobrino’s italics)

<sup>165</sup> Sobrino, *The True Church and the poor*, 112.

## *Spirituality*

In Sobrino's judgment, too many people and too many theologians fail to emphasize the need to see a link between the demands of real life with spirituality. He understands spirituality as a "life with a certain spirit, life lived in a particular spirit, especially, in the case of Christian spiritual life, or life lived in the spirit of Jesus."<sup>166</sup>

From the very beginning, theology of liberation in Latin America has thought to be a creative synthesis of what it means to be human and Christian in the real world of today. Rather than speaking of spirituality in the abstract, Sobrino's point of departure is the concrete that actually becomes present in human beings and animates their thoughts, feelings, and actions. He begins with the proposition that spiritual persons are persons who live with spirit. Spirituality does not intend a relationship with immaterial, invisible realities; spirituality is the spirit with which humans confront the real, the concrete history in which we all live. Sobrino presents the basic premise of spirituality in terms of honesty and fidelity to the truth of things as they actually are, responding to the demand of people's concrete reality.<sup>167</sup>

Basic for liberation theology's spirituality, Sobrino asserts, is the spirituality of forgiveness expressed through love of the oppressors. This love seeks the conversion of the oppressors.<sup>168</sup> This means that the victims of this world are the locus of conversion and evangelization because their situation calls for the universal setting for God's question: what have you done to your brother/sister? Thus, for Sobrino, the non-poor are called to respond and correspond to the God of the poor revealed in Jesus. And this

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<sup>166</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988), 2.

<sup>167</sup> Sobrino, "Spirituality and the Following of Jesus," in *Systematic Theology*, 236-241.

<sup>168</sup> Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 59-68.

requires conversion of all who are not on the side of the victimized poor, that is, the oppressors and those who participate in oppression by their passivity.<sup>169</sup> The real here is the life of the other human being. Salvation, Sobrino affirms, cannot be dissociated from the real historical humanity in which we live.

For Sobrino, theology is about following Jesus in the path of justice and love in the cause of God's kingdom by taking the crucified people down from the cross. For what the Lord requires of us is to embody justice and love in history. This is the way we respond to God's love; the way of seeking the answer to the question of what it means to be human. Sobrino's theology of liberation, like Gutiérrez's, is a decision to work from the viewpoint of the neighbor. Sobrino's subject, like Gutiérrez's, is the other, the poor, the exploited classes, marginalized ethnic groups, and despised cultures.

The analysis of liberation theology in Latin America as understood by Gutiérrez and Sobrino has shown that God is found in the course of human history and more importantly in the neighbor. God stands before humans on the boundary of the historical future. He is the driving force of history urging Christians to experience transcendence as a permanent turn to the neighbors. The Christian God we worship is the crucified God who submerges himself in a world of misery. God is found on the crosses of the oppressed rather than in beauty, power, or wisdom. At this point, it would be significant to address the issue of the centrality of the neighbor in liberation theology as it makes explicit how the Christian response to God is to be lived out.

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<sup>169</sup> Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 59-68.



#### IV. The Centrality of the Neighbor in Liberation Theology

At the heart of Rahner's philosophical theology is a view of the world as the mysterious field where God's self-communication in Jesus and the Holy Spirit takes place. God for Rahner remains a mystery, always beyond human reach, as the horizon posited in humans' movement toward knowing and willing, freedom and love. In a transcendental movement human beings are oriented and able to know God only through their being *in the world*. Karl Rahner has always held that the human spirit, although transcendent, is bound ontologically to matter, the physical, appearance, the world and history by a transcendental relation. Therefore its encounter with the transcendence is always and inevitably mediated through history.<sup>170</sup> This implies that there is no pure religion separate from history because religion is at all times and unavoidably a reality of the world in which human beings live. Whatever their religion, human beings express their faith within a concrete particular historical situation. All symbols, concepts, things, places, persons and events of history, are elements of mediation between a human person and the divine transcendence.<sup>171</sup>

Since Vatican II the Catholic Church has adopted this approach to theology as a way of making Christian doctrine relevant to the contemporary questions. Hence, for the Catholic Church and Christian theology faith is an experience that governs the whole of one's life and being. It has been the concern of the Catholic Church to persistently

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<sup>170</sup> This idea is the main trend of his transcendental anthropology and this is well-expressed in his *Hearers of the Word*, translated by Michael Richards (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 130-149. Friedrich Schleiermacher expresses the same thing in phenomenological terms of consciousness: There can be no consciousness of transcendence apart from consciousness of this world. See his *The Christian Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 125-127.

<sup>171</sup> Roger Haight, *An Alternative Vision: An Interpretation of Liberation Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 74. For an account of different ways in which historical symbols may structure religious faith see Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, translated by Rosemary Sheed (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1958).

condemn the injustices of the economic and social conditions created by modern societies. The church's declarations have always been in support of basic human rights in the social, economic, and political orders of societies. Liberation theology has in recent times endeavored to give voice to these concerns through a less conventional structure of thought which has been the object of many criticisms, mainly for its use of Hegel's and Marx's views of history.<sup>172</sup> History for Hegel and Marx is not something to speculate about but also a place where real issues of the future of humanity are dealt with. The notion of historical consciousness that liberation theology embraces from Hegel and Marx emphasizes the eschatological vision of history. History is now understood as the place where the process of emancipation of human beings occurs because God reveals God's self through history or God saves in history. This vision of eschatology raises fundamental questions: how could historical-temporal-spatial events be events of salvation while retaining a basic orientation toward the future (eschatological salvation)? How does liberation theology understand the tension between the *already* and the *not-yet* of salvation?

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<sup>172</sup> With regard to Marxist ideas, Vatican II's Congregation for the doctrine of faith published in 1984 an (*Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation*) instruction aimed at drawing attention of pastors, theologians, and all the faithful to the deviations and risks of using concepts borrowed from various currents of Marxist thought. The Catholic Church has formulated two criticisms against Liberation Theology. First, the use of Marxist analysis and other theories that in the end, it is said defeat the cause of the poor. The church's argument states one cannot examine injustice in Marxist terms without tacitly endorsing the philosophy's denial of the spiritual world and of God. Second, the questioning of the church's hierarchy and authority lines. Liberation Theology undermines the Church leaders' influence over the laity. The interest in Christian-Marxist dialogue was not limited to Latin America, but it evolved in a distinctive way. Among the many works from the perspective of Christian theologians, see René Coste, *Marxist Analysis and Christian Faith*, translated by Roger Couture and John Cort (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985); Arthur McGovern, *Marxism: An American Christian Perspective* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1980); Anselm Kyongsuk Min, *Dialectic of Salvation: Issues in Theology of Liberation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989). For a criticism of liberation theology from a contemporary Marxist perspective, see Alistair Kee, *Marx and the Failure of Liberation Theology* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990).

Liberation theology's biblical hermeneutic was shaped by its reception of the Enlightenment philosophical perspective that argues for the independence of human reason. The turn to the subject became the fundamental point in Christian theology. God's transcendence and self-disclosure were no longer only mysterious, rather God is found in the medium of human dealings in history. Yet, for liberation theology, the devastating experiences of oppression and poverty in Latin America have shown the limit of this excessive emphasis on the thinking subject's freedom and autonomy in history. It challenges also a futuristic vision of eschatology that has no bearing on human reality. Liberation theology recognizes that the *here* and *now* of salvation has a basic orientation toward the future. But it insists that this process begins here on earth and ends in eternity. For Gutiérrez, Sobrino, and most liberation theologians, the historization of salvation does not consist of reducing salvific action to the transformation of the socio-political structures. It consists of saying that salvation does not reach its fulfillment if it does not attain that historical dimension, and when appropriate, that political dimension. It proposes the turn to the other, that is, social responsibility and commitment to the other human person that is necessary for the establishment of the anthropology of the new human.

It argues that the human person's fullness and the defeat of socio-political and economic structures of power in human societies can be realized only through a re-appropriation of the biblical principle of Christianity of love of neighbor. This is a fundamental response to the issue of human existence and authenticity. For liberation theology, Gutiérrez asserts, "the veneration of God and the doing of God's will are the

necessary conditions for reflection on Him.”<sup>173</sup> Humans find God mostly through concrete commitment toward the poor (cf. Matt. 25:31-46). “Contemplation and commitment in human history are fundamental dimensions of Christian existence.”<sup>174</sup> John Risley’s comments on liberation theology as an authentic spirituality that embraces the neighbor and God are here helpful:

The gospel sense of the poor, moreover, is also the authentic verification of the contemplative and interior values of Christian spirituality... orthodox Catholic spirituality, when trying to discern the criteria for the authenticity of prayer and mystical experience, has always responded that the verification does not come with the contemplative prayer in itself, that is, with the subjective mystical experience. That can easily be deceiving. No, its verification is in the practice of fraternal love, in fidelity to the sense of the brother or sister in need. The gospel declares that authentic spirituality is one love which embraces both God and neighbor, the neighbor who is precisely the poor and needy (Luke 10:29ff.; Matt. 25:31ff.). The experience of God and the experience of the poor are mutually verifying and mutually reinforcing: the sense of the poor brings with it and reinforces the sense of God, and vice versa.<sup>175</sup>

For liberation theology, the biblical concept of salvation is associated with the process of liberation from oppression and injustice. Sin is understood in terms of the human person’s inhumanity to the other human. For Liberation theology, as Gutiérrez affirms, “it is not enough to say that love of God is inseparable from the love of one’s neighbor. It must be added that love for God is unavoidably expressed *through* love of one’s neighbor.”<sup>176</sup> Hence, God is found in our neighbor and salvation is said not to be dissociated from the real historical humanity in which we live. The history of salvation becomes the salvation of history embracing the entire process of humanization. Liberation theology centers its argument about the centrality of the neighbor on biblical

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<sup>173</sup> Gutiérrez, “The Task and Content of Liberation Theology,” 28.

<sup>174</sup> Gutiérrez, “The Task and Content of Liberation Theology,” 29.

<sup>175</sup> John Risley, “Liberation Spirituality,” *Spirituality Today* 35 no. 2 (1983): 136.

<sup>176</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 114-115. (Gutiérrez’s italics)

stories of the quest for justice and human dignity, exemplified by Israel's liberation from Egypt and Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Jesus Christ, the founder and determining factor of Christian faith, taught a self-sacrificing love of God and love of neighbor as an integral part to our relation to God. He displayed his teaching as the fundamental reason of his own life. He went around doing good. He was remembered after his death by his friends for his actions which were consistent with his teaching and faith. To be his disciple is about following in his life patterns which are essentially a life of love and doing good, not simply for one's friends, but for the others, one's enemies, the outsiders. Hence, in the ethical teaching of Jesus Christ, as Roger Haight argues, "the love of God and the love of neighbor are inextricably entwined."<sup>177</sup> For liberation theology, Haight contends, "one cannot love God wholly without including in that love all that is of God, especially all other people who are God's own... [Equally] an authentic love of other people implies a love for what makes them be and be as they are, their ground of being, God."<sup>178</sup>

With respect to the connection between love of neighbor and love of God, liberation theology uses two main texts: the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 29-37) and the text of the last judgment in (Mat. 25: 31-45). The story of the Good Samaritan presents two figures of the neighbor; both the one who approached the wounded man and made him his neighbor and the one who fell into the hands of the robbers. The neighbor is not only the one who one finds in one's path, but also the one in

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<sup>177</sup> Haight, *An Alternative Vision*, 76. The argument here is the same as that of Sobrino in *Christology at the Crossroads*.

<sup>178</sup> Haight, *An Alternative Vision*, 77. This analysis is dependent on Karl Rahner's in "Reflections on the Unity of Love of Neighbor and the Love of God," in *Theological Investigations*, VI (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1968), 231-249. See also Rahner's "The Mission of the Church and the Humanizing of the World," *Doctrine and Life*, XXI (April and May 1971), 171-178, 231-242.

whose path one places himself, the one who one approaches and actively seeks. To be a Christian, for Gutiérrez and Sobrino, is to draw near, to make oneself a neighbor in taking actions in history as Christians live their lives as beings in the world. God reveals his human face in history through his Son Jesus Christ. Energized through faith in Jesus Christ, Christians give witness to God's will and become on earth, the instruments and models of God's love for humankind.

The last judgment text presents two fundamental points: loving one's neighbors as one loves oneself and the preferential option for the least of these. To live out these two commandments is without a doubt life's greatest challenge and highest purpose. The context of the parable infers that the poor are the ones who have been hungriest, thirstiest and most naked and so we must not fail to care for them. For liberation theology, following the scriptures, how humans treat one another is a critical part of how we love God. Thus, any act of love toward the others, especially the poor, marginalized, and exploited ones, is an act of love toward God. Gutiérrez explains:

God is loved in the neighbor... To love one's brother or sister, to love all persons, is a necessary and indispensable mediation of the love of God... This holds to a certain extent for every human person according to the important text of Matthew 25, which reminds us that an action on behalf of a human being is an action on behalf of God. It is to love God: if you gave food and drink, you gave it to me; if you denied it, you denied it to me.<sup>179</sup>

As Saint John puts it: "But if a man says, 'I love God,' while hating his brother, he is a liar. If he does not love the brother whom he has seen, it cannot be that he loves God whom he has not seen" (1John 4: 20). The strength of liberation theology is in its compassion for the poor and its conviction that Christians should not remain passive and unconcerned to the plight of their neighbors. The human person's inhumanity to a fellow

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<sup>179</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 115; Gutiérrez, "Toward a Theology of Liberation," 74.

human is sin and calls for conversion and Christian resistance. Liberation theology is a plea for costly discipleship and a reminder that to follow Jesus has practical social and political consequences. Here is how Gutiérrez puts it:

Love of neighbor is an essential component of Christian life. But as long as I apply that term only to the people who cross my path and come asking me for help, my world will remain pretty much the same. Individual almsgiving and social reformism is a type of love that never leaves its own front porch... On the other hand my world will change greatly if I go out to meet other people on their path and consider them as my neighbor, as the Good Samaritan did... the gospel tells us that the poor are the supreme embodiment of our neighbor. It is this option that serves as the focus for a new way of being human and Christian in today's Latin America. But the existence of the poor... is not neutral on the political level or innocent of ethical implications. Poor people are by-products of the system under which we live and for which we are responsible... That is why the poverty of the poor is not a summons to alleviate their plight with acts of generosity but rather a compelling obligation to fashion an entirely different social order.<sup>180</sup>

What Gutiérrez seems to be saying here is that to follow Jesus leads to a concern for social justice. This is an intrinsic form of authentic Christian faith, because it is the determining form that structures faith's love for other human beings. Haight's words explain exceedingly well how liberation theology understands Christian faith:

Active concern for other human beings on a social level, though never to the exclusion of concern for the other levels of personal and transcendent freedom, constitutes real union with God by an implied faith. And all faith that lacks this concern as its form is incomplete and suspect.<sup>181</sup>

Furthermore, for liberation theology, as Gutiérrez argues, the bond between love of neighbor and the love of God

is not only valid for Christians, but for all persons who, in one way or another, welcome the Word of the Lord into their heart... God is revealed in history, and it is likewise in history that persons encounter the Word made flesh. Christ is not a

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<sup>180</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith," in *Frontiers of Theology in Latin America*, translated by John Drury and edited by Rosino Gibellini (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979), 8.

<sup>181</sup> Haight, *An Alternative Vision*, 80.

private individual; the bond which links him to all persons gives him a unique historical role.<sup>182</sup>

For liberation theologians, human beings find the Lord in their encounters with others, and to be a human is to commit oneself in one way or the other in the process of the respect of human dignity and emancipation. The centrality of the neighbor in liberation theology lies in the fact that one's action toward the other is at the same time an action toward God. Again, liberation theology urges Christian theology to leave the climate of the turn to the subject and move toward a consideration of the *turn to the other* that constitutes the truth of Christianity: the concern for the humanity of every human being created in God's image. Haight argues that liberation theology's commitment to neighbor implies also a commitment to God's ultimate transcendence:

The neighbor then is certainly the test and the criterion of authentic self-transcendence vis-à-vis God. But even more, the 'others,' he and she and they, are the privileged near-at-hand mediating vehicle through whom, by responding precisely to *them*, we respond to God. It is therefore true that while we are in history the only way we can love God authentically is through the neighbor.<sup>183</sup>

Haight's point is a valid one. Liberation theology, notwithstanding some excess in the application of this theology in concrete situations, takes as its starting point the love of neighbor as it constitutes the truth of Christianity. Every human person, especially the poor, the stranger, the oppressed – the nonpersons – is an incarnation of God's image in the world and deserves to be treated with respect and dignity. And in so doing we meet the divine transcendence who from eternity calls us to justice and love of neighbors. There is a need to build up and enforce stronger political and local solidarity in the world.

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<sup>182</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 115.

<sup>183</sup> Haight, *An Alternative Vision*, 77-78.



### *Conclusion*

In Central and Latin America, this chapter noted, the challenge to Christian theology was the political oppression and the socio-economic plight of “the ‘non-persons,’ those who are not recognized as humans by the social order: the poor, the exploited, those systematically and legally deprived of their status as human beings, those who barely realise what it is to be a human being.”<sup>184</sup> This led to the emergence of liberation theology. It is a theology that stems from the meaning of love of neighbor in Christianity in the midst of the tragic human situation; hence, the centrality of the neighbor as the condition of an authentic self-transcendence vis-à-vis God in liberation theology. It calls for the liberation of the neighbor and argues that it is in the works of justice toward the other human person, in loving one’s neighbor, that the divine transcendence is encountered in concrete life.

This chapter discussed the place of neighbor in liberation theology through the eyes of Gutiérrez’s and Sobrino’s theological perspective. It argued that liberation theology emerged as a response to the existence of a crucified people, the non-persons, the poor and the oppressed of our world – whose suffering presents Christian faith with an urgent demand – that we turn toward them in love and solidarity because they also are children of God. The stress here is on the neighbor’s humanity, as created in God’s image. Thus, love of neighbor is the first moment in the process of theological reflection for Gutiérrez, Sobrino, and other liberation theologians. The examination of the social, cultural, and ecclesial background of Gutiérrez and Sobrino has helped make sense of and appreciate the theological origins of their thought in time and place. Furthermore, this chapter has also shown that for Gutiérrez and Sobrino the human person, the poor, the

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<sup>184</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, “The Task and Content of Liberation Theology,” 28.

stranger, the widow, the oppressed, the homeless, is the place for a possible divine self-disclosure. As Gutiérrez and Sobrino analyze the human person in the light of the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, this chapter argued that their theological reflections are inspired by their Christologies and the experience of their social locations. Liberation theology as presented by Gutiérrez and Sobrino stems from the “Christology from below” and in this perspective, it is very concrete and social and calls for an ever-closer link between faith and daily life, between theory and practice. Hence, liberation is seen as dialectically linked with the humanization of the other human person, Levinas’s *autrui* who bears the trace of the divine. For Gutiérrez and Sobrino salvation cannot be dissociated from the real historical humanity in which humans live. This soteriological perspective takes its content from Jesus’ command of love of neighbor, his ministry to the poor and his opposition to oppression.

## CHAPTER THREE

# Emmanuel Levinas and Liberation Theology in Dialogue: An Intersubjective Model for the Radical Re-imagining of the World

### Introduction

The first chapter established that the core of Levinas's philosophy is the relationship between the other and the subject. As we have seen, Levinas articulates his position on the issue of the other within the Western philosophical tradition and presents ethics as first philosophy.<sup>1</sup> He acknowledges his debts to Plato who first placed the Good beyond being, to Descartes who opened thought to the idea of the infinite and to Kant whose criticism had shaken up philosophical dogmatism.<sup>2</sup> His aim has been to renew twentieth century phenomenology by combining "a radical critique of Western philosophy with a Platonizing retrieval of the pre-Platonic tradition of Israel."<sup>3</sup> Levinas was dissatisfied with Western philosophy's tendency to base all knowing, willing, and meaning on the intentional consciousness of the subject, rejecting thus any possibility for the existence of the other independent of the subject. In his work, responsibility is first an ethical gesture, "set forth as the determinative *structure* of subjectivity"<sup>4</sup> in its

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<sup>1</sup> Emmanuel Levinas explains his whole philosophical project in one of his first major works, *Totality and Infinity*. It is important to note here that Levinas's use of the word "ethics" should not be understood in the traditional sense of moral principles, norms, obligations, and interdictions that rule human behavior, rather as the pre-originary and pre-radical practice of the good that transcends all dimensions of theory and contemplation of a thematized subject. This is a position of which Levinas's entire work is an expression.

<sup>2</sup> S. Ploudre and R. Simon, "Ethique et morale chez Emmanuel Levinas," *Le Supplément* 160 (1987) : 123-124.

<sup>3</sup> Adriaan T. Peperzak, preface to *Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas for Philosophy, Literature and Religion*, edited by Adriaan Peperzak (New York: Routledge, 1995), ix. Levinas's Platonic retrieval centers on the idea of the goodness beyond being which Plato developed in the *Republic* (508e-509b).

<sup>4</sup> Alphonso Lingis' introduction to *Otherwise than being or Beyond Essence*, xi. (My italics)

“relationship with the Good, which is over and beyond Being.”<sup>5</sup> It is a command that orders a being to act for the good of the other who presents him/herself as a face. The face is an unrepresentable trace and calls forth the idea of transcendence.

Liberation theology – as developed by Gutiérrez and Sobrino – was the object of the second chapter. This theology posits one’s responsibility towards the poor, the stranger, the oppressed, etc, as constitutive of one’s subjectivity and relationship with the divine transcendence. It sees in the faces of the crucified people of Latin America and the Third World the face of Jesus Christ. Gutiérrez and Sobrino also insist on the necessary link between the notions of kingdom of God, grace, and soteriology with the *creation* of a better society – the radical re-imagining of the world.

The purpose of this third chapter is to examine the conceptual affinities of Levinas’s philosophy with liberation theology. The thesis here is that Levinas’s humanism – as opposed to the humanism of the Enlightenment<sup>6</sup> – finds some conceptual affinities with liberation theology and it is a revalidation of one of the truths of Christianity and Christianity’s vision of human life and existence: the concern for the humanity of every human being or love of neighbor.<sup>7</sup> Levinas’s philosophy and liberation theology, each in its own right, responds to the human situation at least in one comparable way. Their respective work in philosophy and theology emerged as a response to the twentieth century’s tragic human situation as at once transcendent yet absolutely weak and exposed. They search for the divine transcendence in a life of commitment to the other human person, find in the Judeo-Christian wisdom a distinct

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<sup>5</sup> Alphonso Lingis’ introduction to *Otherwise than being or Beyond Essence*, xii.

<sup>6</sup> For Emmanuel Levinas, the humanism of the Enlightenment is the privileging of the human subject over and against the human other. He mentions anti-semitism as one of the consequences of this view of humanism; see his *Difficult Freedom: Essay on Judaism*, 277- 288.

<sup>7</sup> Pope Benedict XVI reaffirms this argument in his first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*.

way of thinking of the subject and the other, and call for love of neighbor and justice. Hence, they both view the turn to the other/neighbor as a power of genuine love opening new avenues for the re-imagining of the world. What is fundamental for Levinas's thought and liberation theology is that they both bring forth one major characteristic: the dimension of the divine opens forth in the human face. God's transcendence emerges not in the oppression and hatred of other human beings but in love of one's neighbor.

This chapter will begin with an overview presentation of the movement from modernity to postmodernity that constitutes the context for our philosophical and theological reflection on Levinas's ethics of responsibility and liberation theology. The presupposition here is that the twenty-first century in which we live is a postmodern world. It is a period that questions modernity's overemphasis on individual subjectivity. The term modernity as it applies to this dissertation stands for the Cartesian-Kantian model of thought that celebrates the uniqueness of the thinking subject as the center of all knowing and meaning. Yet, within the postmodern environment nothing seems to hold, most foundational culture, intellectual and religious values are being questioned, and new meanings are being born at the meeting of diverse ideas and worldviews.

While postmodernity, like modernity, has its negative and positive aspects, the definition of postmodernity that this dissertation embraces is the one that emphasizes the absolute necessity of relationality, interdependence, and solidarity, based on the philosophical theology of *otherness* and *difference*, to use David Tracy's words.<sup>8</sup> It takes the form of the turn to the other, resists modernity's excessive focus on the subject, and

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<sup>8</sup> David Tracy, *On Naming the Present: Reflections on God, Hermeneutics, and Church* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books; London, England: SCM Press, 1994); "Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity," 104-114; "Forms of Divine Disclosure," in *Believing Scholars: Ten Catholic Intellectuals*, edited by James L. Heft, 1<sup>st</sup> edition (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005): 47-56. (My italics)

offers a better prospect for a redefinition of subjectivity as being for the other. Since this postmodern world is the context in which contemporary philosophical theology has to be undertaken, this dissertation argues that a reconsideration of Levinas's thought and liberation theology, each in its own right, as they both view the turn to the other/neighbor as a way to approach the otherness of divine transcendence, offers this prospect both philosophically and theologically. Hence, the examination of commonalities and differences that can be found between Levinas's thought and liberation theology will constitute the second moment of this chapter. It will be argued that the conceptual affinities between Levinas's thought and liberation theology – especially their turn to the other/neighbor – can contribute toward a redefinition of subjectivity as “being-in-the-world” for the other human person. In today's postmodern world, philosophy and theology should turn around and face the other who is both God and every human being. This turn to the other is most needed for any possible re-imagining of today's world.

In order to further show the connection between Levinas's philosophy and liberation theology, this chapter will put forward some propositions as to how their thought might be put in dialogue. In a sense, this chapter will assert that Levinas's transcendental ethics provides a viable philosophical anthropological framework that is compatible with the centrality of love of neighbor in liberation theology. For Levinas to argue that all human beings have by nature an essential desire for the Infinite who gives himself in responsibility for the other human person is unquestionably a radical awakening that differentiates his thought from abstract philosophies, bringing it closer to liberation theology's understanding of the human person. Similarly, this work will suggest that liberation theology historicizes Levinas's transcendental ethics of

responsibility. It will be argued that liberation theology's spirituality of conversion to the neighbor bears witness to Levinas's ethical responsibility. In the end, this chapter will argue that the turn to the other/neighbor in Levinas's philosophy and liberation theology is a precondition for peace, justice and good social order.

### **I. The Context for Philosophical and Theological Reflection: The Postmodern World**

It is usual for contemporary scholars to explain the late twentieth and this early twenty-first century as a postmodern world.<sup>9</sup> It is a new environment in which all intellectual reflections take place, and this work is no exception. A number of terms have been put forward to describe this new environment: information society, consumer society, post-modernity, postmodernism, post-industrial society, post-capitalism, and so forth.<sup>10</sup> The debates around this new concept, as Anthony Giddens would contend, are mainly centered on the philosophical and epistemological issues as initiated by Jean-François Lyotard.<sup>11</sup>

To be sure, the term postmodernity is most often used in opposition to modernity to signify a kind of demarcation or distance from the modern era which put emphasis on "individual subjectivity, interiority, and self-subsistent autonomy."<sup>12</sup> Situating the

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<sup>9</sup> Stephen Edelston Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990); Eric Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas, Religion and the Rise of Modernity*, Vols. III, IV, V, edited by James L. Wise (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1999); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989); Louis Dupre, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

<sup>10</sup> Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, 1-2.

<sup>11</sup> Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, 2. Jean-François Lyotard is considered the father of postmodernism. He defines postmodernity, philosophically and epistemologically, as the end of modernity's period of the grand universal narrative that explains any given discipline; see his *The Post-Modern Condition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

<sup>12</sup> Michael Downey, "Postmodernity," in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* edited by Michael Downey (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 746.

beginning of modernity in the sixteenth century, most scholars agree that modernity is the result of the academic changes that occur with Galileo in physics and astronomy and René Descartes in mathematics and epistemology. With their works appeared the concept of the rationality in human dealings.<sup>13</sup> From then onwards, rational methods became a standard in thinking about nature and in dealing with the problems of human life and society in decontextualized terms.<sup>14</sup> Of course, any reasonable person would admit and appreciate modernity's contribution to intellectual, socio-political and economic values. Not only did it transform the modes of social life in the Western world, but it had also more or less influenced other parts of the globe. On the whole and in all fairness "the development of modern social institutions and their worldwide spread have created vastly greater opportunities for human beings to enjoy a secure and rewarding existence than any type of pre-modern system."<sup>15</sup> Most twentieth century works in philosophy and theology were influenced by this modern turn to the subject.<sup>16</sup>

Modernity also, however, contains negative aspects whose initial cause could be attributed to Descartes' agenda for modernity as it centered on a method grounded in the subjects' self-presence.<sup>17</sup> In addition, cultures other than Western culture were not considered as possessing history because they were primitive, archaic, and pre-historical. They were "lesser' copies of the modern drive to sameness, the modern 'Western'

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<sup>13</sup> Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*, 12. According to Toulmin "beyond this point" of agreement, "different people go on in different directions. Some focus on the merits of these changes, some on their damaging by-products, while a few attempt to strike a balance between the costs and benefits of the new attitudes. What is rarely questioned is the *timing* of the changeover: the significant changes are usually placed between the prime of Galileo in the 1600s, and the appearance of Newton's *Principia* in 1687." See p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*, 9.

<sup>15</sup> Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, 7.

<sup>16</sup> See introduction, p. xiii, footnote 5.

<sup>17</sup> Tracy, "Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity," 104.



scientific, technological, democratic culture that *is* culture and history.”<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the degradation of the human other, visible in today’s world, has been partly the consequence of modernity’s over-confidence on the individual subject’s capacity to create, with the help of modern technology, a safe and secure society where order, cohesion, and coherence will reign.<sup>19</sup> Yet modernity’s courageous “claims for the idealist self-subsistent rational self and its view of history as inevitably progressive have been unsettled by the ‘terror of history’ which interrupts and disorients, calling into question human conceptions of order, divine providence, indeed the very nature of God.”<sup>20</sup> This description could be said to characterize the breakdown of the modern turn to the subject. The modern individual subject, whose structured cognitive functions were thought to offer a foundation for integration and unity in self, and the starting point for the ultimate human ordering of human relationships in societies, seemed to have failed to fulfill the genuine yearnings of the human heart.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, however, the influence of this modern individual subject is still noticeable in today’s postmodern world.

As this study situates its discussion in the context of postmodernity, it does not, however, deny the fact that postmodernity, like modernity, has its negative and positive aspects. There are still today different accounts of postmodernity and intense struggles on how to define this new turn in any particular field, as well as in general. Besides, the unbalanced changes in social relations in recent years and the attempts of various scholars at defining postmodernity in the context of their differing fields of inquiry have characterized the puzzling and always challenged territory of postmodernity.

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<sup>18</sup> Tracy, “Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity,” 104. (Tracy’s italics)

<sup>19</sup> Downey, “Postmodernity,” 746.

<sup>20</sup> Downey, “Postmodernity,” 746.

<sup>21</sup> Downey, “Postmodernity,” 747, 748.

Postmodernity is a period when nothing seems to hold, all consistent value systems seem to collapse, new meanings are being born at the meeting of different elements, and more importantly modern individual subjectivity is being questioned. As a result, conflicts of all kinds are becoming more and more common.

In the present age as never before, Anselm Min Kyongsuk argues, the globalization of the world has created two dialectics that invite humanity to new ways of thinking the subject both philosophically and theologically: the dialectic of *differentiation*, in which humans are made ever more aware of differences in nationality, culture, religion, ethnicity, gender, class, language; and the dialectic of *interdependence*, which forces them to find a way of living together regardless of differences.<sup>22</sup> In addition, political issues with reference to the incorporation or integration of strangers, the politics of sexual category, the treatment of the poor by the rich, of the disabled by the healthy, of non-Europeans by Europeans, not to talk of the crisis of ethnicity in Africa and so forth, also seem to require a properly philosophical and theological skill in what looks like their common root, that is, the human subject's encounter with the human other.<sup>23</sup> And this, to be sure, is, as Roger Haight asserts, "the human and theological crisis of our epoch."<sup>24</sup> For Haight, "the massive human poverty and oppression in our time, both the amount of it and the degree of the damage it does to human life, calls into question the very meaning of human existence and hence our faith."<sup>25</sup> What is at stake here is the very meaning of the human other in the postmodern situation that has been neglected in the Western

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<sup>22</sup> Anselm Min Kyongsuk, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 1. (Kyongsuk's italics)

<sup>23</sup> Rudolph Bernet, "The Encounter with the Stranger: Two Interpretations of the Vulnerability of the Skin," in *The Face of the Other & the Trace of God: Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Lévinas*, edited by Jeffrey Bloechl (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 43.

<sup>24</sup> Haight, *An Alternative Vision*, 43.

<sup>25</sup> Haight, *An Alternative Vision*, 43.

philosophical and theological reflection which inspired modernity's dominating and self-centered subject.

Notwithstanding these divergences and contestations, this work wishes to argue that how one defines postmodernity in contemporary history, whether one has a positive or negative, simplistic or complex understanding of it, accounts both for a specificity of one's perspective and one's vision of the humanity of humans. Given that the above description represents both modernity's overpowered subject and the present situation in the world, the questions now become: what is the role of philosophy and theology in this kind of world? What kind of discourse are theology and philosophy? Where should philosophy and theology turn in their conversation with postmodern "wounded" culture?

While there are diverse accounts and intense struggles on how to define the postmodern turn, the definition that serves the purpose of this work stems from a more practical approach to philosophy, theology and natural science which will mark a return to the concerns with *otherness* and *difference*.<sup>26</sup> It calls for a new perspective of coexistence, based on the consideration of the transcendental dimension of the human person, and is "appreciative...of the indispensability of relationality, interdependence, community, and traditions,"<sup>27</sup> given the degradation of the dignity of the human other in history. Thus, the definition of postmodernity this work embraces is, as David Tracy argues, the one that

at its best is a fully ethical response to the ambiguities of modernity [that is] an ethics of resistance – resistance, above all, to more of the same, the same unquestioned sameness of the modern turn to the subject, the modern over-belief

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<sup>26</sup> Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*, 186-192. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 47-48; Tracy, "Forms of Divine Disclosure," 47-56; "Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity," 104-114. (My italics)

<sup>27</sup> Downey, "Postmodernity," 747.

in the search for the perfect method, the modern social evolutionary narrative whereby all is finally and endlessly more of the self-same.<sup>28</sup>

This orientation is what has been defined as the postmodern turn to otherness. Levinas's transcendental ethics of responsibility and liberation theology, each in its own right, provide a possibility for this turn to the other who is both God and every human being. They find in the Judeo-Christian wisdom the "prophetic-ethical sense for the other, especially the preferred other of the prophets, the poor, the marginal, and the oppressed."<sup>29</sup> In today's postmodern world philosophy and theology are invited to address the question of the other. David Tracy writes:

Genuine postmodernity begins not in ennui but in ethical resistance. Postmodernity begins by trying to think the unthought of modernity. Beyond the early modern turn to the purely autonomous, self-grounding subject, beyond even the most recent turn to language (the first great contemporary challenge to modern subjectism) lies the quintessential turn of postmodernity itself- the turn to the other. It is that turn, above all, that defines the intellectual as well as the ethical meaning of postmodernity. The other and the different come forward now as central intellectual categories across the major disciplines, including theology...Part of that return to otherness...is the return of biblical Judaism and Christianity to undo the complacencies of modernity, including modern theology.<sup>30</sup>

The least one can say is that the question concerning the subject's relation to the human other has tremendous significance for any theological enterprise attempting to face head on the problem of inhumanity (poverty, injustice, exploitation, murder, war etc.) in a postmodern context.

What is attempted here is not a comprehensive analysis of postmodernity, rather, at best, an overview of the general horizon of the movement from modernity to postmodernity and how in the postmodern period the other human person – in his/her

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<sup>28</sup> Tracy, "Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity," 108.

<sup>29</sup> Tracy, "Forms of Divine Disclosure," 55.

<sup>30</sup> Tracy, "Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity," 108.

irreducible otherness and difference – becomes the center of interest in the disciplines of philosophy, theology and the natural sciences. The examination of the dialogue between Levinas’s transcendental ethics of responsibility and liberation theology which proposes, notwithstanding some divergences, the turn to the other/neighbor as an intersubjective model for the radical re-imagining of the world, finds here its significance. The turn to the other/neighbor opens a possibility for a better world in which the human other will no longer be seen as a threat to the subject’s existence but rather as a necessary companion for the subject’s existence in history. The suggestion that humans see in other humans the dimension of the divine introduces the notions of surplus, transcendence and infinity that could lessen the possibility of the hatred of the other person. With Gutiérrez, Sobrino, and Levinas, this dissertation argues that – in today’s world – the claim the other makes upon the subject ought to be the starting point of any reflection on subjectivity.

## **II. Areas of Affinity between Levinas’s Philosophy and Liberation Theology**

One can be excused for reacting with skepticism to any proposal linking the names of Levinas and liberation theology. One might understandably be doubtful that significant convergences can be found between two such dissimilar approaches. Is it not Levinas who insisted that his point of departure is not theological, and that it is not theology that he does but philosophy?<sup>31</sup> Is the use of the notion of experience in liberation theology not already wedded to the ontological foundations of Western philosophy and theological anthropology criticized by Levinas? What has liberation theology to do with postmodern philosophy? Levinas’s thought and liberation theology

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<sup>31</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Transcendence et Hauteur,” *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie* 56 (1962) : 110.

are not engaged, of course, in the same project and present differences in approach, yet it is certainly possible to hold the two in a kind of “productive tension.”

An attentive reader of Levinas’s philosophy would certainly agree that there are a number of elements in his thought upon which a fruitful dialogue could be established with liberation theology. The main focus here will be to establish areas of affinity between these two approaches. As stated earlier on, the plausibility of discussing Levinas’s philosophical conceptual affinities with liberation theology can be said to be justifiable by a couple of aspects: each in its own right emerged as a response to the situation of human suffering in history, each searches for the divine transcendence in a life of commitment to the other human person, each finds in the Judeo-Christian wisdom a distinct way of thinking of the subject and the other, and each calls for love of neighbor and justice. They both view the turn to the other/neighbor in love as a prospect for the *creation* of a better world.

*Levinas, Gutiérrez, Sobrino, and the Human Historical Situation*

As it was argued in the first chapter, Levinas was influenced by his experience of the Shoah in the articulation of his philosophy. In condemning this incomparable atrocity, he takes issue with modernity’s failure to address the horror of history, and most especially, the rise of National Socialism in Germany as expressed through the Holocaust. He saw the Nazis’ extermination of the Jews as completely opposed to the Judeo-Christian concept of love of neighbor. The expressions such as *alter-ego* (Husserl) and *being-with* (Heidegger) articulated Western philosophy’s inclination to posit the subject to authenticate the existence of the other. In his new direction, Levinas defined

the subject's identity through the encounter with the face of the other that takes place in *diachronic temporality*.<sup>32</sup>

While Levinas takes inspiration for his philosophy from his feeling and memory of the sufferings of millions in the world, he advocates for a view of history that remains transcendent (Infinity) with regard to the totality and the freedom of the individual subject. He insists, however, that this transcendental movement takes place both “*within* totality and history, *within* [human] experience.”<sup>33</sup> Human history, for Levinas, has to be understood as eschatological infinity whereby within human experience, the subject's desire for the other human person always breaks totality and calls the subject to infinite responsibility in terms of affectivity and sensibility.<sup>34</sup> Here the human other marks the end of history as totality and opens up a world in which the human other is the condition of possibility for the subject's subjectivity. What Levinas is attempting here is an asymmetrical relation both *beyond* and *within* human experience in history that has to take “the form of giving the very bread I eat... and to give oneself in giving it.”<sup>35</sup>

Like Levinas, Gutiérrez and Sobrino, as presented in the second chapter, were provoked by the political oppression and the socio-economic plight of the non-persons,

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<sup>32</sup> For the discussion on the term *diachronic temporality*, see Chapter One, page 44.

<sup>33</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 23. (My italics). For Levinas, the notion of Infinity as eschatology is opposed to Western thought's egological history. It establishes a relationship with being both *beyond* and *within* totality, history, and experience. It “draws beings out of the jurisdiction of history and the future; it arouses them in and calls them forth to their full responsibility.”

<sup>34</sup> Levinas offers an account of subjectivity as sensibility in his book *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 14-15; 61-97. With regard affectivity, Levinas argues that in responsibility for the neighbor the subject is affected by exteriority that he/she cannot control, by the Infinite. This “being-affected” is what he calls *affection*, see his “The Thinking of Being and the Question of the Other,” in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, translated by Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 118. (Levinas's italics). Affectivity as “an excellence of love, of sociality and ‘fear for others’ which is not my anxiety for my own death,” becomes then for Levinas the characteristic of the humanness of the human person in passivity of consciousness; see his “The Idea of the Infinite in us,” in *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-other*, 221. For Levinas therefore, “love is possible only through the idea of the Infinite – through the Infinite put in me, through the ‘more’ which devastates and awakens the ‘less’, turning away from teleology, destroying the moment and the happiness of the end.” Levinas, “God and Philosophy,” in *The Levinas Reader*, 177.

<sup>35</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 72.

the poor, the oppressed, the despised of Latin American society and the Third World. The Kantian awakening to human reason which Christian theology embraced was no longer adequate in the midst of human sufferings; it became imperative that Christian theology awake from its deeper “sleep of inhumanity to a reality of humanity.”<sup>36</sup> Gutiérrez and Sobrino accepted to face the challenge of taking the “crucified people,” the poor and the oppressed of the world down from the cross. Thus, their theologies emerged as an invitation to Christian theology to leave the climate of transcendental subjectivity and move toward a consideration of the human needs of the non-persons in concrete history, hence the centrality of the neighbor in liberation theology. It is a wake up call for the humanization of the victims of poverty, oppression, and marginalization. The human condition in history has been the starting point for both Levinas and liberation theology.

Furthermore, the introduction of the third party in Levinas’s philosophy also constitutes a point of affinity and dialogue between these two approaches. It opens Levinas’s thought to the human situation in history by introducing the prospect of “thought, consciousness, and justice”<sup>37</sup> through the creation of political and juridical institutions that reflect the nature of human fraternity.<sup>38</sup> Here, the subject, who dedicated himself in responsibility for the other, is called into responsibility by many others in society. Levinas makes the subject extend its love for the other to all the others equally, launching the basis of a society based on responsibility, justice and fraternity. The turn to the neighbor in love that liberation theology calls for takes place, for Levinas, as a response

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<sup>36</sup> Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 11.

<sup>37</sup> Levinas, “Substitution,” in *The Levinas Reader*, 118. For Levinas’s discussion on the thematic thought as an exigency that makes justice concrete, see his “Diachrony and Representation,” in *Time and the Other*, 165.

<sup>38</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 64.



to the call to justice that arises with the entry of the third party to the scene. Jacques Derrida's rereading of Levinas, especially in *Totality and Infinity* and other lesser-known Talmudic readings, in terms of "hospitality, responsibility, and justice," explains how in concrete life, Levinas "never turned his eyes away" from the "violence" and "distress" experienced by the "foreigner, the immigrant (with or without papers), the exile, the refugee, those without a country, a state, the displaced person or population."<sup>39</sup> This reinforces the view that Levinas gets inspiration for his philosophical discourse not only from the tradition of Jewish religious texts, but also from human concrete conditions, both bodily and interpersonally in society.<sup>40</sup> Yet Levinas insists on the asymmetrical nature of his philosophy which is beyond ontology.

*Divine Transcendence and Responsibility for the Neighbor in Levinas's Philosophy and Liberation Theology*

Another aspect of affinity is found in their understanding of the subject-other relationship as a place of divine transcendence. Levinas's thought and liberation theology find divine transcendence in the subject's life of commitment to the other human person. They all start from the ethical encounter with the human other and from there work toward the encounter with the trace of the Divine other. What comes first in Levinas's philosophy and liberation theology is the notion of the human, because it is the human person whom they know. They think God in thinking about human relationships. For Levinas, the other most mysterious is the human other who is ethical mystery *par excellence*, a human whose infinity comes from God. He/she does not belong to the same genus as the subject. For liberation theology, the other is the other human being, the

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<sup>39</sup> Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, 64.

<sup>40</sup> Catherine Chalier, "The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and the Hebraic Tradition," in *Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas for Philosophy, Literature and Religion*, 3-12.

original bearer of God's image through Jesus Christ. Yet for both Levinas's thought and liberation theology the human other is the neighbor, the stranger, the orphan, the poor, the marginalized, the widow, the way to approach the otherness of the divine transcendence. The other's otherness and difference is tied to his/her transcendental dimension. Liberation theology asserts the locus of human encounter with God to be the crucified people of Latin America and the world. Any life of commitment to God entails the respect of the life of every human person who bears God's image. According to liberation theology, love of neighbor is the necessary condition for encountering God. Like liberation theology, Levinas keeps the human neighbor between the human subject and God, such that we cannot too readily approach the invisible God without first encountering the height of our neighbor.<sup>41</sup> To express this, Levinas asks the question:

Is morality possible without God? I answer with a question? Is divinity possible without relation to the human other? Is such a thing possible in Judaism? Consider Jeremiah, chapter 24, or Isaiah 58:7 'to bring to your house the poor who are outcast.' The direct encounter with God, this is a Christian concept. As Jews, we are always a threesome: I and you and the Third who is in our midst. And only as a Third does He reveal himself.<sup>42</sup>

Levinas, although not speaking theologically, argues in *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*<sup>43</sup> that the moment at which the word of God is heard is inscribed in the face of the other, in the encounter with the other. He affirms that it is in the form of ethical order, an order to love, that the descent of God takes place. He writes:

I can not describe the relation to God without speaking of my concern for the other. When I speak to a Christian, I always quote Matthew 25; the relation to God is presented there as a relation to another person. It is not a metaphor: in the other, there is a real presence of God. In my relation to the other, I hear the Word of God. It is not a metaphor; it is not extremely important, it is literally true. I'm

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<sup>41</sup> Terry A. Velting, "In the Name of Who? Levinas and the Other Side of Theology" *Pacifica* 12 (1999): 283.

<sup>42</sup> Levinas, "Ideology and Idealism," in *The Levinas Reader*, 247.

<sup>43</sup> Emmanuel Lévinas, *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée* (Paris : J. Vrin, 1982).

not saying that the other is God, but that in his or her Face I hear the Word of God.<sup>44</sup>

Levinas sees the obligation or the order to act with love toward the other as

the first word of God. For me [he argues] theology begins in the face of the neighbor. The divinity of God is played out in the human. God descends in the “face” of the other. To recognize God is to hear his commandment “thou shall not kill,” which is not only a prohibition against murder, but a call to incessant responsibility with regard to the other. It is to be unique, as if I were elected to this responsibility, which gives me as well the possibility of recognizing myself as unique and irreplaceable, of saying “I.” Conscious that in each of my human endeavors – from which the other is never absent – I respond to his existence as unique being.<sup>45</sup>

Sobrino and Gutierrez also posit the encounter with the human other in love as constitutive of the human person and his/her relationship with divine transcendence.

Therefore, ethical responsibility is integral to faith itself, and not a secondary by-product.

Gutiérrez writes:

We stand before something which challenges our categories, the mystery of God who will not be reduced to our mode of thinking, and who judges us on the basis of our concrete, historical actions toward the poor...Now we face a God who blocks the path of a false love which forgets sisters and brothers while claiming to direct itself spiritually toward God, more to domesticate God than to feel itself questioned by God’s word.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Levinas, “Philosophy, Justice, and Love,” in *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-other*, 109-110. For Levinas, “from the start, the encounter with the Other is my responsibility for him. That is the responsibility for my neighbor, which is, no doubt, the harsh name for what we call love of one’s neighbor; love without Eros, charity, love in which the ethical aspect dominates the passionate aspect, love without concupiscence.” See p. 103.

<sup>45</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “On the Usefulness of Insomnia,” in *Is it Righteous to be?: Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, edited by Jill Robbins (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 236; see also Emmanuel Levinas, *Liberté et commandement* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1994), 45. “It is in terms of relations with the other that I will speak about God [...] I do not begin with the existence of a very great or very powerful being. All that I can say about him will come from this situation which is religious in the sense that the Ego cannot avoid it. If you want, it is Jonas which cannot flee. You are in front of a responsibility from which you cannot escape, you are not at all in the situation of a conscience which thinks and which, while thinking already moves back and hides.”(My translation)

<sup>46</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, “Hermeneutical Principle: Preferential Option for the Poor,” in *Gustavo Gutiérrez: Essential Writings*, edited by James B. Nickoloff (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 105.

The God of liberation theology, although incomprehensible and mysterious, is always in relationship with his people and is fundamentally concerned with creation and the achievements and failures of humankind. He is not only with us and for us, but in the incarnation of Jesus as the Word of God, has even become one of us. For liberation theology the stranger, the oppressed, the poor one, is the incarnation of God. Hence, to know God is to love one's neighbor and to act with justice.

For Levinas's philosophy and for liberation theology divinity is not possible without relation to a human other. Both argue for a philosophical theology of life that understands the subject's self-transcendental experience in terms of love of neighbor. Thus, "transcendence is no longer the ascent to a heaven of the ideal or the sublime but the humble endurance of everyday life, touched, affected, burdened, wounded, obsessed, and exhausted by the other's proximity."<sup>47</sup>

*Levinas's Philosophy, Liberation Theology and the Judeo-Christian Wisdom*

The Judeo-Christian wisdom in both Levinas's philosophy and liberation theology can hardly be missed. Levinas's thought and liberation theology find in the Judeo-Christian's "prophetic-ethical" call for love of neighbor a way out to a hopeful humane world. In the background of Levinas's transcendental philosophy there is obviously the influence of Jewish theology. Levinas takes the Bible as a model of ethical transcendental philosophy. He affirms that all philosophy, all rationality and all intelligibility stem from the book of books, namely from the Hebrew Bible.<sup>48</sup> He thinks with the Hebrew Bible in elaborating his philosophy. His claim that the subject's only way toward God is to be

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<sup>47</sup> Peperzak, "Transcendence," in *Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas for Philosophy, Literature and Religion*, 191.

<sup>48</sup> Levinas, "Philosophy, Justice, and Love," in *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-other*, 109.

ethically responsible for the other person echoes the God-human relationship in the Hebrew Bible. From the perspective of the Torah, each face represents God's law to his people, more importantly, the sixth commandment *Thou shall not kill*. He often refers to this ethical responsibility as being "the essence of Jewish conscience", which, he believes, is also "the essence of the human conscience": "All men are responsible for one another, and 'I more than anyone else,'" quoting Dostoïevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*.<sup>49</sup> This is, for Levinas, the path to new humanism; it centers on the ethical enactment as bearing the trace of God at once distant and invisible (*YHWH*) and at the same time close to the world and human beings (*Elohim*).<sup>50</sup>

Liberation theology is a theological method based on praxis in the light of the Bible, to use Gutiérrez's words.<sup>51</sup> Its concern for the poor and the oppressed is rooted in both the Old Testament and in the New Testament. In the New Testament, Liberation theology takes seriously Jesus' instructions to his disciples about the love of God and love of neighbor (Mt. 22: 36-40). These two commandments summarize all the ethical teachings from the Old to the New Testament. Those who do not love one another cannot love God, and those who love God have to love one another (1Jn. 4: 7-8, 12, 19-21). This biblical reference makes clear the fact that the human person is ordained to total communion with God and to the fullest fellowship with all other persons. This is clear in Matthew's eschatological discourse which has been interpreted as the summary of Jesus' teaching.<sup>52</sup> "Anything you did not do for one of these, however humble, you did not do

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<sup>49</sup> Levinas, "Philosophy, Justice, and Love," in *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-other*, 107.

<sup>50</sup> Levinas, "Judaism and Kenosis," 124-125.

<sup>51</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 6.

<sup>52</sup> Mt 25: 31-46. Roger Mehl, "La catholicité de l'Église," *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 48/4 (1968): 369; Wolfgang Trilling, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 216; John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), 61.

for me” (Mt 25:45). Hence, Liberation theology’s association of faith in God and love of neighbor is an old tradition of Christianity.

Besides, in the subject’s response to the ethical command which he/she encounters in the face of the neighbor, the subject is called to substitute himself/herself to the point of death and beyond. This, in liberation theology, corresponds to Jesus’ commandment to his disciples: “Love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (John 15: 12-13). Levinas’s position, which is more of caring for the other than knowing God, is not essentially opposed to liberation theology’s appeal to respond to the objective needs of the neighbor in imitation of Jesus’ kenosis in the Scripture. Levinas’s thought and liberation theology, each in its own right, definitely agree that to be a free human person is to be always given to the other in responsibility, and this is a difficult freedom, to use Levinas’s words.

Still, another rapprochement with regard to the Judeo-Christian wisdom would be on the issue of the “suffering servant” in the Bible, who is identified in Christian theology as Messiah, the Christ. The suffering servant for Levinas is a personification of the subject’s subjectivity. This, he makes clear in the preface of *Totality and Infinity*. The subject realizes or fulfils his/her identity by welcoming and being hospitable to the other.<sup>53</sup> This is crucial for understanding Levinas’s project. For Levinas, the subject is from the outset elected to act as the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 who takes responsibility for the other to the point of persecution and death.<sup>54</sup> The election is a

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<sup>53</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 27.

<sup>54</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, translated by Nidra Poller (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

surplus of responsibility, not a privilege; “it is the fundamental characteristic of the human person as morally responsible.”<sup>55</sup> This is for Levinas humanity rightly understood:

I think prophetism as a moment of the human condition itself. For every man, assuming responsibility for the Other is a way of testifying to the glory of the Infinite, and of being inspired. There is prophetism and inspiration in the man who answers for the Other, paradoxically, even before knowing what is concretely required of himself. This responsibility prior to the law is God’s revelation. There is a text of the prophet Amos that says: “God has spoken, who would not prophesy?,” where prophesy seems posited as the fundamental fact of man’s humanity.<sup>56</sup>

With this reference to the Hebrew Bible, Levinas’s subject, as the suffering servant, takes upon himself/herself the sufferings of others. The subject will suffer as a result of his/her commitment to the task of bearing the rebukes, reproaches, and wounds of his/her fellows. Here comes in the idea of kenosis, the humility of God in the Christian tradition, which for Levinas has nothing to do with the Jesus Christ which St Paul’s letter to the Philippians (2:6-8) portrays. The Messiah, for Levinas, is not the intervention of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

God’s kenosis in Judaism, as interpreted by Rabbi Haim of Volozhin and also by Levinas, has to be understood as the humility by which the Infinite God subordinates his greatness to human ethical consent.<sup>57</sup> Subjectivity is substitution; the fact of emptying one’s being for the sake of others. Substitution is messianic whenever the subject acts with love and responsibility for the other. God does not intervene in the life of humans. He only reigns “by the intermediary of an ethical order, an order in which one being is

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<sup>55</sup> Levinas, “Philosophy, Justice, and Love,” in *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-other*, 119.

<sup>56</sup> Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 113-114.

<sup>57</sup> Levinas, “Judaism and Kenosis,” 114-132.

answerable for another...the human is the possibility of a being-for-the-other.”<sup>58</sup> Every human person is urged to act as if he/she were a suffering servant, the Messiah. Levinas finds in the messianic texts of the Talmud a description of what it means to be human. He writes: “the Messiah is Myself [*Moi*]; to be Myself is to be Messiah... The fact of not evading the burden imposed by the suffering of others defines ipseity itself. All persons are the Messiah.”<sup>59</sup> It takes shape here and now in the presence of the other person whenever one’s subjectivity in the world is questioned. Levinas would certainly reject Liberation theology’s view of the eschatological Messiah who is the fulfillment of history. He would fear that this kind of Messiah would end the subject’s state of *insomnia/wakefulness*<sup>60</sup> or what we would call *vigilant insomnia*.<sup>61</sup> It is a state of watchfulness characterized by an impossibility of sleep. For what keeps the subject awake and always in permanent responsibility for the other in love is precisely his/her state of watchfulness. Before even the subject could express his/her freedom, he/she is already met with this obligation to the other. Hence, Levinas asserts, “ethical freedom is *difficile liberté*.”<sup>62</sup>

Levinas says of human subjectivity what liberation theology says of Jesus Christ. The notion of substitution in liberation theology makes reference to the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Christ reveals thus that the essence of human responsibility stems from the meaning of human life, taking the sufferings of other human beings upon

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<sup>58</sup> Levinas, “Judaism and Kenosis,” 126. Redemption for Levinas is accomplished by the human person through love and responsibility in a time that goes countercurrent to the linear time. Asymmetrical time is duration of sociality and responsibility; it is there that the subject relates to the other.

<sup>59</sup> Levinas, “Messianic Texts,” in *Difficult Freedom*, 89.

<sup>60</sup> Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 65-67; Emmanuel Levinas and Richard Kearney, “Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas,” 30 (My italics); Levinas, “On the Usefulness of Insomnia,” in *Is it Righteous to be?: Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, 234-236.

<sup>61</sup> I am indebted to Terry A. Velting for the expression *vigilant insomnia*; see his “In the Name of Who? Levinas and the Other Side of Theology,” 278. (My italics)

<sup>62</sup> Emmanuel Levinas and Richard Kearney “Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas,” 27.



oneself. The human person can only realize himself/herself or his /her true vocation by understanding responsibility in imitation of Christ as a radical openness to the needs of others, thus a self-emptying. Substitution becomes, therefore, a radical expression of solidarity with others, most especially, with the victims of inhumanity to others. In history, Gutiérrez and Sobrino argue, Christians in particular and human beings in general, have the responsibility to act as Christ, the suffering servant. Levinas's idea of incarnation is a re-evaluation of subjectivity in terms of substitution, responsibility and expiation for others. To be a subject is to be for the other person. This is what Jesus Christ as the prophet of God did so well, and this is what Christian love is all about: to be human is to love one's neighbor as God does; it is to bless, care for the poor, the abandoned, the orphans, and the oppressed; to pray for, and then turn the other cheek to the enemy.

Now, as this dissertation does not claim a perfect matching between these two approaches, a couple of points can be noted in terms of divergence. For instance, while for liberation theology the stranger, the oppressed, the poor one, is the incarnation of God,<sup>63</sup> for Levinas, he/she only manifests the *height* in which God is *revealed* as God is maintained in the trace. The event of revelation of the absolute other (*Autre*), for Levinas, takes place through the face of the other whenever the subject takes the prophetic stance which says "Here I am," and stands accused, hostage, and responsible for the other, witnessing, thus, to the Infinite. The infinite discloses itself to the ethical subject through the trace which passes – without ever being present – in the face of the stranger, widow,

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<sup>63</sup> Sobrino and Gutiérrez, on their part, take the incarnation to represent the actual entry of God into humanity, the divinization of the human.

orphan for whom I am responsible.<sup>64</sup> Levinas's non-representable trace of God remains unthematizable. God comes to the idea, falls into meaning in responsibility for the other.<sup>65</sup> The neighbor, in liberation theology, is sacred and holy because he/she is an *Imago Dei*. *Imago Dei* in Levinas is about being found in God's trace, but it is not being an icon of God, for

God who has passed is not the model whose face would be the image. To be in the image of God, does not mean to be the icon of God, but to be in his trace. The revealed God of our Judeo-Christian spirituality preserves all the infinity of his absence which is in order with his person. He shows himself only by his trace, as in chapter 33 of Exodus. To go towards Him, is not to follow this trace which is not a sign; it is to go towards the Others who are held in the trace.<sup>66</sup>

While, for Levinas, the relation to the face takes place on the asymmetrical level, for Sobrino and Gutierrez, it occurs in the reality of history in conditions of extremity, each of which cries out for ethical engagement.

Levinas also departs from Christian theology on the meaning of revelation. He criticizes theology for positing God as being and God's revelation as the manifestation of being.<sup>67</sup> For him the God of the Scriptures cannot be defined or confined in theological language; even the superlatives often used to approach God's reality are all misleading. This, of course, is a direct attack on the Christian tradition for its use of superlatives to describe God and its belief in the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ. Christ, in the Christian tradition, is incarnate in the life of Christians, while for Levinas, true incarnation is subjectivity rightly understood. Levinas's God is not an omnipotent God of

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<sup>64</sup> Levinas, "God and Philosophy," in *The Levinas Reader*, 184.

<sup>65</sup> Levinas, "Diachrony and Representation," in *Time and the Other*, 115; Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 106.

<sup>66</sup> Levinas, "La trace de l'autre," in *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, 202. (My translation). "Le Dieu qui a passé n'est pas le modèle dont le visage serait l'image. Etre à l'image de Dieu, ne signifie pas être l'icône de Dieu, mais se trouver dans sa trace. Le Dieu révélé de notre spiritualité judéo-chrétienne conserve tout l'infini de son absence qui est dans l'ordre du personnel même. Il ne se montre que par sa trace, comme dans le chapitre 33 de l'Exode. Aller vers Lui, ce n'est pas suivre cette trace qui n'est pas signe, c'est aller vers les Autres qui se tiennent dans la trace."

<sup>67</sup> Levinas, "God and Philosophy," in *The Levinas Reader*, 181.

the Christian tradition, encountered both in a one on one contemplative experience and in the human other. In his philosophy, God's self-disclosure carries first of all an ethical signification rather than a theological one.

Another point of divergence is that Levinas operates on the level of philosophy that runs counter to much of the Western philosophical and theological tradition. He writes:

The philosophical discourse of the West claims amplitude of an all-encompassing structure or of an ultimate comprehension. It compels every other discourse to justify itself before philosophy. Rational theology accepts this vassalage. If, for the benefit of religion, it reserves a domain from the authority of philosophy, one will know that this domain will have been recognized to be philosophically unverifiable.<sup>68</sup>

Evidently, for Levinas, much theological reflection is ontologically based which, by privileging and celebrating the uniqueness of the thinking subject over ethical responsibility renders the other defenseless to whatever possible violence this subject might exercise on the other. Liberation theology in constructing its theological project lies resolutely within the ontological tradition of Western philosophy criticized by Levinas. It analyzes the issue of otherness within the Christian theological tradition to revitalize the theological agenda from where Rahner left it.

Liberation theology, however, by focusing on the human other left the climate of the turn to the subject (excessive emphasis on the human subject) and moved a step forward toward a consideration of the turn to the human other/neighbor that Levinas speaks about. With liberation theology, the meaning of being is now located in exteriority, that is, in what is other than self. To be human in the world is to be affected by the neighbor à la Levinas. Against the accusation that liberation theology was a

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<sup>68</sup> Levinas, "God and Philosophy," in *The Levinas Reader*, 167.

“political reduction of the Gospel,”<sup>69</sup> liberation theology has persistently maintained that the legitimacy of theology will always be evaluated by the practice of ethical action and justice. “Any attempt,” Gutiérrez says, “to separate the love of God from the love of neighbor gives rise to attitudes which impoverish the one or the other.”<sup>70</sup> In its conceptually thematized categories of being, it posits the subject not as “ontologically constituted,” but rather, as “ethically enacted” through a “relativization of intentionality.”<sup>71</sup> This perspective offers a new possibility for understanding human subjectivity. Thus, to be a subject for Gutiérrez, Sobrino, and Levinas is to go beyond moral obligations to the affirmation of what it means to be human. They are concerned with the humanity of the other person, which is infinite and cannot be contained by any human subject. Levinas himself referred to liberation theology as a concrete example of the application of his thought in the real time of history.<sup>72</sup> Gutiérrez on his part refers to Levinas as a philosopher who shares liberation theology’s perspective. He writes:

That is why we need an ethics of solidarity. An important Jewish philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas, has written of this matter eloquently. Based on Scripture, he states that the “other” comes first, as we saw in the parable of the Good Samaritan. For Levinas, the first philosophy is ethics, and I think it is a very demanding one. For Levinas and for Christians, the “other” is first because he or she is made in God’s image. We should have the faith to recognize Jesus Christ in the face of the poor. To have a Christian perspective, we should have a very deep commitment to this ethics of solidarity.<sup>73</sup>

Thus, notwithstanding some divergences, Levinas’s thought and liberation theology are conceptually related in their effort to bring forward the dimension of the divine that opens

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<sup>69</sup> Claude Geffré, “A Prophetic Theology,” in *Theology of Liberation*, edited by Claude Geffré and Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Concilium* 6,10 (1974), 11.

<sup>70</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, “Liberation, Theology and Proclamation,” in *Theology of Liberation*, 63. See also Veling, “In the Name of Who? Levinas and the Other Side of Theology,” 282.

<sup>71</sup> Baird’s expressions in her book *On the Side of the Angels*, 87.

<sup>72</sup> See “Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas,” in *Face to Face with Levinas*, 32-33

<sup>73</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, “The Poor and the Third Millennium,” in *Believing Scholars: Ten Catholic Intellectuals*, edited by James L. Heft, 1<sup>st</sup> edition (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 43-44.

forth in the human face. God's transcendence emerges not in the oppression and hatred of other human beings but in love of one's neighbor. The effort of Levinas, Gutiérrez, and Sobrino is to redefine what justifies subjectivity, both philosophically and theologically. They establish that the human other is the condition for the possibility of the subject's subjectivity in the world. For what constitutes the human person's very humanity is the concern for the death of another, not its concern for its own death. To posit the other is to understand the subject whose existence is justified in his/her responsibility to others. Thus, the subjectivity of the subject depends on the other and that of the other depends on the subject's. Heidegger's "being-with" the other in the world is now a "being-for" the other, because humans are all responsible for the well-being of one another, but the subject more than any one else. Again, there is certainly not a perfect matching between these two approaches. Yet all noticeable affinities and divergences make these two approaches complementary and ascertain an opportunity for dialogue. In the following section this work will examine how these approaches could complement each other.

### **III. Levinas's Philosophy and Liberation Theology: Complementarity and Dialogue**

Thus far, this study has established some conceptual affinities between the philosophical project of Levinas and liberation theology. Our contention in this section is that Levinas's philosophy and liberation theology could complement each other in their respective field. This work will suggest that Levinas's philosophy presents a practical philosophical framework for liberation theology as it is compatible with one of the truths of Christianity: the concern for the neighbor. Besides, it will also show that liberation theology's spirituality of *conversion to the neighbor* bears witness to Levinas's ethical responsibility in the real time of history. Yet, the turn to the other/neighbor in Levinas's

philosophy and liberation theology offers a promising perspective for human coexistence necessary for the prospect of a humane world.

*Levinas's Transcendental Ethics: A Viable Philosophical Framework for Liberation Theology*

Levinas's transcendental ethics, as it was argued in the first chapter, emerged in response to Western philosophy's ontological tendency that understood the human subject in terms of knowledge and comprehension. In this focus on ontology, he argued, the consciousness of the subject in relation to the other is autonomous and occupies the first place in the principle of intelligibility. As he became displeased with this interpretation of the consciousness of the subject, he proposed a different philosophical framework in which the consciousness of the subject in the relationship with the other loses its first place. It is a new philosophical framework that keeps the subject awake to humanity that is no longer constituted by his/her powers, but rather, enacted by his/her responsibility "in passivity, in reception, in obligation with regard to the other." Here "it is the other who is first and there the question of my sovereign consciousness is no longer the first question."<sup>74</sup> Levinas's philosophical project here offers to liberation theology and the entire Christian common consciousness a philosophical structure of human consciousness which goes beyond human freedom. Levinas believes that a true human consciousness is a movement toward the divine through uprightness (*droiture*) of life, not a return to the self. For him consciousness is

the urgency of a destination leading to the Other and not an eternal return to self...an innocence without naivety, an uprightness which is also absolute self-criticism, read in the eyes of the one who is the goal of my uprightness and whose look calls me into question. It is a movement toward the Other that does not come back to its point of origin the way a diversion comes back, incapable as it is of

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<sup>74</sup> Levinas, "Philosophy, Justice, and Love," in *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-other*, 112.

transcendence – a movement beyond anxiety and stronger than death. This uprightness is called *Temimut*, the essence of Jacob.<sup>75</sup>

Levinas's description of human consciousness awakens Christian consciousness to the infinite heteronomy in the subject's relationship with the other. It is a philosophical construction that finds inspiration from the Scripture and breaks with the ontological autonomy of the subject's consciousness. It posits a mode of being human for the other and emphasizes the subject's consciousness of responsibility as an awakening to humanity.<sup>76</sup> Liberation theology will certainly benefit from this philosophical perspective as it argues for the primacy of the other and calls the subject's consciousness to love and responsibility for the other/neighbor.

More pertinent to liberation theology and Christian theology would be Levinas's concept of *insomnia or wakefulness*. The search for the anthropology of unity and equality, in the sense of sameness, has been the characteristic of Western philosophical and theological anthropology. This for Levinas, as this study argued above, has been the source of violence, wars and conflict of all kinds. One might see in liberation theology the danger of articulating its turn to the existence of the victims of history in terms of rights, freedom, and autonomy given to the human person by modernity's turn to the subject. It might be emphasizing sameness, equality, and fusion more than the uniqueness of each individual in ethical responsibility for the neighbor. Liberation theology is challenged to reconsider its theological anthropology by opening up to Levinas's view of the human person who is always in the state of *vigilant insomnia*. It is an expression of the true life of the subject in the world in which the other always keeps the subject awake

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<sup>75</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Four Talmudic Readings*, translated with an introduction by Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 48.

<sup>76</sup> Levinas, "Philosophy, Justice, and Love," in *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-other*, 111-112.

in an experience of rupture; he/she never gives the subject a possibility to have a feel of *totality*, rather, always a feeling of *infinity* – of desires that are infinite, questions that are always opened out eternally, longings that are never satisfied. It keeps the human person away from any illusion of sameness, equality, self-centeredness, self-satisfaction, and self-completeness, until he/she turns toward the “other,” the “elsewhere” and the “otherwise,” leaving the security of “at home with oneself” (*chez soi*), “which [we] inhabit, toward an alien outside-of-oneself [*hors-de-soi*], toward a yonder.”<sup>77</sup> In this movement outside of oneself in vulnerability and exposedness, Levinas’s philosophy finds what opens up the subject to the revelation of God and makes him/her a prophet: “Here I am.” Hence Levinas describes

ethical responsibility as *insomnia* or *wakefulness* precisely because it is a perpetual duty of vigilance and effort that can never slumber. Ontology as a state of affairs can afford to sleep. But love cannot sleep, can never be peaceful or permanent. Love is the incessant watching over the other; it can never be satisfied or contented with bourgeois ideal of love as domestic comfort or as the mutual possession of two people living out an *egoisme-à-deux*.<sup>78</sup>

For Levinas, prior to all systems of reasoning, which are necessary for the development of thought, exists an ethical subject at all times turned toward the needs of the other. The idea of asymmetry is meant to emphasize the other’s transcendental dimension that obligates the subject to love in responsibility. This is how being justifies itself. Hence, ethical responsibility for the human other ought to be the ground for any possible ontologically based philosophical and/or theological discourse. In some sense, Levinas recognizes the transcendental power of human historical reality.<sup>79</sup> This is an event of

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<sup>77</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 33; Veling, “In the Name of Who? Levinas and the Other Side of Theology,” 278.

<sup>78</sup> Emmanuel Levinas and Richard Kearney, “Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas,” in *Face to Face with Levinas*, 30.

<sup>79</sup> See the discussion on Levinas’s notion of history as eschatological infinity, p. 139.



meaning, not of cognition or comprehension, which characterizes the human person rightly understood and necessary for the re-imagining of the world. Levinas's transcendental ethics provides liberation theology with a viable philosophical framework of human intersubjectivity that emphasizes human subjectivity as fundamentally orientated toward the other in love and responsibility. The subject's responsibility for the other person or love of neighbor is non-reciprocal and endless. The other's otherness and difference urges the subject always to do more for the other, more than anyone else; and no one is exempt from this ideal.

Specifically, the dissertation argues that Levinas's transcendental ethics is an apt, if not wholly adequate, approach from the Christian perspective, for representing human engagement with the other who bears the trace of the divine goodness that is beyond being. In today's world, as Veling argues, "to turn around, to face the other, is the conversion required of theology."<sup>80</sup> This study sees in Levinas's discovery of ethics as first philosophy a new direction that all serious Christian theology should consider; this is, as David Tracy would argue, "the prophetic-ethical form that has characterized not only earliest Christologies, but also liberation and evangelical Christologies."<sup>81</sup> And "surely," he continues, "on the central question of transcendence, this ethical route to the Absolute Other only by way of interrelationships of human others is Levinas' most original, and daring, and for Jewish and Christian theology, both promising...and

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<sup>80</sup> Veling, "In the Name of Who? Levinas and the Other Side of Theology," 282.

<sup>81</sup> Tracy, "Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity," 112. "The prophet speaks on behalf of the other – the neighbor – especially the poor, the oppressed, and the marginal other." And "the other – the biblical neighbor-," Tracy argues "is what no ontological totality can ever control. The temptation to totalizing modes of thought is disrupted once and for all by the glimpse of the Infinite in the face of the other and its ethical command, 'Do not kill me.'" 112.

controversial move.”<sup>82</sup> Since all subjectivity is prophetic, philosophy and theology may meet outside of both of their own homes, on a journey toward the other, in ethics.

*Liberation Theology as Conversion to the Neighbor in History: Bearing Witness to  
Levinas’s Transcendental Ethics of Responsibility*

The basis of Levinas’s philosophy is the ethical relationship between the subject and the other. It is a relationship that takes place in *atemporal temporality* in terms of sensibility, hostage, vulnerability, exposure, proximity, obsession, trauma, persecution, substitution, obligation, and responsibility. The other, who is totally different, has always already transcended, disturbed the imaginary self-centered totality of the same in a time that goes contrary to the linear and synchronic time of being and history.

At this point one finds oneself faced with a recurrent question of the availability of Levinas’s philosophy within the real time of history. Should all genuine modes of encounter with the other be reduced to an unmediated, unthematized face to face relationship? Is this a tenable position in the world of conflicts and injustice? Is it possible to conceive of the human subject as ethically responsible within the ontological system of thinking? Can’t an ontologically based system, such as liberation theology, embody an ethical responsibility that recognizes the uncompromised value of the other human person? As such, the non-ontological dimension of Levinas’s philosophy has been questioned.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> David Tracy, “Response to Adriaan Peperzak on Transcendence,” in *Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas for Philosophy, Literature and Religion*, 194.

<sup>83</sup> Interesting here is the *otherwise than being* and *being otherwise* debate. For an overview of some of the positions, see Baird, *On the Side of the Angels*, 81-88. Michael Purcell is one of those who posit the ethical encounter with the other as a *being otherwise* over and against Levinas’s *otherwise than being*. For Purcell, Levinas’s position finds its source in his univocal understanding of Being as comprehension. He argues that within the being of ontological structure one can still find otherness and difference, sensibility and affection which are not irreducible to the totality of the same. And this, this dissertation would argue, could be found in liberation theology’s idea of *conversion to the neighbor*. See his *Mystery and Method: The Other in*

Liberation theology, in our estimation, offers elements that can critically complement Levinas's transcendental ethics of responsibility. The priority it gives to the human neighbor in his/her relationship with the subject over and against dogmatic principles and transcendental subjectivity, opens a possibility for understanding "human subjectivity as ethically enacted rather than ontologically constituted" in the real time of history.<sup>84</sup> For liberation theology, being is not only knowledge or comprehension, but also sensibility and affection. A purely metaphysical discourse of the turn to the other/neighbor does little to advance the actual lives of the victims of human inhumanity to humans. The point here is that Levinas's "ideal of holiness" over and against "the laws of being," cannot of itself act; it remains on the level of an ideal. It has, obviously, the merit of positing *Infinity* as that "which cuts through and perforates the totality of presence and points towards the absolutely other,"<sup>85</sup> but falls short of translating it within the real time of history where justice might be done for others. Humans relate to one another and relate to God or to God's trace only as subjects of the historical world.

Liberation theology bears witness to Levinas's philosophy by arguing for *conversion to the neighbor* or love of neighbor. It articulates in the real time of history a possibility for the subject to act with sensibility and affection toward the other and calls the subject to infinite responsibility à la Levinas. Hence, love of neighbor becomes *affective responsibility* toward the other. It functions within human history as Michael Purcell's *being otherwise*<sup>86</sup> and breaks every inclination to totality through the dimension

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*Rahner and Levinas* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1998), 297-332; 314. Andrew Tallon, "Nonintentional Affectivity, Affective Intentionality, and the Ethical in Levinas's Philosophy," in *Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas for Philosophy, Literature and Religion*, 107-121;

<sup>84</sup> Baird, *On the Side of the Angels*, 87.

<sup>85</sup> Emmanuel Levinas and Richard Kearney, "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas," in *Face to Face with Levinas*, 21.

<sup>86</sup> See his *Mystery and Method*, 297-334.

of divine transcendence. As with Levinas, liberation theology insists that the neighbor's existence (the poor, the oppressed, the orphan, the stranger etc.), takes the first place and awakes the subject to humanity that is no longer the subject's powers, but rather, the subject's responsibility in obligation to the other. Its insistence on love of neighbor is about responsibility for the neighbor in concrete history through liberation.

Liberation theology's spirituality of *conversion to the neighbor* is an unending process of turning toward the other person in *affective responsibility*. And this *affective responsibility* or love of neighbor is possible only through the 'more' which destroys and awakens the 'less' in the subject, turning him/her away from self-centeredness. It is a turn that recognizes within the real time of history the absolute presence of God in the other human person. It is an option that stems from the Judeo-Christian wisdom of which Levinas is a part and finds some inspiration. It finds full meaning primarily in the life of commitment to those who are subject to unjust suffering and death. This is God's attitude toward humankind, mostly toward the less privileged, and it must serve as a model for all humans. It is an ethics of solidarity.<sup>87</sup>

Besides, Levinas's philosophical framework in which the consciousness of the subject in the relationship with the other loses its first place could find some resonance in liberation theology. Its call to uprightness of life, as noted above, could be read in line with liberation theology's demands for theological responsibility. For liberation theology, theological responsibility is founded on the eschatological promises of the scriptural

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<sup>87</sup> Liberation theology insists that if a human person is to be consistent to him/herself as a human being and offspring of God, he/she must accept the fact that the whole of human being is constituted or lost in the acceptance or rejection of the evangelical principle that in order to find life, one must lose it, and that there is no greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends (Mark 8:35; John 15:13). See Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness*, 33.

tradition: love, peace, justice, reconciliation, and transcendence.<sup>88</sup> It urges Christians to give account of the hope that is in them through commitment to the neighbor in human society. It involves practical commitment in human concerns in history and it precedes self-transcendence. Liberation theology certainly has the merit to have awakened to this call to responsibility by taking theological reflection back to its original truth of being at the service of love. In a sense, liberation theology's centrality of the neighbor functions as a form of justification of Levinas's philosophical framework.

Levinas himself acknowledged the exaggerated non-ontological perspective of his thought and was ready to concede that his philosophical reflection, insofar as it is knowledge, has to be conceived ontologically. Objectively, a great part of human verbal communication and thought is, in one way or the other, systematic and logical. He comments: "I do not deny that philosophy is a knowledge, insofar as it names even what is not nameable, and thematizes what is not thematizable. But in thus giving to what breaks with the categories of discourse the form of the *said*, perhaps it impresses onto the said the traces of this rupture."<sup>89</sup> In the same vein, he continues "an event of unlimited responsibility for another certainly has a historic meaning; it bears witness to our age and marks it...I do think that the *unlimited* responsibility for another, as an enucleation of oneself, could have a translation into history's concreteness."<sup>90</sup> Levinas here

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<sup>88</sup> Here, Sobrino and Gutierrez would agree with Johannes Baptist Metz on the fact that the eschatological promises are an integral part of human historical conditions; they cannot be made private because they constitute not only the basic structure of human existence, but also the meaning for the whole human existence when they are viewed historically and socially. For Metz, "the Christian community finds the theological basis of its socially critical task in the eschatological dimension of its self-understanding, which is at the same time a dimension of universal humanization...They force one ever anew into social responsibility." See Johannes Baptist Metz, *Theology of the World*, translated by William Glen-Doepel (New York: The Seabury Press, 1969), 153.

<sup>89</sup> Levinas, *Ethic and Infinity*, 107-108. (Levinas's italics)

<sup>90</sup> Levinas, "Questions and Answers," in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 81. (Levinas's italics)

acknowledges the possibility of translating what he calls the *utopia of conscience*<sup>91</sup> within the real time of history and cites the South American student priests in Louvain as an example. He writes:

I was taken one day, in Louvain, after a lecture on these ideas [ethical responsibility], to a student house that is there called “pedagogy.” I found myself surrounded by South American students, almost all priests, but above all preoccupied by the situation in South America. They spoke to me of what was happening there as of a supreme trial of humanity. They questioned me, not without irony: where would I have encountered concretely the Same, preoccupied by the Other to the point of undergoing a fusing of itself? I replied: at least here. Here, in this group of students, of intellectuals who might very well have been occupied with their internal perfection and who nevertheless had no other subjects of conversation than the crisis of the Latin American masses. Were they not hostages? This utopia of conscience found itself historically fulfilled in the room in which I found myself. That history should be concerned by these utopias of conscience, I believe seriously.<sup>92</sup>

Again, as it was shown above, it is certainly the entrance of the third party (*tiers*) to the scene, the whole of humanity that brings Levinas’s project down to earth, to the realities of human communities. But in so doing, it also brings to bear the subtle ambiguity of a human subject: good and bad. Beyond the unique singularity of the subject’s prophetic orientation, he/she can also be the source of violence, hatred, and war. Hence the inevitable need for justice through laws, institutions, and States. Love of neighbor without concupiscence in concrete human community demands justice. This is a more tangible moment where Levinas’s ethical responsibility opens up to ontological

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<sup>91</sup> Levinas’s *utopia of conscience* functions in the level of *otherwise than being*. In the real time of history, however, it would correspond to what this study calls *affective responsibility* or love of neighbor. The South American students’ concern for the sufferings of their countrymen and women renders them hostages for the sake of others. In Levinas’s view, they exemplify the *utopia of conscience* in the real time of history.

<sup>92</sup> Levinas, “Questions and Answers,” in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 81-82. Levinas goes as far as seeing in Marxist’s theory a concrete example of concern for the other in history, see Emmanuel Levinas and Richard Kearney, “Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas,” in *Face to Face with Levinas*, 32-33; “Philosophy, Justice, and Love,” 119.

discourse.<sup>93</sup> Justice, Levinas argues, originates from the subject's "Here I am", that is, from "its gratuitousness or grace or unconditional charity."<sup>94</sup> It arises to temper the other's privileges, because next to the one who is an other to the subject, is another other to the same subject.

While justice arises in history to temper the other's privileges, it does not, however, address the issue of human weakness and evil that Levinas recognizes in the human person which might prevent him/her from awakening to the human other in responsibility.<sup>95</sup> To awaken to the human other is constitutive of humanity rightly understood. This, for Levinas, is the "ideal of holiness" expected of every human person.<sup>96</sup> Yet Levinas offers no alternative to how in reality one is to deal with elements of weakness and evil in the human person that might prevent one from awakening to the human other. This is a fact of human nature as we experience it. Here again liberation theology could complement Levinas's transcendental philosophy as it suggests the spirituality of *conversion to the neighbor* as the way to remain focused on the divine call to a life of uprightness, expressed through the prophetic attitude of "Here I am" in the real time of history. The spirituality of *conversion to the neighbor* offers Levinas's transcendental ethics a possibility to keep humans in *check* in their daily dealings with

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<sup>93</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 213.

<sup>94</sup> Levinas, "The Other, Utopia, and Justice," in *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-other*, 228-229.

<sup>95</sup> The view presented herein is what Levinas himself takes when he wrestles with the question of the human person not responding to the awakening which is obligation. He admits that "there is in man the possibility of not awakening to the other," and that, he calls evil. In this context, Levinas notes "I am not certain that the 'otherwise than being' is guaranteed to triumph. There can be periods during which the human is completely extinguished, but the ideal of holiness is what humanity has introduced into being...An ideal of holiness [is] contrary to the laws of being, [and sets humans on the path of] acting without letting [themselves] be guided by [the menacing possibility of not awakening to the other.]" See Levinas, "Philosophy, Justice, and Love," in *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-other*, 114.

<sup>96</sup> Holiness for Levinas is concern for the other; it breaks the concern for oneself, see Levinas, "On the Usefulness of Insomnia," in *Is it Righteous to be?: Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, 235.

one another, “without letting [themselves] be guided by”<sup>97</sup> menacing possibilities of not awakening to the human other. While the never-ending responsibility of the subject – through *wakefulness* or unremitting watching over the other – in Levinas is expressed asymmetrically, Liberation theology’s spirituality of *conversion to the neighbor* offers human beings a possibility in history of redirecting everlastingly their eyes toward the “ideal of holiness” Levinas speaks about. It opens up a possibility for the subject to remain in a state of *vigilant insomnia* and act in ethical responsibility for the other/neighbor in the real time of history. Levinas’s “ideal of holiness” in liberation theology’s perspective would be understood in terms of a spirituality lived in the spirit of Jesus Christ. It is a spirituality of a life given for the sake of the neighbor.

Besides, liberation theology’s *conversion to the neighbor* also offers a possibility for forgiveness through love of the oppressors, those who did not awaken to God’s call to uprightness of life in the form of ethical responsibility. The victims’ love for the oppressors seeks the conversion of the oppressors to the others/neighbors’ humanity. At the same time, it reminds the victims themselves of the unlimited nature of the prophetic attitude of “Here I am” that constitutes their true subjectivity. The victims of poverty, oppression, and marginalization become the locus of *conversion to the neighbor* for the oppressors, and their attitude calls for the universal setting for God’s question: what have you done to your brother or sister? Hence, for Gutiérrez and Sobrino, the non-poor, the oppressors, and those who participate in the oppression by their passivity are called to respond and correspond to the God of the poor and marginalized revealed in the biblical tradition. As the God of biblical revelation is known through inter-human justice, both

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<sup>97</sup> Levinas, “Philosophy, Justice, and Love,” in *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-other*, 114.



the oppressed and the oppressors are invited to a never-ending *conversion to the neighbor* expressed in responsibility for the other.

*The Turn to the Other/Neighbor: A Precondition for Peace, Justice, and good Socio-Political and Economic Order*

The study of the dialogue between Levinas's transcendental ethics of responsibility and liberation theology, both of which propose the turn to the other/neighbor as an intersubjective model for the radical re-imagining of the world, shows their significance for addressing critical issues such as poverty, racism, terrorism, civil wars, oppression, marginalization, xenophobia, and intolerance in the postmodern world. Levinas's ethics of responsibility and liberation theology propose a new way of understanding human subjectivity and take our philosophical and theological reflection to a dimension of ethical engagement which is necessary in today's world.

They propose, in our estimation, a fundamental avenue for a long-term resolution of crisis in today's wounded world. Their suggestion that all subjectivity be described as *inspired* by the other and that humans see in other human persons the dimension of the divine could lessen the possibility of the hatred of the other person.<sup>98</sup> The human person rightly understood is the one who acts in ethical responsibility toward the neighbor. Human eyes should always be focused on the "ideal of holiness" which is to go toward the other. Both philosophically and theologically, self-centeredness has to give way to the primacy of responsibility for the well-being of other humans, one's neighbor who bears the trace or presence of God. In their separate fields, as Jacob Meskin helpfully puts it, liberation theology and Levinas's transcendental ethics of responsibility "reveal to us a

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<sup>98</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Autrement qu'être; ou, au-delà de l'essence* (La Haye : M. Nijhoff, 1974), 180; see also Michel Vanni, "Messianisme et Temporalité Eschatologique dans la Philosophie d'Emmanuel Lévinas," *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie* 130 (1998) : 37-50, 45.

portrait of late twentieth-century intellectual work which refuses to abandon eschatological urgency,”<sup>99</sup> because the kingdom of God is ethics fully realized in human relationships. In today’s postmodern world, Levinas’s philosophy and liberation theology propose a path to peace, justice, and good socio-political and economic order. Levinas’s philosophy and liberation theology’s approach awaken today’s world vehemently to the practice of responsibility, justice, and love. Their emphasis on the turn to the other/neighbor is most needed for any possible re-imagining of today’s world.

### *Conclusion*

Certainly this concise synopsis of the dialogue between Levinas’s philosophy and liberation theology, as presented by Gutiérrez and Sobrino, does not reflect either the complexity or the density of their thought. Rather, in these pages this chapter has presented two different approaches that share some conceptual affinities and remain relevant to the situation of the degradation of the human other in history. The main focus of this chapter has been on the dialogue between Levinas’s transcendental ethics of responsibility and liberation theology. The thesis here is that Levinas’s humanism finds some conceptual affinities with liberation theology. This chapter argued that both propose the turn to the other/neighbor as an intersubjective model for a *creation* of a better world. The devastating experiences of Holocaust, oppression, the plight of the stranger and poverty, have been, this chapter had argued, the major motivation for Levinas, Gutiérrez and Sobrino’s attempt to reflect on the self-other relationship.<sup>100</sup> They argued that the divine is encountered in a life of commitment to the neighbor and call for love of

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<sup>99</sup> Jacob Meskin, “From Phenomenology to Liberation: The Displacement of History and Theology in Levinas’s *Totality and Infinity*,” *Philosophy and Theology* 4 (1989): 119.

<sup>100</sup> In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas expresses this in a rather helpful manner: “the face in its nakedness as a face presents to me the destitution of the poor one and the stranger.” 213.

neighbor and justice. Each in its own right insists on the centrality of the human person in God's discourse. They find in the ethical readings of the prophetic nucleus of the Judeo-Christian tradition a way forward for the creation of a world in which the hatred of the other person becomes less and less possible. As in the Hebrew Bible, the neighbor for Levinas is linked to the stranger, the widow, the orphan, and the poor, asserting their uniqueness as *others* to be faced in responsibility. Liberation theology finds in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ the prophetic attitude of concern for the neighbors. In the Scripture, the total work of God is geared toward the respect for the humanity of the other person. It contends that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ constitute the hermeneutic principle that exemplifies the "prophetic-ethical" attitude needed for the re-imagining of the world. Love of neighbor is seen as dialectically linked with salvation, and Christian faith with the practice of justice. Levinas's philosophy's and liberation theology's key prophetic-ethical orientation echoes a stance that seeks to protect the neighbor from being assimilated or dominated and, at the same time *reveals* the divine in history in the case of liberation theology, while for Levinas, it brings the idea of God to mind as the matching part of the justice rendered to the other human person in an asymmetrical relation.

This chapter also noted that despite some affinities between these two approaches, they come from different philosophical and theological perspectives. A couple of underlining divergences were mentioned in this chapter. It was noted that liberation theology is ontologically based reflection, while Levinas's thought is philosophical in the phenomenological tradition with the influence of the Jewish tradition. Besides, while Levinas was suspicious of Christian theology in general for its reliance on an

ontologically based system of thought, he was nevertheless more sympathetic to liberation theology's approach as one of the examples, in concrete history, which bears witness to his transcendental ethical responsibility. As this chapter mapped out the thought of Gutierrez, Sobrino, and Levinas, it showed that Levinas's transcendental ethics, which conceives God as the goodness that is beyond being and calls humans to responsibility for the neighbor, provides a viable philosophical framework that remains vital to a justification of one of the truths of Christianity: the concern for neighbor. It also argued that liberation theology's spirituality of *conversion to the neighbor* bears witness to Levinas's ethical responsibility.

What is fundamental to both liberation theology and Levinas's ethical responsibility is that they both bring forth one major characteristic: the dimension of the divine opens forth in the human face. For Levinas, Gutiérrez, and Sobrino, commitment to the neighbor is the necessary context for *understanding* God. The ethical command of "love thy neighbor" which can be seen as foundational for Levinas's ethics of responsibility, finds conceptual affinities with liberation theology's concern for the non-persons, the others. In a world of deadly ethical struggles, hardening divisions among people, and in the time when tens of millions of refugees have no place to call home, liberation theology and Levinas's transcendental ethics, each in its own right, call for a redefinition of "human subjectivity as ethically enacted."<sup>101</sup> For Levinas, Gutiérrez, and Sobrino, ethical subjectivity for the human other is a primary expression of humans' relationship to God.

From this perspective, this chapter argued that the works of Levinas, Gutiérrez, and Sobrino, offer great promise to our postmodern "wounded" culture. Their turn to the

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<sup>101</sup> Baird, *On the Side of the Angels*, 87.

other/neighbor as an intersubjective model for the radical re-imagining of the world, offers a possibility of a peaceful world. Their suggestion that humans see in others the dimension of the divine could lessen the possibility of the hatred of the other person. By examining Levinas's philosophical conceptual affinities with liberation theology as a promising project, this dissertation hopes to contribute to on the ongoing significant and positive conversation between Christian theology and postmodern philosophy. What matters in today's world is not so much the question of the meaning of life, but the question of ethics. What matters is not so much our separation from God and the desire for mystical participation; rather, what matters is our regard for each other, and the desire for sociality, for ethical responsibility.<sup>102</sup> This provides a compelling case for rethinking the place of the other in the world, more importantly in Africa as this dissertation will argue in the fifth chapter. For the moment, the next chapter will examine how some scholars developed Levinas's phenomenological insights more explicitly in a philosophical and theological direction, again without assuming that Levinas is a theologian.

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<sup>102</sup> Veling, "In the Name of Who? Levinas and the Other Side of Theology," 283.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Enrique Dussel, Jean-Luc Marion, and Michael Purcell on Emmanuel Levinas's Ethics of Responsibility and Christian Theology**

#### **Introduction**

Having laid out the complex dimension of Levinas's philosophy's conceptual affinities with liberation theology in the third chapter, this chapter examines how such similarities hold up in the views of three respected contemporary Christian scholars, Enrique Dussel, Jean-Luc Marion, and Michael Purcell, who have been influenced by Levinas. Their work shows how Levinas's turn to the other can serve Christian theology. Levinas's ethics of responsibility, they argue, opens a possibility of breaking out of a theology developed on the basis of an anthropology and categories mainly influenced by nineteenth century modern philosophy.

Enrique Dussel, a Mexican philosopher and theologian of liberation, develops his thought as a challenge to the neocolonialism of Eurocentrist philosophy and brings Latin American/Third World lived experiences to the core of critical philosophical reflection. He embraces Levinas's idea of alterity as the starting point and argues for an ethics of liberation that places at the center of its discourse the vulnerability of the others, the poor and the oppressed. Jean-Luc Marion, a French phenomenologist of religion, is known for his attempt to address the issue of God in a more or less different direction than that of the metaphysical tradition. For him, theology as reflection on revelation has been too dependent on a traditional view of metaphysics. He proposes to overcome metaphysics, using a phenomenology that is nonetheless willing to dialogue with theology. In a non-

metaphysical way, Marion articulates the notion of God in theology and philosophy, not in terms of Supreme Being, but in terms of agape, echoing the prophetic voice of Levinas for whom God gives himself to be *known* through one's love for the other or through ethical responsibility as an event that enacts one in his/her subjectivity. Michael Purcell, a leading senior lecturer of theology and ethics at the University of Edinburgh, has published books and articles on the significance of Levinas's philosophy for Christian theology. Purcell finds in certain themes of Levinas's thought, such as infinite, awakening of the subject, desire, responsibility, love, justice, and holiness, a possibility for a fruitful dialogue. Besides, for him, Levinas's philosophy and Christian theology share one major common point of departure, that is, they share the same meaning of human existential experience. Levinas's insistence on the priority of ethics, Purcell argues, challenges Christian theology to be less theoretical and more committed to the service of love.

These scholars, although interpreting the relevance of Levinas's thought for theology from different perspectives, see in Levinas's ethics of responsibility a philosophical framework that might illuminate or inform the content of Christian theology, and thus, open a possibility for a fruitful dialogue with Christian theology. In this, they helpfully serve the goal of this dissertation.

### **I. Enrique Dussel**

Professor Enrique Dussel was born in Mendoza, Argentina in December 1934. In 1975, he was exiled to Mexico where he later acquired citizenship and taught for a number of years. He studied philosophy, history, and theology and received several degrees from prestigious universities in Europe and Latin America. He is the author of

numerous books and articles in different languages. His teaching experience goes as far back as 1966, and since then, he has been a visiting lecturer to many universities in Latin America, Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America. His research field has been in the areas of history, philosophy, theology, and ethics.

As a South American, he is concerned with the plight of the poor and the oppressed in that part of the world and in the entire so called Third World countries. Ever since he was a boy in Mendoza, Dussel was already particularly sympathetic to groups engaged in social activities. His first work in sociology in the Department of Philosophy at Mendoza was about the marginal neighborhoods in Argentina.<sup>1</sup> Dussel later moved to Madrid, Spain for his doctoral studies (1957-1961). He defended his dissertation in June 1959, and immediately traveled to Israel to join the community of manual laborers led by Paul Gautier (1960-1961). While in Israel, Dussel came into contact with the Jewish concern for the humble, the downtrodden, the poor, the miserable, and excluded. His experience in the Holy Land became an existential one as it informed all his future intellectual work. Quickly, he became suspicious of Greek philosophy for its emphasis on the intellectuals and the wealthy, and praised Semitic culture for its passion for the poor, the abandoned and the marginalized. Upon his arrival in Europe (France) from the Middle East to begin his theological studies, Dussel studied phenomenology, especially the works of Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricoeur, and Martin Heidegger, before he met with Levinas in the early 70s.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Fernando Gomez, "Ethics is the Original Philosophy or The Barbarian Words Coming from the Third World: An interview with Enrique Dussel," *Boundary 2* 28/1(2001): 19-73, 19.

<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive narrative biography of Enrique Dussel, see Linda Martín Alcoff and Eduardo Mendieta, editors' introduction to *Thinking from the Underside of History: Enrique Dussel's Philosophy of Liberation* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 1-26; and Eduardo Mendieta, editor's introduction to *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricoeur, Rorty, Taylor, and the Philosophy of Liberation*, by Enrique Dussel (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities, 1996), xiii-xxxii.



His early interest for the marginalized of history will take a decisive turn with his encounter with Levinas. Dussel recalls his discussion with Levinas and a group of students in 1972, in Louvain, as a crucial moment of truth that shaped his philosophy of liberation. At this meeting, he asked Levinas whether “the fifteen million Indians slaughtered during the conquest of Latin America, and the thirteen million Africans who were made slaves” were not also the other he (Levinas) spoke about. Levinas looking at him in the eyes replied: “that’s something for you to think about.”<sup>3</sup>

From then onwards, he embraced Levinas’s critique of Western philosophy and his turn to the other/exteriority as the starting point and argued for an ethics of liberation that places at the center of its discourse the turn to the other – those who are despised, poor, oppressed, neglected, and barred from present socio-political, economic, or cultural systems. His philosophy of liberation draws upon the everyday experiences of poverty and oppression in the Third World and rejects the Western view of modernity and globalization as the root cause of most inhuman behaviors in today’s world. The concept of the *other* became, for Dussel, the reference point for his interpretation of history, economics, philosophy, and theology. While he integrates Levinas’s concept of the other to a certain extent, he nevertheless disagrees with his view of history. In what follows, this work will examine how Dussel developed his thought in terms of Levinas’s phenomenology of the other and how, at the same time, he transforms and surpasses Levinas’s thought by locating the other in the context of Latin America, the Third World, and the current system of capitalist economy, globalization and postcoloniality.

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<sup>3</sup> Enrique Dussel, “‘Sensibility’ and ‘Otherness’ in Emmanuel Levinas,” *Philosophy Today* 43/2 (1999): 126.

*Embracing Levinas's Challenge: Dussel's Critique of the Western Ontological Horizon*

Before embracing Levinas's philosophy of the other and developing his own philosophy of liberation, Dussel went through a cycle of change that later defined his anthropology. At the center of this are his studies of Hellenic and Semitic philosophical anthropologies, the Hegelian dialectic, and the Heideggerian account of philosophical anthropology. He finds in Heideggerian thought an understanding of anthropology that situates the meaning of the human person's existence within the sphere of a certain pre-comprehension of the world which diverges from one cultural group to another.<sup>4</sup> Dussel appreciates Heidegger's efforts in trying to posit human beings as already in the world. He even uses Heideggerian anthropology to criticize modernity, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Marx Scheler and others. But in his estimation, Heidegger did not go far enough. He finds the Heideggerian fundamental ontology on the unity of the human person wanting and rejects the Western philosophical tradition for its neglect of this aspect.<sup>5</sup>

Now, an appreciation of Dussel's rupture with Western philosophical thought has to be situated in the global context from which he began his intellectual work. His ethical

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Barber, *Ethical Hermeneutics: Rationality in Enrique Dussel's Philosophy of Liberation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 19-22. Within the sphere of a certain pre-comprehension that Heidegger argues for, the human person is understood as a unified being constituted of existentials of corporality, animality, temporality, and intersubjectivity. For Dussel, this pre-philosophical description of the world and the unitary view of the human person has been the characteristic of the Semitic and Christian original worldview prior to the Hellenic dualistic view of the human person (soul/body). Unfortunately, Christian anthropology later fell into the trap of this Hellenic dualism. Dussel sees in Heideggerian philosophical anthropology the possibility to liberate Christian anthropology from Greek dualism. The Heideggerian fundamental ontology on the unity of the human person, however, can be found exemplified in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. Thus, in his anthropology, Dussel is close to the Heideggerian and Christian-Semitic unified anthropologies which argue for the unity of the human person.

<sup>5</sup> Barber, *Ethical Hermeneutics*, 28-45. In his effort to address the insufficiencies of the Heideggerian ontology on the unity of the human person, Dussel engages Hegel's dialectic method creatively and sympathetically. He eventually criticizes it for its positing of Absolute subjectivity of modernity as the "actual infinity which englobes everything in an absolute immanence without exteriority." This type of understanding of subjectivity runs the risk of validating the eradication of the other person and as a consequence becomes an "ontological cause" of human inhumanity to humans as exemplified in various situations of injustice, oppression, exploitation, marginalization, and genocide in the world. See 26-27.

hermeneutic developed as a reaction to Latin America's history of colonization, oppression, poverty, and marginalization. In today's world, these vices are reflected in the present international order of globalization which, in his view, has its root in the US-Eurocentrist desire to dominate countries of the periphery. The US-Eurocentrist alliance has divided the world into two different cultures: the culture of the center (US-Eurocentrism) and the culture of the periphery (Latin America, Africa, and Asia, to which he includes the marginalized groups of our societies, women and children). For him, Western socio-political and economic domination of those who exist at the periphery is the result of their ontologically based system of thought. He writes:

The conquests of Latin America, the enslavement of Africa and its colonization, as well as that of Asia, are the dominating dialectical expansion of "the same" that assassinates "the other" and totalizes "the other" in "the same." This huge dialectico-ontological process of human history simply went unperceived by the ideology of ideologies (even though it claims to be the critic of ideologies) – modern and contemporary European philosophy.<sup>6</sup>

The ontologically based system has made the West believe and claim universal knowledge and legitimated its control of Third World nations. For Dussel, the Western dialectical method is incapable of envisioning the existence of alterity expressed in the face of the poor, the oppressed, the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner who live beyond or outside the world or categories of its ontological horizon. It defines itself as the center of the world and neglects those in the periphery.<sup>7</sup> In view of this, Dussel argues, it became necessary that those in the periphery set out for themselves a method of philosophizing which takes its starting point from the historical situations of poverty, oppression, and marginalization which they were forced into by the dominating

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<sup>6</sup> Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, translated by Aquilina Martinez and Christine Morkovsky (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1985), 52.

<sup>7</sup> Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: The Eclipse of the 'Other' and the Myth of Modernity*, translated by Michael D. Baber (New York: Continuum, 1995).

subjectivity of the West. The construction of a just world order is possible only through the liberation of nations of the periphery and the articulation of a non-ontologically based philosophy which focuses on the exteriority of the other. Dussel uses the concept of the other to make a case for his philosophy of liberation. Here he is aided by Levinas's phenomenology of the other, adjusting it with insights from Marxism and dependency theory.

*Dussel's Anadialectical Method in terms of Levinas's Phenomenology of the Other*

It is in Levinas that Dussel finds a philosopher who made an important move beyond Heidegger's helpful insight into human existence in the world. He discovers in Levinas's phenomenology of the other that which outshines the entire philosophical tradition of the West by focusing on the human other who is beyond the horizon of being, the world, and ontology. Levinas's arguments about the absolute uniqueness or otherness of the other set the stage for Dussel's own philosophical method which he calls *anadialectical* or *analectical*.<sup>8</sup> Dussel did not only embrace Levinas's thought, he also, at the same time, gave it a new dimension by applying it to the Latin American environment and "developing his own analectical method, which begins with the Other, recognizes the analogical character of the Other's word, unmask[s] false universals imposed upon the Other, and expands rationality through exposure to the Other."<sup>9</sup> He defines the analectical method as follows:

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<sup>8</sup> Eduardo Mendieta's introduction to Enrique Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History, Marxism, and Liberation Theology*, edited by Eduardo Mendieta (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 5 (Mendieta's italics). According to Roberto Goizueta, Dussel's anadialectical or analectical method includes five moments: origin in the everyday, the ontological demonstration of the entities, the analectical as such, the ethical self-revelation of the other, and service in justice. See his *Liberation, Method, and Dialogue: Enrique Dussel and North American Theological Discourse* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 68-73.

<sup>9</sup> See Barber's preface to *Ethical Hermeneutics*, x.

The analectical refers to the real human fact by which every person, every group or people, is always situated 'beyond' (*ano-*) the horizon of totality. Negative dialectic is no longer enough. The analectical moment is the support of new unfoldings. The analectical moment opens us to the sphere (which is not the ontic one of the factual sciences or the ontological one of negative dialectic), referring us to the other. Its proper category is exteriority. The point of departure for its methodical disclosure (a method that is more scientific than dialectic) is the exteriority of the other. Its principle is not that of identity, but separation, distinction.<sup>10</sup>

This method is intended to go beyond the Eurocentric method of dialectic, the proper sphere of totality. It affirms the priority of the existence of the other or exteriority as the very starting point of philosophy. In Dussel's articulation of this method, Levinas's terms such as other, exteriority, totality, face, proximity and sensibility, are re-appropriated and utilized in the context of the Third World, most especially of Latin America. Dussel's anadialectical method is a combination of the Western dialectical tradition and the Latin American historical lived experience. The result is a new form of ontology that transcends the European ontology of totality so as to express and articulate a Latin American philosophy of the other.<sup>11</sup>

Inspired by Levinas's phenomenology of the other, Dussel discovers in the term *person* more than a simple unified being and argues that the concept of person evokes alterity, the other who is beyond the horizon of being and ontology. The other is given as unity and cries out to the subject prior to any philosophical considerations, be it the Hellenic dualistic view of the human person. He/she is the paradigm from whom the moral world is constituted.<sup>12</sup> The exteriority of the other now turns out to be the place of the judgment of the totality and affirms his/her absolute rights that stem from the fact of

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<sup>10</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 158-159.

<sup>11</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 159; Goizueta, *Liberation, Method, and Dialogue: Enrique Dussel and North American Theological Discourse*, 64.

<sup>12</sup> Barber, *Ethical Hermeneutics*, 23.

being a person. This starting point is deep-seated in the Judeo-Christian tradition in which Dussel is a part. Thus, in Dussel's philosophy of liberation, the exteriority of the other is mystery which reason can never have a hold on; it interrupts Western totality and exaltation of reason.<sup>13</sup> He also insists on the prophetic nature of one's service to the other in justice. The one who takes the defense of the other is a prophet, and his/her attitude breaks with every system of totality. In the articulation of this new philosophical method, Dussel sees "the relationship of the living God with the poor human being, and of this poor human being with the living God, [as] the theme of the Bible and theology."<sup>14</sup> Thus, the anadialecical method calls for an anadialecical theology in which faith is concrete and practical.<sup>15</sup> Hence, with the help of Levinas's philosophy, Dussel insists on the centrality of the exteriority of the other, that is, the other's transcendental dimension in his analectical philosophy of liberation.

Now, for Dussel the suffering of the other in history turns into an interpellation of the capitalist system. He sees in this system the main cause of the hardships of the Third World countries. Such a historical analysis led him to complete Levinas's phenomenology of the other with insights from Marxism and dependency theory. Most important, in Dussel's turn to Marxist's thought, is the concept of "living labor" which he regards as the necessary principle of Marxist ethics and theoretical construction. "Living labor" is the creative source of surplus-value which exists outside of exteriority, prior to, and valorizes capital. For Dussel, "the logico-dialectical grounding of Marx's concept of

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<sup>13</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 46-47. For Dussel, "what reason can never embrace – the mystery of the other as other – only faith can penetrate." See 46; see also Goizueta, *Liberation, Method, and Dialogue: Enrique Dussel and North American Theological Discourse*, 67-68.

<sup>14</sup> Enrique Dussel, *Ethics and Community*, translated by Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988), 236.

<sup>15</sup> Enrique Dussel, *Ethics and the Theology of Liberation*, translated by Bernard F. McWilliams (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1978), 19; Goizueta, *Liberation, Method, and Dialogue: Enrique Dussel and North American Theological Discourse*, 72, 80-82.

capital is not totality, but *exteriority*; the absolute *exteriority* to the totality of capital as a system is the ‘living labor’.”<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, for Dussel, in Marx’s concept of “living labor” is the recognition “of the life of the other as the living labor of the worker.”<sup>17</sup>

While Dussel acknowledges his profound debts to Levinas’s phenomenology of the other, he still expresses his dissatisfaction with Levinas’s reduction of history to consciousness, his reluctance in embracing the other of the global periphery, and his equivocal understanding of the absolutely other. In a couple of writings, he explains how and why his philosophy goes beyond Levinas’s.<sup>18</sup> Dussel finds Levinas’s phenomenology of the other wanting in so far as it provides no expressive political philosophy capable of transforming situations of oppression and injustice into better socio-political and economic conditions that recognize human dignity. He insists on the concrete reality of ethics. Ethics of liberation should address the lived experiences of those oppressed and excluded from the dominant Eurocentric method of dialectic, because the present capitalist system and the phenomenon of globalization continue to suppress nations at the periphery. Furthermore, he argues for an analogical nature of philosophy over and against Levinas’s equivocal and univocal absolutely external other. For him, the analogical method offers a possibility for “conviviality,” “engagement in solidarity,” and “historical communication” between the “same” and the “other” in the real time of history.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, “Dussel’s Philosophy of Liberation: Ethics and the Geopolitics of Knowledge,” in *Thinking from the Underside of History: Enrique Dussel’s Philosophy of Liberation*, 32. (Mignolo’s italics)

<sup>17</sup> Eduardo Mendieta’s introduction to Enrique Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History, Marxism, and Liberation Theology*, 8-9.

<sup>18</sup> See Barber, *Ethical Hermeneutics*, 50-77, footnote, p.77ff; Walter D. Mignolo, “Dussel’s Philosophy of Liberation: Ethics and the Geopolitics of Knowledge,” 28-30, footnote, p. 48; Dennis Beach, “History and the Other: Dussel’s Challenge to Levinas,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 30 3 (2004): 315-330.

<sup>19</sup> Mignolo, “Dussel’s Philosophy of Liberation: Ethics and the Geopolitics of Knowledge,” 30. According to Mignolo, Dussel has also argued that Levinas’s philosophy somehow remained Eurocentrist, that is, “he never thought that the ‘Other’ (*Autrui*) could have been an (Amer)indian, an African, or an Asiatic.” See p. 29. On this specific aspect, Dussel’s criticism of Levinas might be unreasonable. Levinas has always, at

Nevertheless, Levinas's phenomenology of the other clearly provides Dussel with theoretical tools to articulate his philosophy of liberation. With Levinas's insistence on responsibility for the other person, Dussel could argue for a "mutual fulfillment of the analectic solidarity of center/periphery, woman/man, mankind/earth, western culture/peripheral postcolonial cultures, different races, different ethnicities, [and] different classes."<sup>20</sup> Like with Levinas, love of the other person, especially those excluded from the center of modernity, and the exterior transcendence of the other person, are at the center of Dussel's ethics of liberation. Dussel finds in Levinas's philosophy a legacy that has much to offer to Christian theology and to humanity as a whole.

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least implicitly, referred to all the oppressed and persecuted people of the world as being the "others" toward whom ethical responsibility should be exercised. This undisputable universal dimension of his thought is perceptible in the preface of *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* when he writes: "To the memory of those who were closest among the six millions murdered by the National Socialists, and the millions upon millions of all confessions and all nations, victims of the same hatred of the other man, the same anti-Semitism." Levinas's preface to *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. Thus, to accuse Levinas of only being focused on the plight of the Jews seems out of proportion.

<sup>20</sup> Enrique Dussel, "Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism," *Nepantla: Views from South* 1:3 (2000b): 465-478, 474.



## II. Jean-Luc Marion

Marion has often acknowledged his indebtedness to Levinas's phenomenological approach in his attempt to secure, in postmodern context, a relationship between phenomenology and theology, with phenomenology being the groundwork for a better understanding of theology.<sup>21</sup> In examining Marion's thought this study does not intend to give a thorough analysis of his work and its significance for contemporary thought. It will suffice here to highlight some aspects of Marion's writings that echo his use of Levinas's philosophy in his rejection of the onto-theological tradition and his proposed new way for doing theology in terms of agape.

The background for Marion's philosophical theology is the French continental philosophical environment within which he began his career as a philosopher. Born in Meudon, Paris, in 1946, Marion's philosophical project began with his meeting with French philosophers of the time, when he studied at the University of Nanterre, at the Sorbonne in Paris, and at the École Normale Supérieure. It was then that he came into contact with the movements known as structuralism and post-structuralism. These movements later became significant for the emergence of the movement called postmodernity, at least in French continental philosophy. Upon receiving his doctorate in 1980, he began his profession as a philosopher and a specialist of Descartes, and has written comprehensively on him. He worked at the University of Poitiers which happened to be Descartes' *alma mater* and an institution where Levinas taught between 1963 and

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<sup>21</sup> The jury is still out on whether or not Marion could be considered a theologian. Marion has always considered himself a philosopher and a phenomenologist, see his *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, translated by Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 236. In this study, Marion is considered a phenomenologist of religion.

1967. Marion will later become the director of philosophy at the University of Paris X at Nanterre, where Levinas had been for six years (1967-1973).<sup>22</sup>

Marion's mastery of both the philosophical and theological tradition has earned him respect and admiration from his supporters and critics worldwide. Not only was he well-read in philosophy and theology and wrote several books and articles in the mid-1980s, he also played a significant role in the field of phenomenology as he started research on Husserlian phenomenology which appeared to be significant for his understanding of the thought of Heidegger. Hence, Marion's work is undeniably philosophical and phenomenological. In addition to teaching at the University of Sorbonne Paris IV, he is a visiting professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago and at Boston College. Being a Roman Catholic, his philosophical work as a whole has been influenced by his faith trying to address the question of the relationship between philosophy and theology.

#### *The Demise of Metaphysics: Toward Marion's Phenomenological Approach*

Marion's work emerges in the context of the questioning of traditional metaphysics by contemporary continental philosophy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. He expresses his dissatisfaction with a traditional view of metaphysics articulated from Aristotle to Thomas Aquinas which attempts to found knowledge of what is in terms of "an unchanging *ousia*" (substance/essence), called "being, the divine, the first cause, and knowing subject."<sup>23</sup> Such metaphysics, he argues, is onto-theology,

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<sup>22</sup> Robyn Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, Company, 2005), 3-12.

<sup>23</sup> Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*, 20. Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, translated by Thomas A. Carlson with a forward by David Tracy (Chicago: The University Press of Chicago, 1991), xxiii; *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, translated by Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 5, 8. With regard to Thomas Aquinas, in the

that is, it focuses on the highest being that is the source and meaning of all being and gives this being metaphysical attributes which serves its own purpose.<sup>24</sup> It reaches its peak in the form of modernity through the claim of the will to power. Modern subjects, aided by scientific and technological progress, develop a dream to have everything under human control. There is here a manifest desire to depart from the onto-theological tradition and rational subjectivity that began with Descartes and was clarified by Kant. In this context of crisis on the issue of the foundation of knowledge, continental philosophers proposed phenomenology and hermeneutics as a response to the metaphysical question of the foundation of first philosophy, overcoming at the same time the distinction between subject and object developed by Kant's metaphysics.<sup>25</sup>

Phenomenology appears, for Marion, the only method capable of providing legitimacy to philosophy as a way forward for a non-metaphysical thought. As a discipline of philosophy, phenomenology emerged in the tradition of continental European philosophy in the early twentieth century and was championed by Edmund Husserl. Heidegger reacts to Husserl's phenomenological reduction by redefining phenomenology in terms of Being.<sup>26</sup> For Marion, not all types of phenomenological approach could succeed in achieving the goal of providing legitimacy to philosophy. All

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English edition of his *God Without Being*, Marion gives some clarifications in a few arguments. He makes a distinction between Aquinas' *esse* which Aquinas assigns to God and the metaphysical tradition *ens commune*, the objective concept of being. He insists that Aquinas's *esse* "does not chain God to Being because the divine *esse* immeasurably surpasses (and hardly maintains an *analogia* with) the *ens commune* of creatures, which are characterized by the real distinction between *esse* and their essence, whereas God, and He alone, absolutely merges essence with *esse*: God is expressed as *esse*, but this *esse* is expressed only of God, not of the beings of metaphysics. In *this* sense, Being does not erect an idol before God, but saves his distance." *God Without Being*, xxiii.

<sup>24</sup> It is in the *Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, translated by Thomas A. Carlson and edited by John D. Caputo (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001) and in *God Without Being* that Marion set the tone for his desire to engage modern metaphysics, criticizing the idolatrous concepts of God in modernity as both *causa sui* and as source of morality. See Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*, 61-62.

<sup>25</sup> Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*, 18-21.

<sup>26</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 49-50, 61.

the great phenomenologists, after Husserl and Heidegger, in his estimation, have failed both to move beyond objectness and beingness and to claim phenomenology as first philosophy. Yet only one successor of Husserl, Levinas, has been successful. He writes, “it goes without saying that we owe it to Emmanuel Levinas to have ingeniously reconfigured phenomenology so as to let it finally reach the Other as saturated phenomenon.”<sup>27</sup> Different from Husserl and Heidegger, Levinas defines phenomenology in terms of intersubjective relation and posits the subject’s ethical encounter with the other person as the original philosophical experience.<sup>28</sup> Thus, in his articulation for a new direction in phenomenology, Marion embraces Levinas’s phenomenological method over and against certain aspects of Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology and sees in it foundational insights which are helpful for the renewal of phenomenology and his investigation into the question of God and human beings’ relationships to one another.<sup>29</sup>

Levinas, Marion asserts, has the merit to have taken “explicitly as his responsibility the revindication of Husserl. For in bringing to the foreground the fundamental dignity of ontology, or rather in order to threaten it better, he concluded his

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<sup>27</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, 366-367, footnote 88.

<sup>28</sup> Horner’s words on Levinas’s type of phenomenology are here illuminating. She writes: “With respect to Heidegger, Lévinas again has two main areas to put in question. This time he fears that the reduction to being has been made absolute, with a consequent lack of attention to what resists or exceeds being, most particularly the other person. Further, he maintains that this overlooking of the other person shows Heidegger’s inexcusable lack of interest in ethics. While Lévinas sees himself within a phenomenological trajectory, picking up what remains unexplored in Husserl, he also goes beyond phenomenology and develops – perhaps confusingly – what he calls a ‘metaphysics.’ It is not, however, a metaphysics characterised by the same features as a traditional metaphysics. By using this title he both situates himself in opposition to Heidegger and what he sees as the suffocating theme of ontology, and places an emphasis on that part of the word that simply means ‘beyond’ [*meta-*]. Lévinas’ post-phenomenological style is exemplified in the means he uses to write about the other person, for example, where the other is not phenomenolised as such but addresses me (from a ‘height’) and calls me to responsibility. It is further exemplified in the way in which, for Lévinas, the subject (I or *ego*) is always subsequent to a more basic ‘me,’ who is constituted by the call of the other rather than self-constituting.” See her *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*, 40-41.

<sup>29</sup> In Horner’s view, Marion considers himself as an intermediate postmodern thinker as he joins Heidegger, Levinas and others to move beyond metaphysics. Marion’s “concerns include the nature and limits of metaphysics, and questions about hermeneutics, subjectivity, alterity (otherness), relationships, and responsibility.” *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*, 13-17.

demonstration in these terms: ‘Ethics is not a branch of philosophy, but first philosophy.’”<sup>30</sup> For Marion, only Levinas before him took seriously Husserl’s “principle of principles” in articulating a new direction for phenomenological method that would no longer belong to metaphysics, but would constitute a “breakthrough” for a “new start,” a “first philosophy.”<sup>31</sup> What, then, does Marion draw from Levinas’s ethics of responsibility in elaborating his phenomenological approach that would better define theology as a non-metaphysical possibility? The answer to this question would require that Marion’s work be examined more closely.

*Marion’s Givenness, Saturated Phenomena or Paradoxes and Levinas’s Ethics of Responsibility*

In his thinking about overcoming traditional metaphysics (ontology, onto-theology) with phenomenology, Marion argues for a “rethinking of God: not as a conceptual ‘idol,’ and not through the heavy metaphysical language of ‘Being’ or substance or essence, but, instead, in terms of phenomena such as love, gift, and excess.”<sup>32</sup> Marion’s method of phenomenological reduction is summarized in the expression: *Autant de réduction, autant de donation* (As much reduction, as much givenness), with givenness being the key principle for phenomenology.<sup>33</sup> Here he proposes a new, post-metaphysical and

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<sup>30</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, 14.

<sup>31</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, 15.

<sup>32</sup> Dermot A. Lane, “Foreword,” *Givenness and God: Questions of Jean-Luc Marion*, edited by Ian Leask and Eoin Cassidy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), xv.

<sup>33</sup> This is the principle that Marion adds to Husserl’s principles, see his *Being Given*, 14-19, 38; *In Excess*, 16-23. Marion notes that Husserl’s principles have failed because of their limited formulations of the issue of the “originarity” of givenness. In those principles, objectness and beingness are the sources from which stems givenness. Hence, the need for the fourth principle which Marion considers to be the “first principle of phenomenology;” that is, “givenness”: “as much reduction, as much givenness.” This principle, in Marion’s view, comes in to complete the lack in the previous three as it is the only principle capable of efficiently defending the givenness of the phenomena. The connection between reduction and givenness is so important that one cannot operate without the other. The reduction is constituted to always work toward givenness by reducing every single appearance to givenness. It restricts, filters, measures all appearances

phenomenological approach that opens up the possibility of thinking otherness by way of *givenness* and *saturated phenomena*. From now on, Marion's renewal of phenomenology is defined in terms of givenness and saturated phenomena. Givenness is the way a phenomenon gives itself unconditionally and on its own terms to a recipient. It is the only principle capable of protecting the self-giving of the phenomenon beyond objectness and beingness. A saturated phenomenon is a phenomenon in which the intuition always "exceeds and decenters" every intentionality.<sup>34</sup> In this phenomenon, the "intuition always submerges the expectation of the intention, in which givenness not only entirely envelops manifestation but, surpassing it, modifies its common characteristics."<sup>35</sup> Marion identifies four saturated phenomena: the event, the idol, the flesh, and the icon. His rethinking of phenomenology by means of givenness and saturated phenomena entails an attempt "to show the possibilities within phenomenology to open onto thought that is excessive, which gives theology a new philosophical context."<sup>36</sup> While phenomenology is a way forward beyond metaphysics, theology, for Marion, is the ultimate fulfillment of all thought, including phenomenology. He believes that philosophy's basic understanding of love in terms of lived experience and one's own consciousness was flawed and needed some phenomenological redefinition that is open to the theological.<sup>37</sup> Theology, for Marion, is *caritas/agape*, and it is resonant with Levinas's ethical responsibility. A close examination of Marion's categories of givenness and saturated phenomena will help to

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that they attain real givenness before appearing. And givenness cannot be thought of without that givenness passing through the control of a reduction.

<sup>34</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, 225.

<sup>35</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, 225.

<sup>36</sup> Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*, xi.

<sup>37</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, translated by Stephen Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 74-75.

see Levinas's influence on Marion's articulation of his new direction for theology or his "theological phenomenology"<sup>38</sup> which is based on *caritas* or *agape*.

For Marion, the appropriate horizon of phenomenological reduction is givenness, not presence or being. A phenomenon gives itself from itself as something that gives what is given, and defines every phenomenon through a movement of appearing and withdrawing without limiting it either to some horizon or to a transcendental I. To be sure, in Marion's view, the horizon is no longer limited as in Kant and Husserl. It is quasi-absolute and yet opens to a hermeneutics of multiple possibilities.<sup>39</sup> For Marion, because phenomena are given without limited transcendental conditions, the given is given intrinsically, irrevocably, and radically in an intuitive excess as a gift. Now, to whom is this givenness given? Givenness, Marion asserts, is given to the subject as to the *l'interloqué* (the receiver, the witness) or *l'adonné* (the gifted one); the gifted is constituted by the call of what gives itself, that is, the given. The subject as *l'adonné* or *l'interloqué* receives itself from what he/she receives. He/she is the screen upon which an event gives itself to be seen.<sup>40</sup> What Marion understands by call stems from Levinas's "inversion of intentionality" in terms of "responsibility for the Other, going against intentionality."<sup>41</sup> The subject receives a call, an appeal (*appel*) and therefore he/she is

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<sup>38</sup> I borrow this expression from Dermot A. Lane, "Foreword," *Givenness and God: Questions of Jean-Luc Marion*, xvi.

<sup>39</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, 196-212, 287. On this issue of the phenomenological horizon, Marion disagrees with Levinas who sees the concept of the horizon as absolute to phenomenology, see his "On the Gift: A Discussion between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion," *God, the Gift and Postmodernism*, edited by John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 66. For helpful analysis, see Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theological Introduction*, 114.

<sup>40</sup> Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theological Introduction*, 115-118; Marion, *In Excess*, 48-53.

<sup>41</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, 266-267. For Marion's reference to Levinas's texts, see footnote 29, p. 370. Levinas, *Autrement qu'être, ou au delà de l'essence*, 61, 67 and 180 [English translation, 47, 53 and 141]; "Un Dieu-homme" in *Entre-nous : essais sur le penser-à-l'autre* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1991), 75. [English translation, 58]. Marion writes: "Let me just call to mind a passage that juxtaposes the two meanings: 'Intentionality means that all consciousness is consciousness of something, but above all that every object calls forth and as it were gives rise to the consciousness through which its being shines and, in

called “forth as gifted.” Givenness as saturated reverses intentionality, and as a result makes the call possible and undeniably certain. Here the gifted one goes before the transcendental, self-identical, self-constituting subject.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, for Marion, every given is a gift in the sense that it is a “privileged phenomenon,” “the figure of all phenomenality.”<sup>43</sup> The gift shows itself following different determinations and more importantly with saturated phenomena: the event, the idol, the flesh, and the icon. To these four saturated phenomena, Marion adds the phenomenon of revelation, which, for him, is central because it blends and summarizes all the other four and opens them up to a hermeneutics of multiple possibilities. It is the last possibility as it constitutes the maximum point of saturated phenomenality. It is also the highest point because it accomplishes the saturation of saturation that is, “saturated at the second degree,” even though, Marion initially, assimilated it to the phenomenon of the icon.<sup>44</sup> Besides, in other writings he also defines the phenomenon of revelation phenomenologically to mean “what gives *itself* in what shows *itself*.” Yet, Marion sees this as theology’s task, not phenomenology’s.<sup>45</sup> Here Marion sees in the epiphany of Christ the paradigm of the phenomenon of revelation that well-characterizes each of the four modes of saturation.<sup>46</sup> Saturated phenomena are essentially pure event, without horizon or context. They cannot be contained, conceptualized, predicted, controlled, or grasped not because of any deficiency on the part of the intuition but rather because of

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*doing so, appears,’ En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* (Paris, 1949), 134 (emphasis in the original) [English translation, 119].”

<sup>42</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, 267; “The Final Appeal of the Subject,” in *The Religious*, translated by Simon Critchley and edited by John D. Caputo (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 131-144.

<sup>43</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, 117-118.

<sup>44</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, 235; *In Excess*, xxi, footnote 3, 29; footnotes 41, 52-53.

<sup>45</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, 52-53; see also “The Saturated Phenomenon,” *Philosophy Today* 40, 1-4 (1996): 103-124, 121.

<sup>46</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, 234-245, 267;



the excessive nature of their giving. They demand an endless hermeneutic and are recognized only by the effect they produce in their witness.<sup>47</sup>

What transpires from Marion's phenomenology is the capacity of the concept of saturated phenomenon to address what metaphysics failed to properly grasp as an exception, namely, the phenomenology of love that questioned the uniqueness of the thinking subject and the primacy of being. Each of these phenomena accomplishes a saturation or paradox in terms of quality, quantity, relation, or modality, which can never be constituted as objects within a horizon and by an I.<sup>48</sup> There is no transcendental I or the ego who would constitute any of these phenomena as an object. There is only a "me" à la Levinas, in Marion's estimation, who receives the event, the idol, the icon, and the flesh. In analyzing each of these phenomena one can see that Marion is a careful reader of Levinas in the way he incorporates some aspects of Levinas's thought in his phenomenology.

Marion defines the saturated phenomenon of the event in the form of an unforeseeable historical phenomenon. It has no transcendental I that would constitute its giving and showing when considered phenomenologically. It gives itself prior to showing itself and has its own self and shows itself on the basis of its own self. It occurs instantaneously in the happening starting from itself and arises from its own phenomenality as a *fait accompli*. Thus, the subject does not constitute it, rather finds itself as constituted by it.<sup>49</sup> The subject is the "me" that receives it, reminiscent of Levinas's "me voici." As with Levinas's ethical responsibility as an event that enacts the subject in his/her subjectivity, Marion's saturated phenomenon of the event enacts the

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<sup>47</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, 113.

<sup>48</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, 228.

<sup>49</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, 267; *In Excess*, 30-49.

recipient or *l'adonné* or *l'interloqué* (the “me”) in its subjectivity as a constituted witness. Here the subject cannot allege to be the producer of truth; it is “stripped of the characteristics that gave it transcendental rank.”<sup>50</sup> With the positing of the “me” both Marion and Levinas oppose Descartes’ subject and Heidegger’s effort to overcome it. For both Levinas and Marion, the subject “me – accusative” (Levinas) or “to me – dative” (Marion) is enacted into being upon receiving the event (saturated phenomenon – Marion) or (ethical responsibility - Levinas).<sup>51</sup>

The saturated phenomenon of the idol suggests “aspects of the unbearable and bedazzlement”<sup>52</sup> close to what Plato describes in relation with the myth of the cave, where the idea of the Good offers itself as difficult to be seen, not by any imperfection or limitation, but rather “by excess – because the soul is incapable of seeing anything ... saturated by an extremely brilliant bedazzlement.”<sup>53</sup> The brilliance of this phenomenon impedes intentionality and characterizes what the subject’s gaze cannot bear. The idol is now a phenomenon capable of looking at and of displaying an excessively visible quality that no single hermeneutic can exhaust.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, 217.

<sup>51</sup> My thanks here to Dr. Marie L. Baird for clarifying this point in one of our conversations.

<sup>52</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, 229; 229-231.

<sup>53</sup> Marion, “The Saturated Phenomenon,” 115; Plato, *Republic*, 517bc and 518a.

<sup>54</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, 54-81. Marion’s view of idol in *In Excess* presents a major shift from the one he developed in *God Without Being*. In *In Excess*, he tries to concentrate more on phenomenology, rather than on theological questions. In *God Without Being*, the idol is theologically a false self-projection of an image by the subject; it is a fabrication of what the person wants to see; it only functions as result of the gazing person’s satisfaction, “since if the gaze did not desire to satisfy itself in the idol, the idol would have no dignity for it.” 10. An idol, for Marion, is the person’s self-satisfaction with a given visibility as this limits him/her and prevents him/her from seeing beyond his/her visibility. With this first visible, Marion argues, the idol admits no visibility beyond; there is no possibility of going beyond the visible, everything stops, freezes, settles, comes to rest at this point of visibility as beyond it “the *invisible* opens, rather closes up.” 12-13. Marion uses the word *invisible* (from the French verb *viser*, to aim at) to signify “that which cannot be aimed at or taken into view.” See footnote 8, p. 201.” Here is, for Marion, the limit of the idol, that is, in which “the divine actually comes into the visibility for which human gazes watch; but this advent is measured by what the scope of particular human eyes can support, by what each aim can require of visibility in order to admit itself fulfilled.” 13-14.

As with the idol, the analysis of the icon as a saturated phenomenon has both theological and phenomenological foci. It appears under the characteristics of “irregardable and irreducible,”<sup>55</sup> of the invisible that cannot be looked at because it breaks off visibility by excess. The icon points the person’s gaze to something beyond the person’s mastery, to the infinite gaze. The gaze is called upon to go beyond itself by never stopping, freezing, settling or resting at the point of visibility. Yet it is a visible reference to the invisible. The icon makes visible the gaze of the invisible other who in turn looks at one’s gaze, or whose look traverses one’s gaze.<sup>56</sup>

Marion soon sees in Jesus Christ the definitive icon whom Paul depicts as “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). He goes as far as to identify the icon with the cross of Christ/God which functions as the measure of all icons.<sup>57</sup> In the icon, God gives himself to contemplation yet maintains the necessary gap with humanity. This gap is what Marion calls distance. The distance between the invisible God (the icon) and humanity in Marion’s phenomenology takes a number of meanings as his work progresses. Yet, the fundamental meaning expresses both the interruption of thought and God’s withdrawal, that is, God’s way of entering into thought. The interruption of thought is for Marion the human’s impossibility to think that which is absolutely excessive. Distance preserves the necessary and infinite difference between humans and

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<sup>55</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, 232.

<sup>56</sup> Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*, 62-63; Marion, *God Without Being*, 18.

According to Horner, Marion’s background on this understanding of the icon is found in the patristic and ecclesial tradition, most specifically, in the works of John Damascene, Basil of Caesaria, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Denys, and the Second Council of Nicaea of 787. God the invisible is seen in flesh through the image of the Son whose image makes possible the contemplation and worship of the invisible God.

<sup>57</sup> Horner takes issue with Marion on this. She believes that “the cross is a difficult example to choose in the context of a discussion of the constituting gaze, since the cross (and even a crucifix) need not function through eyes.” See her *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*, 65, footnote 25. For a more helpful discussion on this, see her *Rethinking God as Gift: Derrida, Marion, and the limits of Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 168-171; Marion, *The idol and the Distance*, 118-120.

the divine; it also takes place among humans themselves and underlines their differences. It makes relationships possible and prevents any totalization of those relationships.<sup>58</sup> Here Marion finds inspiration from Levinas's use of the term distance.<sup>59</sup> He often uses the word "distance," as Horner helpfully argues, "the same way as Lévinas, trying to think relationship in terms of a distance that protects the infinitude of the other, whether that is God or a human other."<sup>60</sup> Paradoxically the unbridgeable gap created by this distance is also the place and moment of God's self-giving to humans in a relationship of proximity and intimacy.<sup>61</sup> Thus Marion's distance is both the gap and God himself, definable and yet indefinable. And God is an icon of distance. Distance is what characterizes human beings' relationship with God in terms of possibility of receptivity, participation and goodness. It surpasses the human capacity to conceptualize God as it precedes every conception.<sup>62</sup>

Marion's analysis of flesh as a saturated phenomenon expresses the way in which the *ego* and the world are phenomenalized.<sup>63</sup> His analysis of the issue of the givenness of the self or flesh is to be understood in relation to the givenness of the icon/face. The *ego* "does not fix itself to its own flesh; it fixes itself to itself as flesh" and as "first *self*."<sup>64</sup> With regard to the other person, the *ego* gives itself without relation as body, in passivity and receptivity, in suffering, pleasure and aging. This self-fixing of the *ego* in Marion's

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<sup>58</sup> Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*, 60.

<sup>59</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 34, 38, 40, and 41. Levinas's understanding of distance takes place in the context of the subject-other relationship. This relationship is made up of irreducible distance or difference. The other (*Autrui*) in a relationship cannot be reduced to thought or comprehension.

<sup>60</sup> Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*, 53-54. See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 215-216. In Horner's words Marion's distance "defines us as one of the terms in a relationship, defining the other as indefinable. The poles of the relationship formed by distance are thus asymmetrical, reminding us very much of Lévinas." 59.

<sup>61</sup> Marion, *The idol and the Distance*, 103-104.

<sup>62</sup> Marion, *The idol and the Distance*, 139-140, 153, 198.

<sup>63</sup> Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*, 112.

<sup>64</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, 91.

thought, especially his analysis of the relationship between time and flesh, is reminiscent of Levinas's examination of *insomnia* and *nausea*.<sup>65</sup> Thus the *ego* taking up flesh is an act of facticity and accomplishes his/her individuation by the "unanimous white conflict" of the one with the other – precisely by the taking of flesh....I do not give myself my flesh, it is it that gives me to myself. In receiving my flesh, I received me myself – I am in this way gifted [*adonné*, given over] to it."<sup>66</sup>

What then links the saturated phenomenon of flesh with that of icon as Marion understands it? The answer is to be found in Marion's consideration of the relationship between time and flesh. For Marion "the weight of time is accumulated...where my flesh is most openly visible – on my face. Actually, it is in my face that time prefers to leave traces, its traces."<sup>67</sup> This means that "the face shares the privilege of flesh" as "it gives itself to be seen in seeing itself" just like "the flesh feels in feeling itself feeling."<sup>68</sup> What differentiates the face from the flesh is the additional characteristic of the face of "looking without having to be looked at;" hence the definition of the face – "what looks at me [but] I cannot see it, nor look at it in its turn."<sup>69</sup> Now, Marion's phenomenological icon is understood in relation to the face of the other as it is in Levinas. The icon, that is, the face of the other opens onto invisibility by interrupting visibility by the excess of intuition. It is like the subject looking into the pupils of the other's eyes where nothing can be seen but invisibility.<sup>70</sup> With regard to the analysis of the icon as the face of the other person, Marion acknowledges his indebtedness to Levinas's determination of "the

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<sup>65</sup> Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*, 112. Marion, *In Excess*, 95. See Levinas, *Existents and Existence* or *De l'évasion* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1982).

<sup>66</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, 98.

<sup>67</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, 95.

<sup>68</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, 113.

<sup>69</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, 114.

<sup>70</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, 115.

mode of phenomenality proper to the face”<sup>71</sup> that escapes the look, yet it appears as a voice. Levinas writes: “...the face speaks. The manifestation of the face is already discourse....primordial sphere, which corresponds to what we call the same, turns to the absolutely other only on call from the Other. Revelation constitutes a veritable inversion [of] objectifying cognition”<sup>72</sup> The face as an icon “escapes my look and envisages me in turn – in fact, it sees me first, because it takes the initiative.”<sup>73</sup> So the only way it *appears* to the subject is that it shows itself in the silence of the ethical command, “Thou shall not kill!” It “only appears when I admit – submitting myself to him or her – that I must not kill.”<sup>74</sup> There is no intention involved here but only intuition which immerses all intention. The saturated phenomenon thus appears not visible, but by excess. Similar to Levinas, the transition from seeing to speaking – reversed intentionality – is of greatest phenomenological significance for Marion.<sup>75</sup> For both Levinas and Marion, the other, in the reversed intentionality, is completely actualized in the voice that addresses the subject. The subject’s self-sufficiency is challenged and questioned by the other’s look/face. In this regard the manifestation of the face depends on the powerlessness of the subject to constitute it.

It becomes clear, in our estimation, that each of the saturated phenomena (the event, the idol, the icon, and the flesh) developed above is characterized by a saturation of love that obliges the “me” à la Levinas to open up to the other as such. It refuses to let the “me” be self-centered, precisely because it appears with a multiple and inexpressible

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<sup>71</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, 115.

<sup>72</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 66-67.

<sup>73</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, 116.

<sup>74</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, 115-116; Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanisme de l'autre homme* (Montpellier : Fata Morgana, 1972), 47ff.

<sup>75</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, 37, 44, 61, 87, 99, 113-114, 117, 119.

excess that suspends any effort at constitution. It is at the center of Marion's rejection of onto-theology and his articulation of the phenomenology of the other person that gives the subject his/her subjectivity.<sup>76</sup> Here, in explaining how precisely the subject can experience the human other, Marion, as Horner argues "develops a quasi-Levinasian intentionality of love that depends, not on seeing the other (and thereby reducing the other to the scope of my own gaze), but on feeling the weight of the other's unsubstitutable gaze as it crosses my intentional aim. This weight is experienced as an always-prior injunction that exposes and obliges me."<sup>77</sup> Love, for Levinas, "designates a movement by which a being seeks that to which it was bound before even having taken the initiative of the search and despite the exteriority in which it finds it."<sup>78</sup> Following Levinas, Marion argues for a non self-centered love, stimulated by the invisible other who destitutes and exposes the self and directs him/her toward the other in ethical responsibility. The order which elects the self to become an object of another's gaze that is intended at the self and exposes him/her constitutes the initial move toward love without being.<sup>79</sup> This is what Marion calls an "erotic reduction"<sup>80</sup> that occurs only in the context of the counter-intentionality of the face. It makes sense then that Marion would see his project as being in the mid-way to postmodernity as all thoughts (pre-modern, modern, and post-modern) are subordinated to the *agape*/the gift. Furthermore, due to the

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<sup>76</sup> In his attempt to think theology *otherwise*, Marion is aided by his faith in the Christian God and by Levinas's use of the phenomenological method. He is committed to finding a way to approach the question of God contrary to metaphysics by announcing the defeat of the god of metaphysics through a belief in the God of love.

<sup>77</sup> Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*, 70; Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, 83ff.

<sup>78</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 254. The idea of the divine or "the affection of the finite by the Infinite" is, for Levinas, what inspires the subject's love for the other which is not his/her anxiety for his/her own well-being. See also "The Idea of the Infinite in us," in *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-other*, 220-221; "God and Philosophy," in *The Levinas Reader*, 173-175.

<sup>79</sup> Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, 83-85.

<sup>80</sup> For a helpful understanding of what Marion means by "erotic reduction" see Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*, 136-146.

saturated love of intuition, the precise meaning of the subject's love for the other becomes clear, in Marion's estimation, when the other whom the subject loves shows him/herself to the subject in a reversed intentionality of the face as "pure exteriority" à la Levinas's ethical command.

Marion's understanding of love seems to suggest an account of the other dependent on a phenomenology of love that is eventually nurtured by a theological analysis of charity. For him, Christian love prevails over both metaphysics and non-metaphysical thought. He writes that his work "claims in the end to be able to refer to charity, the *agape*, properly revealed in and as the Christ, according to an essential anachronism: charity belongs neither to pre-, nor to post-, nor to modernity; but rather, at once abandoned to and removed from historical destiny, it dominates any situation of thought."<sup>81</sup>

While Marion acknowledges his indebtedness to Levinas for having established "for the first time the mode of the phenomenality proper to the face,"<sup>82</sup> he, however, distances himself from Levinas for having limited the notion of the face to an ethical hermeneutic. For him, Levinas's ethical phenomenon of the face could certainly "work here a phenomenological deployment more originary than it, and which would consequently render possible the description of other phenomena, or other descriptions of this same phenomenon – the face."<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, as a particular saturated phenomenon, this face, Marion argues, stems from a call that originates in the icon and it goes beyond Levinas's other person of ethics. And this icon achieves its phenomenality only by making itself to be seen by being heard. Hence, in his analysis of the face as icon, Marion

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<sup>81</sup> Marion, *God Without Being*, xxi-xxii.

<sup>82</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, 115.

<sup>83</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, 118.



describes the face, as “an icon addressing a call... that envisages me” and calls me to ethical responsibility.<sup>84</sup>

Besides, Marion finds Levinas’s notion of the face as being too universal and representing any face of the other as such. Levinas’s face is no one, unnamed and only leads to unspecified alterity. The notion such as hostage or substitution also describes the universality of Levinas’s ethical command whereby anyone can take the place of any other. Thus, he asserts, Levinas’s ethical injunction is unable to account for the individuation of the other. The face of the other in this sense calls for an infinite hermeneutic in terms of love without end and makes possible the individuation or particularity of both the self and the other. He suggests finding this individuation in the submission to the other and to his/her call as love.<sup>85</sup> The subject in his/her commitment to love allows the other to emerge as phenomenon; hence, in this “erotic reduction” (a crossing of the gazes) the subject and the other leave the universal, even the ethical universal, in order to achieve individuation and particularity in a relationship that concerns only both of them and undoubtedly not the generally forcing neighbor.<sup>86</sup> Hence, love, for Marion, cannot be limited to Levinas’s ethics of responsibility; it makes possible the subject’s relationship with an individuated and personal other through a crossing of the gazes.

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<sup>84</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, 119.

<sup>85</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, “From the Other to the Individual” in *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology Approach the Beyond*, translated by Robyn Horner and edited by Regina Schwartz (New York: Routledge, 2004), 43-59. The French original reads “D’autrui à l’individu: Au delà de l’éthique,” Actes du colloque *Emmanuel Lévinas et la Phénoménologie* (Sorbonne, 11-12 December 1997) under the title *Lévinas et la Phénoménologie*, published in *Emmanuel Lévinas: Positivité et transcendance* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000), 287-308; see especially, 289, 296-298, 302; “The Intentionality of Love: in Homage to Emmanuel Levinas,” in *Prolegomena to Charity*, 71-101; see especially 92-96; “The Face: An Endless Hermeneutics,” *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 28 2/3 (1999): 9-10; *Le phénomène érotique: six méditations* (Paris: Grasset, 2003), 131, 143-161, quoted by Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*, 137.

<sup>86</sup> Marion, *Le phénomène érotique*, 198 quoted by Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*, 138.

Although Marion's criticisms of Levinas have some relevance, considering that Levinas's love dimension is bound by ethical injunction, one still wonders whether Marion does not overlook some dimension of individuation attached to Levinas's ethics of responsibility. Levinas would certainly resist speaking of individuation as Marion understands it, because such language might, without a doubt, suggest a return to totality. Yet, there is, we would argue, in Levinas's insistence on "exclusive singularity without appearing" of each being in the form of assignation, some degree of individuation that emphasizes the uniqueness of both the subject and the other.<sup>87</sup> This individuation in Levinas takes a sense of differentiation (absolute alterity) and "extreme singularity" as necessary conditions for true love of neighbor.<sup>88</sup> The subject, Levinas insists, is bound to the neighbor not on the basis of biological logic ("belonging from the same genus as me that he/[she] concerns me") but because of his/her relation of "kinship" with the other.<sup>89</sup> In this sense the other person appears to the subject when the subject exposes him/herself to the other person in responsibility as separate being. Ethical responsibility becomes recognition of the other person's singularity. The other in his/her absolute uniqueness cannot be contained within conceptual categories of representation and consciousness. In a sense, for Levinas, individuation or particularity is not based on "mutual eroticization" as it is in Marion, but rather on the acknowledgment of the subject's and the other's singularity which constitutes their uniqueness.

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<sup>87</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 86-87; see also *Totality and Infinity*, 104. For an interesting critique of Marion's misreading of Levinas's ethical injunction, see Christina M. Gschwandtner, "Ethics, Eros, or Caritas? Levinas and Marion on Individuation of the Other," *Philosophy Today* 49/1 (2005):70-87.

<sup>88</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 86.

<sup>89</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 87.

In conclusion, Marion's phenomenological approach opens up a possibility of thinking otherness by way of givenness and saturated phenomena which would guarantee the primacy of philosophy and the possibility of a genuine theological approach based on love. In arguing for a phenomenology that remains open to the theological, he joins Levinas in rejecting onto-theology and proposes a new direction for theology which is centered on the horizon of "love without being."<sup>90</sup> Marion sees a possibility of dialogue between Christian theology and Levinas's thought. Thus, in so doing, he argues for the relevance of Levinas's phenomenology for postmodern philosophical and theological discussion. The question of whether or not Marion has been successful in this new approach has been, and still is, an issue of heated debate among scholars. Can we really move away completely from metaphysics' concept of being? We are inclined to think that the being of metaphysics can be understood as in Purcell's *being otherwise* whereby, through the dimension of transcendence, human beings are made capable of breaking inclinations of totality or self-subsistent autonomy.

### III. Michael Purcell

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<sup>90</sup> Marion, *Le phénomène érotique*, 22-23 quoted by Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*, 135.

Michael Purcell is a Scottish theologian and a senior lecturer in systematic theology at the University of Edinburgh, school of Divinity in Scotland. His research field has been mainly in the area of philosophical and theological studies with special emphasis on fundamental theology, mostly the relation of French phenomenology and theology. Most of his writings deal with elements of Levinas's thought that could correlate to Christian fundamental and practical theology.

His first attempt at this correlation is found in his book *Mystery and Method: The Other in Rahner and Levinas*<sup>91</sup> in which he tries to confront Rahner's theology with Levinas's thought. He finds in Rahner's and Levinas's understanding of the other differences that call for complementarity. For Rahner, the other is the incomprehensible mystery of God who is central for understanding the human other. For Levinas, the other is the human other whose infinity comes from God. Levinas and Rahner, he concludes, need each other as they both recognize, each in its own right, the dimension of the divine in human encounters. Purcell's most recent book, *Levinas and Theology*,<sup>92</sup> attempts some connections between Levinas's thought and Christian theology. The task of this section will be to present Purcell's reading of Levinas for theology. Two aspects will be examined: the correlation between phenomenology and theology and the connection between the theologies of grace and sacraments with Levinas's phenomenology of awakening, desire, and the face.

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<sup>91</sup> *Mystery and Method: The Other in Rahner and Levinas*. For full reference, see p. 41.

<sup>92</sup> *Levinas and Theology*. For full reference, see p. 16.

### *The Correlation between Phenomenology and Theology*

Ever since the introduction of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology in Europe, European scholars have been keen to see how Husserl's phenomenology can relate to theology. This of course has motivated unrelenting debate and interest among the leading figures in phenomenological philosophy. French phenomenologists such as Jean-Luc Marion, Michel Henry, and Jean-Louis Chrétien have been prominent in analyzing a possible relation between theology and phenomenological thinking along the line of Levinas's transformation of Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology.<sup>93</sup> Purcell joined the debate with the publication of his *Method and Mystery*. His argument that Rahner and Levinas's thought, notwithstanding some divergences, should be tackled by each other was an acknowledgement of a possibility for a relationship between Levinas's phenomenology and Christian theology. It is this argument that he attempts to articulate in his book *Levinas and Theology*.

What Purcell believes to be of critical significance in the relationship between Levinas's phenomenology and Christian theology is their common point of departure, namely, their concern with human existential experience.<sup>94</sup> The human existential as the central aspect for the correlation between phenomenology and theology presupposes an existence of a real world in which this human existential can be experienced; hence the idea of the incarnate existence as a place where human beings exist and where God's existence becomes a question for them. For Levinas, Purcell contends, it is in the world that human beings exist, find fulfillment, and commit themselves to one another. How

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<sup>93</sup> For an insightful critique of a possible relationship between theology and phenomenology, see Janicaud Dominique et alü, *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000); *Phenomenology "Wide Open": After the French Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

<sup>94</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 2.

does Levinas understand incarnate existence and how is it significant for the correlation between Levinas's phenomenology and theology?

The phenomenology which Purcell refers to is the one that Levinas transforms from Husserl's insights and which rejects naive realism that takes for granted the relationship between meaning and reality.<sup>95</sup> Levinas, referring to Husserl, contests the position of the natural attitude as it fails to account for the link between the world "out" there and subjectivity.<sup>96</sup> He supports Husserl's view that the way things appear in consciousness are given as they appear, and their meanings are unpredictable and not everywhere the same; and this is expressed in terms of intentional consciousness.<sup>97</sup> Levinas, however, with respect to the subject does not limit the function of intentionality to purely representational and theoretical dimensions, like Husserl. He expands the phenomenological possibilities of intentionality to life in general, most importantly to human relations with the world, including the transcendental, volitional and affective dimension of human subjectivity. For Levinas, Purcell argues, phenomenology has to go beyond abstraction, egological reduction, and theoretical and cognitive dimension toward an intersubjective reduction that takes place in concrete lived experience in which "others" are associated.<sup>98</sup> Unlike Husserl, who bracketed the existence of the other in the phenomenological *époché*, Levinas acknowledges the presence of the other in the

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<sup>95</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 9. Husserl's naïve realism presumes that the reality of objects, the relations between them, and the categories of thought are always and everywhere the same and identical. For Purcell, Levinas finds in Husserl three valuable insights that help understand phenomenology as a science of meaning and existence: the relation between appearing and reality (as much appearing, as much being), the concern with concrete life (return to things themselves), and the notion of intentionality (objects appear in a particular mode in conformity with a particular intention).

<sup>96</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 12.

<sup>97</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 11-14. In the relationship between a subject and an object, there are three elements: the act by which the object is perceived, the perception of that object, and the actual object itself, which in actual fact is beyond consciousness, that is, transcendent yet only available to the subject in terms of consciousness.

<sup>98</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 15-23.

intentional and transcendental dimension of consciousness. He is committed to a phenomenology of life that takes seriously human existence, both of the subject and the other.

Levinas finds in Heidegger's thought, Purcell contends, the most important potentialities of the phenomenological method, most especially with regard to his appreciation of incarnate existence. Heidegger was the first, in *Being and Time*, to open Levinas's eyes on this issue.<sup>99</sup> Yet, Levinas still departs from Heidegger's existential phenomenology for its confused understanding of the meaning of the world and its neglect of the ethical dimension in his understanding of *Dasein*. He argues for a positive view of the world whereby human beings, who exist in the world among other things, would not be reduced to *Dasein*'s own self project, but rather would be defined by ethical responsibility that disrupts ontology. For Levinas, the world of humans is the world of lived experience in which consciousness finds itself already incarnated (here in the world) in the everydayness of existence at once opened to both phenomenological and theological elucidation.<sup>100</sup> Here Levinas draws attention to the importance and the sincerity of everyday actions which characterize human existence. Each everyday experience is a phenomenon à la Marion, that is, often saturated and excessive which

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<sup>99</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 74-77. Heidegger was concerned with the identity of being which he defined as *Dasein*. *Dasein* which means "being-there" in the world is not reducible to the human being but is inclusive of it; it is an ontological entity which signifies human life and raises the question of Being in its being-in-the-world. For Heidegger, Purcell argues, human existence is "mine" in the world, as an incarnate existence in terms of *Dasein*. Now, *Dasein* as an existential project is characterized by an existence in terms of possibilities for realizing itself. It has two modes of existence in its being-in-the-world. It exists either inauthentically or authentically. Now, everything *Dasein* encounters in the world is seen in terms of possibility for *Dasein*'s own realization or their utility to *Dasein*. Things exist the way they are for the use of *Dasein* and its possibilities.

<sup>100</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 78-80.

from the outset already puts one “in a prevenient ethical situation without” one’s choosing or knowing.<sup>101</sup>

Now for Levinas, Purcell argues, the incarnate existence is the point of departure for any phenomenological inquiry. Such a perspective is not without theological significance, considering the fact that theology starts as theological anthropology. In the incarnate existence, the subject’s consciousness is awakened to the reality of the world, facilitating thus a shift from subjectivity to intersubjectivity. The subject is awakened from sleep, a mode of refuge or escape from the excessive demands of responsibility, to the mode of vigilance, fear, and threat that characterizes wakefulness and the insomnia of *there is* from which being arises.<sup>102</sup> The subject’s consciousness (interiority) finds itself here already constituted in incarnate existence and geared toward the event of the other person (exteriority) that provokes his/her conscience. There is here a reconsideration of subjectivity in terms of ethical responsibility for the other. To be a subject is to exist not as a *pour soi* but as a *pour l’autre*.<sup>103</sup> According to Purcell, Levinas leaves the climate of the Husserlian and Heideggerian ontology to move toward an ethics where “the event of the other person – which may be described as an ethical awakening – predates the subject, but is only discovered ‘after the event’ of subjectivity, as it were. For Levinas, however, such an ethics can also be ‘first theology,’ properly understood.”<sup>104</sup> The question to be answered is how precisely has Levinas made the move from the ethical awakening of the subject to theological reduction.

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<sup>101</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 82-86.

<sup>102</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 88-94.

<sup>103</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 73-74. The world Levinas argues for is not a *pour soi* type of world rather a *pour l’autre* type, a world that recognizes the transcendental nature of the other human person and renders the subject ever responsible for the other’s well-being.

<sup>104</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 49.



For Purcell, Levinas made this move by seeing in the ethical awakening a new humanism that echoes the humanism of the Hebrew Bible from which originates part of Western thought. While Levinas has been critical of Christian theology for its reliance on a Western ontological foundation, its tendency toward the theoretical, making the transcendence of the divine accessible to thought, and its neglect of humans, Purcell argues, he still sees the need for the revitalization of certain themes of theology as it pertains to holiness. Purcell's underlying argument is that, for Levinas, ethics is not only "first philosophy" but also "first theology," as it addresses the issue of holiness of life which precedes any ethical question. As long as it is a human person, who in history raises the question of God, Levinas believes that ethical engagement as opposed to a purely theoretical approach is an essential component for theological reflection. The ethical engagement that marked both Levinas's phenomenology and revealed theology is motivated by "a first revelation of the other person" and "the ethical intent of scriptures."<sup>105</sup> The Hebrew Bible is the place where the first things about human life and meaning are said; things said in philosophy find their meaning from the "Book of books," and the principle thing said in the Hebrew Bible is the fundamental human responsibility for the other person. Because philosophy stems from the "Book of books," all thinking, all meaning, and all quests for knowledge are subjected to the anteriority of ethics inscribed in the Torah. Biblical humanism argues that subjectivity is intersubjectivity as it

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<sup>105</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 33. With regard the relationship between theology and phenomenology, he embraces Jean-Luc Marion's revealed theology over and against traditional metaphysical theology. Revealed theology is linked to phenomenology because revelation always takes place in the mode of phenomenality. This means that the "given facts" of revealed theology, "which are given positively as figures, appearances, and manifestations (indeed, apparitions, miracles, revelations, and so on) takes place in the natural field of phenomenality and is therefore dependent on the competence of phenomenology." See 31-33. Purcell's reliance on the thought of Jean-Luc Marion and Jean-Louis Chrétien can be found in the following passages: Jean-Luc Marion, 18, 31-32, 109, 147-148, 170-171; and Jean-Louis Chrétien, 32, 144, 146, 157.

is prescribed in the Torah, the text of divine law. The Torah gives direction by way of ethical rule to all humans so that human life may prosper. God's law is written in the face of the other person and calls humans to ethical responsibility toward the other person. In keeping God's law or commandments presented in the Torah, one meets the trace of God that comes to mind.<sup>106</sup> In this sense philosophy, through phenomenology, shares with theology a concern to articulate the meaning of existence in terms of responsibility for the other – an ethical humanism which is the main point of Levinas's philosophical project.<sup>107</sup> And what comes first and defines meaning and understanding in terms of philosophy is therefore the human person's original and unconditional acceptance of the ethical commands of the Law. Without the meaning that philosophy and theology draw from ethical commands of the Law that surpasses human freedom, their thoughts remain empty and meaningless. The ethical command of responsibility for the other is now the central aspect of the correlation between phenomenology and theology. The subject is awakened to ethical responsibility, to his/her genuine humanity, which is a reflection of the divine life; and this for Levinas, Purcell argues, is "first theology,"<sup>108</sup> it takes its root

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<sup>106</sup> Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*.

<sup>107</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 49-55.

<sup>108</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 60-63; 71, 155. Levinas's theology would be defined as ethical attentiveness to the neighbor in the world where the human person asks the question about God. It is justice rendered to the neighbor that "brings" God closer to the subject. In a sense, belief in God takes place in a social world and therefore, it has to be intersubjective, communitarian, and ecclesial. This is the theological perspective that Levinas would be comfortable with and would call *atheism* as opposed to *theism*. Now, according to Purcell, Levinas understands *theism* as a way of belief in God that is neglectful of the social world. It concentrates on the individual, theoretical, abstract, and mystical relationship with God to the detriment of human relationship. This form of belief seeks to protect the integrity of divine transcendence and unknowability. Levinas, Purcell argues, opts for a theology of *atheism*, the one that, without denying the existence of God, recognizes the need for God's absence and separation with humans so as to make possible the meeting with God through ethical encounter with the "holiness and transcendence" of the other person. This theology "is presented as a positive and responsible" theology which "draws attention to human responsibility as the locus of divine presence." God's absence or distance and separation from humans is not meaningless; it expresses the holiness and the absolute transcendence of God, and enables humans to be responsible and render justice to one another. God hides his face so as to create a possibility for ethical humanity whereby to encounter him will depend on one's affective responsibility for the other person. Hence, theology and the question of God for Levinas, Purcell argues, is responsibility for the other.

in the biblical humanism of Torah whereby “God arises as the counterpart of the justice we render to the other person.”<sup>109</sup>

For Purcell, Levinas’s phenomenology, by emphasizing the ethical engagement, helps theology achieve its goal of defending the holiness of life through ethics. Levinas’s phenomenological method “offers theology a new voice, a new grammar of response and responsibility, a new lexicon for articulating the human in its tendency towards the divine, which for Levinas, cannot avoid an ethical commitment to the other person here and now.”<sup>110</sup> In a sense, phenomenology and theology should work together and need each other as they both attempt to answer the same question.

Hence, according to Purcell and following Jeffrey Kosky’s arguments, Levinas’s phenomenology offers a possibility for a philosophy of religion or fundamental theology as it opens a religious possibility in a postmodern or post-metaphysical age for a consideration of the phenomenon of the human subject as responsible for the other person. Interesting here is “the fact that the religiosity of the subject is discovered by way of a phenomenological reduction which Levinas pushes beyond its Husserlian limits.”<sup>111</sup> Levinas recovers the transcendental dimension of subjectivity bracketed by Husserl as he understands the reduction to occur through a consciousness that goes beyond itself in the transcendence of intentionality. Subjectivity is affirmed in terms of exteriority. To be a subject phenomenologically is to be ethically attentive to the other person. Here for Purcell, Levinas’s phenomenological perspective is of significance for fundamental

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It takes place in the context of incarnate existence and ethics where the idea of God is linked to love and justice toward the neighbor.

<sup>109</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 37.

<sup>110</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 3.

<sup>111</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 58.

theology “in reconsidering the subject in terms of ethics and as responsibility for the other person.”<sup>112</sup>

*The Theologies of Grace and Sacraments and Levinas’s Phenomenology of Awakening, Desire, and the Face*

Purcell continues his inquiry into a possibility of dialogue between Levinas’s ethics of responsibility and Christian theology by examining aspects of Levinas’s philosophy that provide a possible rapprochement with the theologies of grace and sacraments. He seems to find it in Levinas’s phenomenology of Desire, Awakening, and the Face. For Purcell, Levinas’s understanding of desire and awakening can be translated into a theology of grace and the notion of the face into a theology of the sacrament.

*Levinas’s Phenomenology of Desire and Awakening and the Theology of Grace*

For Purcell, Levinas’s phenomenology of desire and awakening constitute two important existential experiences that could be linked to a theology of grace whereby consciousness is called upon to become moral consciousness. In Levinas’s phenomenology, desire and awakening are the fruits of a phenomenological journey that originates in the existential experience in which the self, caught up in the sleeplessness of *Insomnia* (the burden of existence), had no other choice than to flee by ‘getting out of being by another way’ – the way of exteriority or of the advent of the other person.

What characterizes Levinas’s phenomenology of desire and awakening, Purcell asserts, has much to do with existence as transcendence or the call of the infinite, the other person. Existence as transcendence begins in the existential experience of the subject when he/she escapes a self-enclosed state of *being* toward an *otherwise than*

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<sup>112</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 60.

*being*. This escape, for Levinas, takes place in the structure of the *hypostasis* of existence and existent whereby the subject emerges from the “enchainment of the bare existence”<sup>113</sup> of the *there is (il y a)* toward subjectivity as ethical responsibility.<sup>114</sup> Within this structure, he identifies two movements: the first is from non-being to being, a situation of impersonal anonymity of the *there is* or *Insomnia* from which being arises and there is no escape. The second is an ethical journey from *being* toward *otherwise than being*.<sup>115</sup> In the first movement, the subject is involved in the kind of self-relationality to itself. Nothing actually exists or is definite, yet there is not nothing; it is a state of wakefulness and darkness, a fact of *there is (il y a)* – a sort of being/existence in its extraordinary obscurity, unknown to itself except through what it causes, namely threat, fear, and vigilance. The notion of *there is (il y a)* as wakefulness without intentionality is a phenomenon of impersonal or pure being. This non-being is expressed through sluggishness, weariness, or the incapacity to face Being. The second movement comes to the rescue of the first. It offers a possibility for the subject to leave the mode of indetermination of *there is (il y a)*. It is a moment of escape from threat, fear, and vigilance with the advent of the other person. The arrival of the other person in the form of transcendental movement disrupts “a subjectivity which is self-closed; it releases the self from its enchainment to bare existence, and enables the emergence of ethical

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<sup>113</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 96.

<sup>114</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 90-92.

<sup>115</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 86-94. The two movements mentioned here, according to Purcell, also correspond to two philosophical itineraries: the Abrahamic and the Odyssean. The Abrahamic itinerary is an outgoing movement toward exteriority, toward an unknown place other than self, in a response to a call. It escapes the ontological world by going beyond system and totality – getting out of being by another way – hence, it is otherwise than being. The Odyssean on its part is a self-return movement toward one’s interiority and characterizes a system of totalization. Now the philosophical itinerary which Levinas adopts, Purcell asserts, and which offers a possibility to escape the state of the *il y a*, is the Abrahamic as it opens up to the encounter with the other person. See 100-101.

subjectivity.”<sup>116</sup> The subject distances itself from itself by way of a transcendental movement that takes place in the mode of *separation*. And “separation gives the possibility of transcendence and a relation to alterity.”<sup>117</sup> The threat, fear, and vigilance of the darkness of the *there is*, “in which no one may sleep, is overcome by the advent of the other person who saves the self from itself and its enchainment to solitary existence.”<sup>118</sup> The subject withdraws from itself to allow the possibility of another person, other than itself, opening thus the possibility of ethical existence expressed as responsibility for the other.

Now, the escape from being or the ‘getting out of being by another way’ – the way of exteriority – evokes a dimension of transcendence that has ethical implications. Transcendence for Levinas, Purcell argues, always suggests a move toward the excessive; it surpasses and goes beyond the aptitude of thought, it is a desire for the infinite.<sup>119</sup> The infinite, the other person “whom thought cannot contain is in the realm of the infinite – provokes thought, and provokes thought preveniently.”<sup>120</sup> The idea here is the possibility for the self to escape the state of *there is* or pure being toward the *Illeity* of the other person. *Illeity* is the origin of alterity and opens up the subject as responsible for the other. To exist as a subject, phenomenologically, is to be awakened to responsibility by the other’s absolute excess or infinity. And what causes this awakening is the insatiable desire that the other provokes in the subject. What this means in terms of the theology of

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<sup>116</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 96.

<sup>117</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 99-100.

<sup>118</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 100.

<sup>119</sup> Purcell reads Levinas’s idea of the infinite in the sense of Marion’s notion of excessive or saturated phenomenon. He writes: “what the idea of the Infinite introduces is the notion of an excessive or saturated phenomenon which is described not simply as phenomenal because of its restriction to the phenomenal world, but rather is described as ‘phenomenal’ because in its very phenomenality it is excessive and overwhelming, and confounds the capacity of thought to contain or to comprehend.” See *Levinas and Theology*, 108.

<sup>120</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 109.

grace is that Levinas's subject – through the second movement of the structure of the *hypostasis*, from *being* to *otherwise than being* – awakens to a transcendental graced existence in terms of desire for the other which is excessive and infinite. This is the *hypostasis* of the other in the subject.<sup>121</sup>

The subject in order to escape the indeterminacy of the *il y a* enters into a relationship that is always and already beyond its power and capacity. It is a “graced relationship” that is always in a transcendental movement toward infinity in terms of the dynamic of desire. The subject always desires what is beyond, the other person, the infinite. And because the person is excessive, ungraspable, infinite, and eminently other, desire is inextinguishable and inaccessible, and does not originate in the subject. Thus, the dynamism of desire as grace, establishes the subject as no longer “for itself” but as “for the other.” Thus, within the ethics of desire, the other, “like grace,” remains antecedent with respect to the subject, “too close to grasp and too far away to reach.”<sup>122</sup> Thus, the dynamism of desire as grace in Levinas presents itself in a “paradox of infinity in proximity.”<sup>123</sup>

The phenomenology of desire that constitutes subjectivity as intersubjectivity, takes place in the incarnate existence through the phenomenology of awakening to alterity. Here the consciousness of the subject is awakened to intersubjectivity as the *hypostasis* of the other-in-the subject. This becomes the subject's original experience as the one-for-the-other in responsibility.<sup>124</sup> This is the definitive meaning of human life.

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<sup>121</sup> Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, 247. “This Other, like grace, draws close in absolute proximity and is experienced in the desire which is aroused in the subject who, in response to the grace and graciousness of the Other's approach, is able to transcend himself or herself, and fully awaken as an ethical person. *Gloria Dei, Homo vigilans.*”

<sup>122</sup> Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, 223-224.

<sup>123</sup> Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, 225.

<sup>124</sup> Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, 210.

For Purcell, Levinas's phenomenology of desire and awakening can be read in the light of the theology of grace. What actually facilitated this possibility is a "graced existence" which could be identified with Irenaeus' theological conviction that "the glory of God is the human person fully alive;" and phenomenologically this could be expressed as the "glory of God is the human person fully awake."<sup>125</sup>

To explain his claim, Purcell presents the thought of Aquinas, Maréchal, Rahner, and De Lubac on desire for God as witness.<sup>126</sup> All start with Aquinas' consideration of the human subject as having within its being "a natural desire for the beatific vision" (*desiderium naturale visionis beatificae*). For Aquinas, Purcell argues, the human person, in his/her intellect is naturally constituted to desire to see the divine substance. Maréchal, building on Aquinas, insists that such natural dynamism to see the infinite and absolute God can only be met by God's grace freely given to the human subject. This position suggests, firstly, the existence of an exterior agent that is capable of communicating itself, and secondly, on the part of the human person, the capacity for receiving this communication. Rahner agrees with Maréchal's argument but also insists on the gratuitous nature of grace. He understands the natural desire for the beatific vision as coming from human existential experience as a supernatural existential whereby the dynamic orientation in the finite spirit toward what is other stems from a transcendental horizon of an absolute (supernatural existential), but not from any lack on its part. In this sense, for Rahner, in the transcendental horizon, the finite spirit is constituted as

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<sup>125</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 125-126.

<sup>126</sup> The theology Purcell seems to be referring to in his argument about Levinas's phenomenology of desire, awakening and face, is a theology as presented by Augustine, Aquinas, Joseph Maréchal, Henri de Lubac, Karl Rahner. See his *Levinas and Theology* - Augustine and Aquinas, 113-114; Joseph Maréchal, 114-116; Henri de Lubac, 118-122; Karl Rahner, 16-17, 114, 117-122.



“openness,” a *potentia oboedientialis*, to alterity.<sup>127</sup> For De Lubac, the desire for God in the human person is both natural (because it is found in human nature) and supernatural (because it does not stem from the human person but God), and the human person cannot on his/her own without God’s grace fulfill his/her goal. Rahner and de Lubac agree that the desire for God in the human person is stirred by God’s grace freely given.<sup>128</sup> The human person can never fulfill the desire for God for which he/she is not the author. This desire is beyond the human capacity to bear. Thus, desire as grace in the subject is always and already opened to a transcendental movement, to exteriority, outside-of-oneself, and toward God, “the infinite who can never be possessed or consumed by the one desiring.”<sup>129</sup> Purcell sees in this theological perspective on desire as grace a possible correspondence with Levinas’s phenomenology of desire and awakening. For, what characterizes desire for Levinas “is insatiable longing for the Other who, on account of his or her excess, sustains the Desire as radically and always unfulfilled and unfulfillable.”<sup>130</sup>

While in the theology of grace it is God who awakens the desire in the human person, in Levinas’s phenomenology “an understanding of grace as desire and awakening” is provoked by “the advent of the other person, always prevenient, who excites an insatiable desire for the other who is always excessive and unencompassable.”<sup>131</sup> The theology of grace in Levinas, Purcell contends, can be read in terms of “the phenomenology of desire which tends to be excessive, and in terms of the phenomenology of awakening, whereby the glory of God is not only the human person

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<sup>127</sup> Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, 245.

<sup>128</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 113-122; *Mystery and Method*, 238-243; 245.

<sup>129</sup> Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, 228.

<sup>130</sup> Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, 247.

<sup>131</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 134.

fully alive (*Gloria dei homo vivens*), but also the human person fully awake (*Gloria dei, homo vigilans*).”<sup>132</sup> Levinas offers here a possibility of dialogue with Christian theology in terms of grace as desire and awakening. Purcell, however, in suggesting that Levinas’s phenomenology of desire and awakening is close to a theology of grace might still have to show how one could reconcile the idea of grace as God’s presence and assistance in Christian theology with Levinas’s God who takes no part in the subject’s responsibility for the other, except that He only passes by as a trace.

*Levinas’s Phenomenology of the Face and the Theology of Sacrament*

Purcell sees in Levinas’s phenomenology of the face an affinity with a theology of sacrament as developed by Karl Rahner. Rahner understands the sacraments in general in terms of a transcendental relationship between humanity and divinity by which the sacraments as signs effect grace (what they signify) in as much as grace is bestowed by being signified. The sacramental sign is intrinsically related to the grace it communicates by virtue of its created nature and purpose. Hence, the efficacy of the sacraments derives not from any human capacity, effort or merit, but from God’s gift to humans. Thus, sacraments as signs are a suitable medium for the manifestation of God’s grace in the human person.<sup>133</sup> The significance of the sacramental sign (*sacramentum*) comes not from the signified, but from the symbolic reality or mystery whose presence is caused or signified by the consecrated material sign. The sacramental sign or *sacramentum tantum* by signifying effects the reality of grace (*res*). The ontological reality of sign guarantees the effectiveness and objectivity of the sacraments. Rahner calls these material signs real or intrinsic symbols.

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<sup>132</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 112.

<sup>133</sup> Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, 263.

Purcell sees in the relationship between sign and reality in Rahner's sacramental theology an affinity with Levinas's phenomenology of the face. The face is the "way" the other *appears* to the subject in a transcendental dimension, exceeding the subject's gaze by which he/she would objectify it. It "signifies, beyond signification, a relation with an absolute absent, an '*au delà de l'être*'" and passes away as a *trace*.<sup>134</sup> In this dimension of the face as presence (proximity and distance) of that which does not present itself and who passes away as trace; Purcell sees a Rahnerian sacramental distinction between sign and symbol. He argues that "to speak of the face as the trace of the other – beyond representation – is to speak of the sacramentality of the face."<sup>135</sup> In Rahner, according to Purcell, material elements such as bread, wine, water, etc, can never function on their own as sacramental signs without transcendental referent. God's grace is the cause of the sign, bringing it about and making it present. In terms of the sacramentality of the face, the face of the other would be the symbolic reality or mystery whose presence-absence as a trace is signified by the other person's absolute transcendence. Thus, what the subject is left with in the absence of the other is the sacramental face as trace (symbolic reality or mystery) of the other caused by the reality of the other person's absolute transcendence.

In this sense, Levinas's face can be read as a sacramental sign. For a face as sign "signifies something other than itself which is irreducible to itself, and irreducible in view of the fact of the transcendence of the Other person who gives the sign, an absolute transcendence which, for Levinas, is ultimately guaranteed by God as 'the other of the Other.'"<sup>136</sup> For the face of the other as trace to function as sign (symbolic reality or mystery) it needs a transcendental referent which the other brings by virtue of its

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<sup>134</sup> Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, 261.

<sup>135</sup> Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, 262-263.

<sup>136</sup> Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, 272.

association with God as the other of the other. Thus, Purcell could say that for both Rahner and Levinas, each in his own right, “exteriority as well as materiality belongs to the meaning of the sacramental sign.”<sup>137</sup> They both “assert the transcendental value of the signified.”<sup>138</sup> There is in a sign an embodiment of God’s grace. For Rahner and Levinas, Purcell argues, “the relationship between the finite and infinite is expressed symbolically due to the symbolic nature of reality;” for “there is distance between image and reality, not confusion.”<sup>139</sup> Levinas’s reflection on the subject who is being faced by the face of the other is expressed in ethical terms enabling, as it were, Rahner’s emphasis on symbolic reality to be sufficiently humanized.<sup>140</sup>

There is in Levinas and Rahner, Purcell suggests, a move from sign to the symbolism of sign as the “other-in-me.” For Rahner, Purcell contends, finite being is relational in the sense that, as multiple in itself, it realizes itself only in expressing itself through the *conversio ad phantasmata*. Levinas’s being also shares the same relationality in itself, because finite existence is best expressed in terms of reflexivity of the verb ‘to be’: ‘it is not just that one is, one is oneself (*on n’est pas, on s’est*)’.<sup>141</sup> Because “existence is primarily reflexive[...], each being forms, in its own way, more or less perfectly according to its degree of being, something distinct from itself and yet, one with itself, ‘for’ its own fulfillment.”<sup>142</sup> Consequently, the meaning of symbol for both Rahner and Levinas is the subject’s self-realization in its own intrinsic otherness. The subject finds itself always and already absorbed in the other, in whom, it finds its fulfillment.

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<sup>137</sup> Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, 272.

<sup>138</sup> Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, 292.

<sup>139</sup> Paul J. Levesque, “Review of *Mystery and Method: The Other in Rahner and Levinas*,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 53/4 (June 2000): 951-952.

<sup>140</sup> Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, 275-279.

<sup>141</sup> Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, 293.

<sup>142</sup> Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, 278.

This other-in-me for Rahner is the one spoken about in sacramental sign, yet remains hidden and excessive in the spoken words of the sacraments.

In terms of the Eucharist, the church remembers Christ's words and actions. Now, the words spoken by the church in the sacrament of the Eucharist are in memory of Christ and make him present. Christ is the one spoken about in the sacramental sign. The Eucharist makes Jesus Christ sacramentally present in a memorial sacrifice. In Levinas's language, this would correspond to the distinction between Saying (*le Dire*) and the Said (*le Dit*), with Saying remaining excessive with regard to what is Said. The Eucharist as memorial would be situated in the time of the other, that is, the *now* of the subject. This Eucharistic time which stems from the other is a liturgical time that calls for *diakonia* (service).<sup>143</sup> The liturgical theology of the church involves two major aspects: the glorification of God and the sanctification of humanity. The subject in glorifying God is invited to act justly toward the other; worship and service are interrelated. Hence, Purcell asserts, "the theological structure of the liturgy is 'other-oriented' just as, for Levinas, the philosophical structure of liturgy is 'a movement of the Same towards the Other which never returns to the Same'."<sup>144</sup> Philosophically, to participate in the liturgy, defined as a work for the people, is to respond in responsibility for the other in a non-reversible movement in which the other, "like the work of grace in us, preveniently precedes and enables the self to move beyond the self."<sup>145</sup> Liturgy is inseparable to the service one renders to the neighbor. As a result, according to Purcell, the church in celebrating the mystery of the Eucharistic memorial enters into the time of the other who "gives time" and makes it meaningful.

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<sup>143</sup> Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, 269-270; *Levinas and Theology*, 147-154.

<sup>144</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 138.

<sup>145</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 139-140.

For the subject to respond in responsibility for the other, Purcell argues, is to be Eucharist in the sense of substitution. Jesus Christ, in the mystery of the Eucharist, gave himself in substitution *for you* and *for many*, in reference to the words of the institution narrative. Read ethically, the Eucharist is both responsibility and working for justice. The unique other calls the subject to responsibility. This invitation also opens up to many other's (humanity) in such a way that through the face of this one other person, the whole of humanity appeals for justice in the world.<sup>146</sup> Levinas's incarnation (Man-God), unlike Christian theology's (God-Man), centers on the human person's role and responsibility in the world. To be a subject is to be incarnate "for-the-other-person." Incarnation for Levinas is now the human person's divine intentionality, in terms of "expiation for others" or "substitution" "for-the-other-person." Subjectivity is understood in terms of kenosis, passivity, and expiation. And God's proximity manifests itself in the subject's ethical responsibility and in the workings of justice.<sup>147</sup> The other-in-me as symbolism of sign derives its surplus of meaning or incomprehensibility from its association with God, "the other than the other." Hence, subjectivity is now defined in terms of the "for-the-other" or openness to the other human person. For Purcell, Rahner and Levinas affirm the necessity of love of neighbor as the most important act of the love of God.

Purcell, however, raises some concerns about Levinas's understanding of ontology which, in his estimation, creates a rift between being and good, thus provoking a risk of "a metaphysical responsibility without an ontological commitment."<sup>148</sup> He suggests a reading of Levinas's ethical responsibility as a *being otherwise* instead of an *otherwise than being*. For him, although Levinas's *Otherwise than being* affirms, "the

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<sup>146</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 156-158; *Mystery and Method*, 286-287.

<sup>147</sup> Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 159-164.

<sup>148</sup> Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, 329.

absolute uncompromisable value of the other ... offers no way of linking responsibility with practical commitment to the other;”<sup>149</sup> it locates the good, not in being, but rather beyond being. Purcell argues rather for a possibility of finding the good in being and that being also has the capacity to actualize it.<sup>150</sup>

Purcell’s merit, one has to admit, is to have tried to establish some connection between Levinas’s transcendental ethics of responsibility and Christian theology. He sees in Levinas’s thought “the possibility for ethical redemption of the ontological which is so prevalent in theological thinking.”<sup>151</sup> Although Levinas has been critical of Christian theology, he has also expressed the need for the recovering of certain theological themes. The theology Levinas accepts, Purcell argues, is the one that shows consideration for the neighbor, that is, the one that takes ethics seriously. It is important to note that theology cannot be reduced to ethics, yet the insistence on the perfection of charity and the service for neighbor as a manner of human living, are the characteristics of holiness of life that Christian theology teaches. Thus, communion with God would be meaningless without ethical responsibility for the neighbor as it is in Levinas. Hence, Purcell claims that ethics is both first philosophy and “first theology” could be justified on the basis of a true Catholic spirituality that connects contemplation with perfection of charity. Levinas, however, Purcell insists, is not a theologian and it is not theology that he does, yet, what he proposes can be seen as a preliminary instruction for theology. While Levinas does not offer a theology of grace, his phenomenology of desire and awakening point in the direction of the theology of grace. In Levinas’s notion of face, Purcell sees a

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<sup>149</sup> Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, 329.

<sup>150</sup> Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, 329-332.

<sup>151</sup> Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, xv.

sacramentality of the face of the other which is close to Rahner's theology of sacraments and the Church's doctrine of the mystery of the Eucharist.

### *Conclusion*

This fourth chapter examined Dussel, Marion, and Purcell's attempt to use Levinas's thought for theological discourse. What transpires is a general consensus that Levinas's philosophy offers an opportunity for dialogue with Christian theology in the postmodern world because his philosophical project is guided by a concern for the human other as the condition of possibility for the human subject's subjectivity. Subjectivity is being for the other in *affective responsibility* that precedes all acts of thinking, knowing, and willing. Philosophically speaking, a free human person is fundamentally given to the other in love and responsibility. Dussel, Marion, and Purcell, each in his own right, argue that Levinas's focus on a God accessible in love and justice calls to mind Christian theology's relating of love of God with love of neighbor.

Dussel's main argument as it relates to the question of alterity is his desire to liberate philosophy from the center of colonial power toward the periphery or the underside of history. He embarks in a task of explaining the uniqueness of Latin American philosophy as opposed to US-European philosophy. He argues for a philosophical theology of liberation that takes seriously insights from Levinas's philosophy of the other or exteriority.

Marion's thought as it relates to Levinas is committed to denouncing traditional metaphysics' view of being as substance, presence, and *causa sui*. He questions traditional metaphysics' inability to think alterity or otherness, without turning it into more of the selfsame. He claims phenomenology as first philosophy that opens to the



theological and acknowledges his indebtedness to Levinas's philosophy. Like with Levinas, the concept of reversed intentionality is significant for Marion's phenomenology. Givenness and saturated phenomenon result in the displacement of the transcendental ego, which can no longer be considered the source of meaning. The subject's self-sufficiency is put into question by the look of the face of the other as with Levinas. Marion joins Levinas in rejecting onto-theology and argues for a theology of *caritas/agape* in the sense of Levinas's ethical responsibility.

Purcell attempts a correlation between Levinas's philosophy and Christian theology. The point of departure that facilitates this possible connection is their common anthropological perspective. Human existence, he argues, is the crossing point between phenomenology and theology. First, phenomenology and theology share the same point of departure, human existence. They both focus on the human person who is capable of asking the question of God and/or for whom God can become a possible question. Second, all meaning and part of Western knowledge come from the Hebrew Bible, in particular from the ethical commands of the Torah. Hence, phenomenology is empty and meaningless without biblical humanism. At the same time, theology would also be empty and meaningless without the natural field of phenomenology that facilitates the manifestation of the given facts or events of revelation in a particular figure of phenomenality. Besides, Purcell finds in certain aspects of Levinas's philosophical thought some similarities with the writings of some theologians, specifically with regard to the theology of grace and sacraments. He sees in Levinas's notions of desire and awakening something that points in the direction of the human desire for God in the theology of grace.

While each of these scholars interprets aspects of Levinas's philosophy along different lines; all delineate the importance of his thought for theological anthropology. They all agree that Levinas is not a theologian, but rather a philosopher of the other, who, inspired by his experience as prisoner of war (World War II) and by the assassination of all of his family members by the Nazis, articulates an ethical relation born of responsibility for the other human person. Dussel, Marion, and Purcell, as this chapter has shown, see in Levinas an authentic philosopher and a dialogical partner for Christian theology. In a sense, they argue that his philosophy is a valuable resource that Christian theology should consider.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Levinas's Philosophy, Liberation Theology, and Contemporary Sub-Saharan Africa Socio-Political and Ethnic Conflicts

#### Introduction

This dissertation ends with a *praxis* issue. We have shown throughout this work that Levinas's philosophy and liberation theology reveal that humankind can overcome the history of the hatred of the other person if each person recognizes a dimension of the divine in every human person. Levinas's philosophy and liberation theology emerged within the context of human suffering; they search for the divine transcendence in the life of commitment to the human person, and view the turn to the other/neighbor as a prospect for the re-imagining of the world. Levinas, Gutiérrez, and Sobrino, therefore, describe subjectivity primarily in terms of the one-for-the-other. The goal of this final chapter is to examine the significance of these two approaches for addressing contemporary sub-Saharan Africa socio-political and ethnic conflicts.<sup>1</sup>

Speaking of sub-Saharan Africa, this study is aware of the danger of generalization because of the obvious historical, socio-political, cultural and ethnic differences between countries. Nonetheless, it is our argument that these differences are

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<sup>1</sup> While the concern for the humanity of every human person should be a preoccupation of every human being living on this planet, the focus in this chapter will limit this discussion to the African continent which constitutes the social location of concern to this study. On the association of the ethnic conflict and African politics, see Harvey Glickman, ed., *Ethnic Conflict and Democratization in Africa* (Atlanta, Georgia: The African Studies Association Press, 1995). For a couple of examples of this association, see Jean Francois Bayart *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*, translated from the French by Mary Harper, Christopher and Elizabeth Harrison (London and New York: Longman, 1993), 41-59; the French original is titled, *L'Etat en Afrique : la politique du ventre* (Paris: Libraire Arthème Fayard, 1989). This work is aware of the divergences of views in defining the terms *ethnicity*, *ethnic group*, or *ethnic identity*. However, this work will use these three terms synonymously to mean "the consciousness among people who share cultural and linguistic, sometimes kinship and religious, roots, and who conditionally affiliate for purposes of political mobilization and political action." See Githu Mugai, "Ethnicity and the Renewal of Competitive Politics in Kenya," in *Ethnic Conflict and Democratization in Africa*, 161.

not sufficient reasons to justify the suffering of any human person; neither are poverty and economic inequality. The suffering of a human person is always and everywhere the same no matter the reasons or socio-political and cultural differences. Today, attentive observers of sub-Saharan Africa share the view that socio-political and ethnic violence seems to be the characteristic of contemporary sub-Saharan African societies.<sup>2</sup> In most cases, the struggle for political and economic power and the role played by sub-Saharan political leaders in creating and triggering group identity, have been the cause of most of these conflicts. The wealth of ethnic differences has been transformed into violent conflicts.<sup>3</sup> It is the same human other whom Levinas, Gutiérrez, and Sobrino speak about who is poor, marginalized, oppressed and killed in the mass murder in Rwanda, the Apartheid in South Africa, the civil wars in the two Congos, Angola, Liberia and Sierra-Leone, the rebel movement in Chad and Central Africa Republic, Somalia, the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Cost), and more recently the political instability in Guinea Conakry, in Zimbabwe, and of course in the ongoing crisis in the Darfur region of Sudan. The suffering of the human other that Levinas, Gutiérrez, and Sobrino talk about is real in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa.

This chapter proposes that Levinas's philosophy and liberation theology's turn to the other/neighbor provides a fundamental path toward a flourishing sub-Saharan Africa.

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<sup>2</sup> Einar Braathen, Morten Boas and Gjermund Soether, eds, *Ethnicity Kills? The Politics of War, Peace and Ethnicity in SubSaharan Africa* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); Henri Bienen, "Leaders, Violence, and the Absence of Change in Africa," *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 108, 2 (1993): 271-282; David L. Huff, James M. Lutz, "The Contagion of Political Unrest in Independent Black Africa," *Economic Geography* 50, 4 (1974): 352-367; Jean Pierre Chrétien, "Les racines de la violence contemporaine en Afrique," *Politique Africaine: Violence et Pouvoir* 42 (1991): 15-27.

<sup>3</sup> Anna-Maria Gentili writes: "Ethnic identity together with power seeking has played a key role in many conflicts, old and new, and has ideologically informed the perpetuation of wars to the point of near anarchy in many African countries." See her "Ethnicity and Citizenship in Sub Saharan Africa," in *Is Violence Inevitable in Africa? Theories of Conflicts and Approaches to Conflict Prevention*, edited by Patrick Chabal, Ulf Engel, Anna-Maria Gentili (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2005), 39.

What sub-Saharan Africa needs is a rethinking of the human other as the condition for the possibility of human subjectivity, a proposition that Levinas, Gutiérrez, and Sobrino would agree with. This work argues that Levinas's philosophy's and liberation theology's redefinition of subjectivity in terms of the other (love of neighbor) carries something of lasting value for addressing the sub-Saharan African socio-political and ethnic conflicts. In chapter four we demonstrated how Dussel, Marion, and Purcell showed the relevance of the turn to the neighbor for Christian theology and found in the analysis of the self-other relationship an essential path for a construction of a better world. While Levinas situates this turn primarily in a non-ontological realm, offering liberation theology a viable philosophical framework of human intersubjectivity, it nevertheless falls short of explaining how this asymmetrical turn is played out in history. Liberation theology rescues Levinas's thought and bears witness to it in the real time of history through the concept of *conversion to the neighbor*. It expresses in history a possibility for every subject to act with *affective responsibility* toward the other and functions in the sense of Purcell's *being otherwise*.<sup>4</sup> Dussel and Purcell, as shown in chapter four, criticized the non-availability of Levinas's ethical responsibility to the real time of history. They insisted on the fact that it is in history that the subject should recognize the humanity of the other human being. Liberation theology complements Levinas's philosophy and illustrates how his ethical responsibility could be implemented in concrete history. Levinas's philosophy and liberation theology and its turn to the neighbor calls on each African and/or African political leader to do what no one else can do for them: to bear the burden of another person's existence and supply for his/her wants. The emphasis is on the turn to the other or love of neighbor that makes the subject fully human.

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<sup>4</sup> For our discussion on this, see chapter three, 159-164.

A concrete experience of a life lived *otherwise than being* of Levinas's ethical subjectivity is impossible. However, in chapter three this work argued for the possibility to conceive of the human subject as ethically responsible within the time of history in the sense of Purcell's *being otherwise* that breaks any tendency to totality through the dimension of divine transcendence. As a result, this work points to the lives of those men and women who rose above their times and their circumstances to live out a life of self-sacrifice and sincere concern for others, be it for religious and/or political reasons, as concrete experiences that illustrate Levinas's "ideal of holiness" in the sense of Purcell's *being otherwise*. Among so many examples of saints and heroes, this study focuses on the stories of Nelson Mandela in South Africa and Jacques Désiré Laval in the Island of Mauritius because of their connection to the African continent.

### **I. An Overview of Contemporary Sub-Saharan African Socio-Political and Ethnic Conflicts**

The focus in this section is on sub-Saharan Africa with its multiple socio-political and ethnic problems. Most traditional sub-Saharan African worldviews acknowledge that human life is the greatest gift; a gift desired and treasured above all material goods. Ultimate joy and fulfillment derive from the propagation, promotion and protection of the life of the other. African philosophical anthropology focuses on relationship, that is, on the human person as essentially "living in solidarity with."<sup>5</sup> Sadly, the picture of most sub-Saharan African countries today is an ugly one. The daily violation of the human person by hunger, unemployment, disease, civil war, unjust socio-political and economical structures, and environmental degradation scourges the human condition.

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<sup>5</sup> Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Enugu, Nigeria: Snaap Press, 1996), 42-44.

While not denying the existence of conflicts in pre-colonial sub-Saharan Africa, one cannot overemphasize the influence of slavery and colonialization on the African history.<sup>6</sup> The disordering of Sub-Saharan Africa by the Western colonial expansion and domination reached its apex in the system of *apartheid* in South Africa.<sup>7</sup> Explorers reported to colonial administrators the existence of lands without owners, uncultured and uncultivated. Immediately, groups of Europeans were sent to conquer this new continent. Colonial administrators and missionaries worked hand-in-hand to bring European knowledge and Christian faith to these indigenous people. Africans learned European history that laid emphasis on the centrality and primacy of the European subject over and against the Africans;<sup>8</sup> after all, Africa “is no historical part of the World; it has no movement, no development to exhibit.”<sup>9</sup> In addition to the effects of slavery and colonialization, and even after the so-called *independence* of sub-Saharan African countries, Western powers continue to turn sub-Saharan Africa into a favorite field for their struggle of influence. Without exonerating African leaders for their responsibility in creating a wretched situation for the people of sub-Saharan African nations, most often, these leaders are manipulated to the extent that they have no control of their nation’s natural resources. The establishment of structures of domination and control limit more

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<sup>6</sup> Abdalla Bujra, “African Conflicts: Their Causes and Their Political Environment,” in *Development Policy Management Forum*, Occasional paper, no. 4, a paper presented at the Ad Hoc Experts Group Meeting on the Economics of Civil Conflicts in Africa, held at UNECA, Addis Ababa, 7-8 April 2000, 28-29. According to Arrighi G., “in sharp contrast to East Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa inherited from the pre-colonial and colonial years a political-economic configuration that left little room for the construction of viable national economies or robust nation states.” See his “The African Crisis,” *New Left Review* 15 (2002): 5-36, 29.

<sup>7</sup> *Apartheid* is a system of socio-political and racial segregation and discrimination that was put in place in South Africa from 1948 to 1994.

<sup>8</sup> Mario I. Aguilar, “Postcolonial African Theology in Kabasele Lumbala,” *Theological Studies* 63/2 (2002): 306.

<sup>9</sup> G.W.F Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 99.

and more the range of choice left to sub-Saharan Africa. As Anna-Maria Gentili contends,

structural adjustment policies and programmes originating in the 1980s, which were meant to introduce Africa to a mainstream market economy, have contributed to the imbalance and dependency of African polities, along with excessive economic extraversion and unequal access to resources in already very asymmetrical societies, characterized by weak local entrepreneurship.<sup>10</sup>

The unjust and unethical programs of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank also should not pass unnoticed.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, most socio-political and economic changes in sub-Saharan Africa today are influenced by encounters with the realities of modernity and postmodernity. Sub-Saharan Africa, in one way or the other embraced both the positive and negative socio-political, economic, and cultural aspects of the Western world. In the aftermath of the Enlightenment, contemporary sub-Saharan Africans came to embrace the project of modern philosophical anthropology which established freedom, self-consciousness, and self-subsistent autonomy as fundamental features of what it is to be human in the world. The globalization of the world and the unbalanced changes in socio-political, economic and cultural relations has created a fuzzy kind of situation in sub-Saharan Africa. All consistent sub-Saharan African value systems apparently have collapsed as new meanings are being born rapidly at the meeting of different cultures. The result is a perceptible fragility of behaviors visible in most contemporary sub-Saharan African societies for reasons which could be different from one place to another. The fragility of behavior takes the form of corruption of every kind. These include contempt of human

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<sup>10</sup> Gentili, "Ethnicity and Citizenship in Sub Saharan Africa," 39.

<sup>11</sup> Uzuoku, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*, 2; Howard Stein, *The Development of the Developmental State in Africa: A Theoretical Inquiry* (University of Copenhagen: Center of African Studies, 2000).



dignity, violations of human rights, ethnicity, prostitution, embezzlement of public funds, wasting of national wealth on prestigious projects, and the poor administration of public property. Today, most sub-Saharan African countries live in a situation where the will of one's self-realization has led to a degrading of the value of the human other. While this study recognizes the diversity of situations in each country, it is not too difficult to characterize contemporary sub-Saharan Africa as a place of conflict. In most cases, groups of self-centered political leaders contribute to this intolerable situation.

It has become standard for thinkers of Third World countries to hold European nations and the United States responsible for their socio-political and economic hardship. Obviously, the ascendance of Europe and the United States remains one of the major causes of privation for most sub-Saharan African countries. This study, however, wishes to pay more attention to the responsibility of sub-Saharan Africans themselves, especially the inhumanity of their leaders to their fellow human beings. The leveling of accusations against several Western nations often provides a source of cover for local politicians who have implemented "Machiavellian" plans to gain profit at the expense of their own people. Even in the exceptional cases where an extreme conflict bursts out between two neighboring countries, the spring of armed violence is always bound to internal political stakes. It is a question either of preserving or reinforcing an established power, or of entering into dissidence with it. As a result, the sources of conflict in contemporary Africa are primarily civil and indigenous. The nature of the state system is thus at the heart of conflicts.<sup>12</sup> Examples of this problem can be found in many sub-Saharan African countries such as Congo Brazzaville, Central Africa Republic, Gabon, Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana, Togo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire,

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<sup>12</sup> Chrétien, "Les racines de la violence contemporaine en Afrique," 19.

Somalia, Sudan, Chad, and Zimbabwe to name but a few.<sup>13</sup> Political and economical fragility comes from non-recognition of the human other and to a blind imitation of foreign models that do not reflect a deeper and real aspiration of the people. The roots of the current situation of poverty and violence in sub-Saharan Africa are both Western interference in African politics and the struggle for political and economic power among Africans elites, who desire to amass wealth.<sup>14</sup> To examine this issue, this work provides three case studies whereby the struggle for political and economic power and the accumulation of wealth for one's self realization and/or one's ethnic group seemed to have been the source of socio-political and ethnic conflicts. The case studies we focus on are Congo Brazzaville, Côte d'Ivoire, and Kenya. It is to these that we now turn.

### *Congo Brazzaville*

The Republic of the Congo or Congo Brazzaville is a heavily forested country located in central Africa. It shares borders with Gabon on the west, Cameroon and Central African Republic on the north, and Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) on the east and south.<sup>15</sup> The country is a multi-tribal society whose members largely belong

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<sup>13</sup> Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*.

<sup>14</sup> Achille Mbembe, *L'Afrique Indocile* (Paris : Karthala, 1988); "Pouvoir, violence, et accumulation," in *Politique Africaine* 39 (1990) : 7-24; Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence : A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, vol. 2 (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1981); Xavier Harel, *Afrique, Pillage à huis clos: comment une poignée d'initiés siphonne le pétrole africain* (Paris : Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2006); Vincent Hugué, *Les sorciers blancs : enquête sur les faux amis français de l'Afrique* (Paris : Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2007); François-Xavier Verschave, *De la francafrique à la mafrafrique* (Paris : Tribord, 2005) ; Guillaume Olivier, Saïdou Sidibé, François-Xavier Verschave, *L'aide publique au développement : un outil à réinventer* (Paris : Charles Léopold Mayer, 2004) ; Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*.

<sup>15</sup> Representative works consulted: John Frank Clark, David E. Gardinier, eds., *Political Reform in Francophone Africa* (Colorado, Westview Press, 1997); René Gauze, *The Politics of Congo Brazzaville*, translated, edited, and with a supplement by Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1973); Rémy Bazenguissa-Ganga, "The Spread of Political Violence in Congo-Brazzaville," in *African Affairs* 98, 390 (1999): 37-54; "Les Ninja, les Cobras, et les Zoulous crèvent l'écran à Brazzaville: le rôle des medias et la construction des identités de violence politique," *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue Canadienne des Etudes Africaines*, vol. 33, 2/3 (1999) : 329-361. Henri Ossebi, "De la galère à la guerre: jeunes et « Cobras » dans les quartiers Nord de Brazzaville" in *Politique*

to the Kongo, Téké, Bémbé, Mbochi, Kouyou, Vili, and other groups. Within these groups, one finds subdivisions such as tribes and clans. Unfortunately, this ethnic identity in the Congo became the “backdrop of all political conflicts.”<sup>16</sup> Since the independence in 1960, the country remained relatively peaceful while Albert Youlou served as its first president. The workers’ unions and rival political parties initiated an uprising that deposed him in 1963. Youlou’s regime was “best described as mildly corrupt, directionless in domestic policy, and deferential to France.”<sup>17</sup> Immediately after Youlou’s defeat, the army temporarily took charge of the country. It put in a civilian interim government headed by Alphonse Massamba-Débat, a Lari similar to his predecessor Youlou.<sup>18</sup> After some six years in office, Massamba-Débat was also forced to give up power to an officer named Marien Ngouabi, who hailed from the Kouyou tribe in the northern part of the country. His term in office constituted a shift in Congo’s political orientation. Marien Ngouabi declared the country a Marxist-Leninist state under the banner of one-party state, the Congolese Labor Party (Parti Congolais du Travail, PCT). The PCT controlled the country until June 1991. After the murder of Ngouabi, Joachim Yhombi-Opango replaced him. He was a northerner of mixed ethnicity.<sup>19</sup> Once again, Yhombi-Opango was forced to relinquish power to Colonel Denis Sassou-Nguesso, from

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*Africaine* 72 (1998):17-33; Bujra, “African Conflicts: Their Causes and Their Political Environment,” 26-27; Kajsa Ekholm, Anne Sundberg, “Ethnic War and Ethnic Cleansing in Brazzaville,” Unpublished manuscript, n.d. These Swedish scholars conducted research in Brazzaville in May 1994, and their report is one of the most detailed and authentic account of Brazzaville’s 1993-1994 ethnic violence; CIA – The World FactBook – Congo, Republic of [data base on-line] available from <https://cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/cf.html>, accessed February 23, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> John F. Clark, “Congo: Transition and the Struggle to Consolidate,” in *Political Reform in Francophone Africa*, 63. For a better grasp of ethnicity in Congo Brazzaville, see Marcel Soret, *Histoire du Congo, capitale Brazzaville* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1978), 19-29. It is important to note here that this issue of ethnic identity is not only peculiar to Congo Brazzaville; it is the case for most sub-Saharan African countries.

<sup>17</sup> Clark, “Congo: Transition and the Struggle to Consolidate,” 63.

<sup>18</sup> For an understanding of Congo’s ethnic groups and their leaders, see Gauze, *The Politics of Congo Brazzaville*, 1-8.

<sup>19</sup> Clark, “Congo: Transition and the Struggle to Consolidate,” 64-65.

the Mbochi tribe. At the center of this turmoil was the struggle for power and the control of the state for one's own self-interest. With the introduction of the multiparty system in 1991 and the convening of an all-party national conference to discuss the nation's political future, ended the Marxist system and Sassou-Nguesso's twelve years in power. Since 1991, Congo has undergone multiple socio-political and ethnic crises. The spark for most of these conflicts has been electoral disputes, which shook the Congo in the second half of 1993, 1994 and 1997. This was not surprising for a nation which was lacking "democratic culture."

The issue of ethnicity was more pronounced in the 1993-94 civil wars than in 1997. Conflict between political parties led to a disappearance of a central state with supreme power to use force and restore order. Instead, the Congolese people witnessed the emergence of violence and hatred of the other along historical tribal fault lines, with the northern Mbochi ethnic group on one side and the southern pool Lari and Vili groups on the other. The emergence of ethnic cleansing led to the division of Congo into three ethno-political groups in Brazzaville, each of them claiming supremacy and control of territories.<sup>20</sup> Every political leader – to seize power – formed his own militia (Ninjas, Cobras, Cocoyes, Zoulous, Mamba, and Obevillois). Each militia group enlisted young men to achieve their goal of political domination. The young men who joined these militia groups mostly were uneducated and unemployed.<sup>21</sup> The cessation of hostilities between these groups came in 1999. Today, Congo is surprisingly peaceful, even though there is still a rebel group in the southern part of the country. In March 2003, this group

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<sup>20</sup> Rémy Bazenguissa- Ganga, "The Political Militia in Brazzaville," *A Journal of Opinion* 26, 1(1998): 37-40.

<sup>21</sup> Ossebi, "De la galère à la guerre: jeunes et « Cobras » dans les quartiers Nord de Brazzaville," 17-33.

signed a peace treaty with the current administration. However, the peace remains fragile.

The years 1993-1994 and 1997-1999 were periods of socio-political, economic and ethnic unrest in Congo Brazzaville. Political and ethnic violence remains one of the preoccupations of the Congolese people. The years of civil war showed the people of Congo that there remain important ethnic and political differences within the nation. Southerners, dominated by the Lari, believe that the Mbochi controlled north would never relinquish power. Political theorists claim there are secret documents of the banned political parties that show how deep-seated are the desire of the north to remain in power and the goal of the south to capture power. Politics and ethnic rivalry fuel each other. Ethnicity and politics thus constitute important variables for understanding life in Congo Brazzaville today. The greatest problem the Congolese people face today is the struggle for power and wealth. The ministerial posts and civil service jobs in post-war Congo have become a battleground to loot the treasury and exploit the Congolese population. The unemployment rate increases daily. Prices of basics commodities are simply unheard of, and yet billions of Franc CFA from oil revenue and other resources are misused and kept away in Euro-American banks. At the heart of the socio-political and ethnic crisis in Congo Brazzaville was a series of violent clashes in the country since December 1993 organized by political leaders for their own self-interest. These events have jeopardized the country's socio-economic development and just social order. Today, the Congolese people seem to have lost hope in political leaders in building the nation.

## *Côte d'Ivoire*

Côte d'Ivoire is located in West Africa and shares a border with Mali and Burkina-Faso in the north, the Gulf of Guinea in the south, Liberia and Guinea Conakry in the west, and Ghana in the east. It remains one of the most prosperous and stable countries in West Africa. After the death of its longtime president Félix Houphouët-Boigny, Côte d'Ivoire experienced two destabilizing coups in 1999 and in 2001 and a harmful civil war in 2002.<sup>22</sup> According to François Roubaud, the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire is both economic and political, which can be more or less combined or exclusive. On the economic front, nearly two decades of mismanagement and structural adjustment led to the collapse of the nation's economy. Today, the country remains in a state of impoverishment that has led to the destabilization of the family and the community network of solidarity. Côte d'Ivoire's political turmoil is the result of the violent competition for power that emerged when Félix Houphouët-Boigny died in 1993.<sup>23</sup> His successor Henri Konan Bédié tried to revive the economy, but this created more problems politically because his concept of *ivoirité*<sup>24</sup> excluded many opponents from the political process, among which, Alasane Dramane Ouattara. The dissatisfaction with Bédié's administration led a group of unruly soldiers to orchestrate a coup d'état, which forced

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<sup>22</sup> For an in-depth understanding of the socio-political and turmoil in Côte d'Ivoire, the following are helpful studies: Robert J. Mundt, "Cote d'Ivoire: Continuity and Change in a Semi-Democracy," in *Political Reform in Francophone Africa*, 182-203; Jacques Baulin, *La Succession d'Houphouët-Boigny* (Paris: Karthala, 2000); Alice Hellenbogen, *La Succession d'Houphouët-Boigny entre tribalisme et démocratie* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002); Marc Le Pape et Claudine Vidal (dir.), *Côte d'Ivoire. L'année terrible 1999-2000* (Paris: Karthala, 2002); *Côte d'Ivoire 2025* (Abidjan: Editions Neter, 1997); Dossier Côte d'Ivoire, *Afrique Contemporaine* 206, 2 (2003):3-203, 223-225.

<sup>23</sup> François Roubaud, "La crise vue d'en bas à Abidjan : ethnicité, gouvernance, et démocratie," *Afrique Contemporaine* 206, 2 (2003):57-58.

<sup>24</sup> The concept *ivoirité* or *ivoirianness* was introduced in the Ivorian political vocabulary under the presidency of Henri Konan Bédié. It aims at defining nationality of the Ivory Coast in a context of economic crisis, democratization and national unification. Politically, it took a xenophobic overtone and was used, as it is often argued, as a way to deny Alasane Outtarra, a former primer minister of the country, the right to run for presidential election on the assumption that he is not an Ivorian.

president Bédié into exile in France. After the coup, Général Robert Guei seized power in 1999. In 2000, he organized the elections which he manipulated and won. His political ineffectiveness caused outrage among the people. The people of Côte d'Ivoire forced him to step down and Laurent Gbagbo eventually became the democratically elected president. In 2002, some unruly members of the army, but without success, initiated another coup. The same year saw the rise of a rebel group called "Les Forces Nouvelles," which controlled a large segment of the northern side of the country. Forced by the international community to negotiate with the rebel group, Laurent Gbagbo and other political opposition leaders met at Linas-Marcoussis, France to sign a peace accord. The accord granted the rebel movement a couple of ministerial positions in a unity government.

For many observers, it is Article 35 of the Ivorian Constitution, which set the eligibility requirements for the office of president that constituted the catalyst of all the political confrontations, ethnic and religious.<sup>25</sup> Since the early 1990s, the political factor was crystallized around the conditions of eligibility, the code of nationality, and the residence permits or the land code. The four presidential candidates (Laurent Gbagbo, Robert Gueï, Henri Konan Bédié and Alasane Dramane Ouattara) and their respective clans instrumentalized these issues in their merciless fight for the control of power.<sup>26</sup> Hence, politicians of both sides of the socio-political and ethnic divide fuelled, exploited, and maintained the civil war for their own ends. Today, tensions remain between the government and the opposition leaders. There remain a number of unknown factors and obstacles that need to be addressed. More importantly, questions that ignited the civil war

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<sup>25</sup> Marc Le Pape, "Les politiques d'affrontements en Côte d'Ivoire 1999-2003," *Afrique Contemporaine* 206, 2 (2003) :41-55.

<sup>26</sup> Roubaud, "La crise vue d'en bas à Abidjan : ethnicité, gouvernance, et démocratie," 58.

such as identification of illegal immigrants, land reform, the disarmament and control of equitable elections remain. French and West African soldiers are still in Côte d'Ivoire to preserve peace and security.<sup>27</sup> The socio-political and ethnic crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, since December 1999, has been the consequence of coup attempts, military and civil by political leaders. These crises have affected the country's long period of political stability. President Laurent Gbagbo and Forces Nouvelles' leader, Guillaume Soro recently signed a new peace-accord in Burkina-Faso. It is our hope that this will put an end to the crisis.

### *Kenya*

The Republic of Kenya shares borders with Tanzania in the south, Somalia in the east, Uganda in the west, and Ethiopia in the north. This country has been one of the most economically prosperous and politically stable countries in East Africa. A couple of months after its independence, the country was en route to democratic culture and held parliamentary and local elections between 1963 and 1974, in spite of the declaration of a one-party state, the Kenya African National Union (KANU). Two major ethnic groups, the Luo and the Kikuyu, constituted this one-party state and Jomo Kenyatta served as its first leader.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, other smaller ethnic groups came together to constitute another party, Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU), which existed under the leadership of Daniel Arap Moi, in reaction to the bigger party. The KADU feared the ascendancy of KANU in the newly independent country. This dynamism continued even after KADU

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<sup>27</sup> CIA – The World Fact Book – Cote d'Ivoire, Republic of [data base on-line] available from <https://cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/cf.html>, accessed February 26, 2007.

<sup>28</sup> David Troup, "Elections and Political Legitimacy in Kenya," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 63, 3 (1993): 371.



merged with KANU.<sup>29</sup> Jomo Kenyatta, the first president after the independence appointed Moi as his vice-president. Unfortunately, this did not change reality on the ground. With the blessing of Jomo Kenyatta, the Luo-Kikuyu alliance still controlled power in the government and the whole political arena. Thus, before his death, as Abdalla Bujra explains, Kenyatta “had already secured for his people the state government, a vast homeland in the Rift Valley and along the Kenya Coast, put commerce in their hands, inappropriate alliance with Asian and European bourgeoisies, and the brutalizing apparatuses such as the general service unit.”<sup>30</sup> Ethnic violence throughout the 1990s eventually took place in the Rift Valley and the Coastal Region.

The political situation in Kenya began to deteriorate rapidly with the death of its first president Jomo Kenyatta in 1978. By the time Arap Moi succeeded Kenyatta, he immediately tried to remedy the discrimination suffered by his tribe: the Kalenjin ethnic group and its allies. In 1983 and 1988, he organized elections to get rid of the barons of the Luo-Kikuyu alliance with members of his ethnic group and their allies; he did the same in the private sector, taking away business from the Luo-Kikuyu. He later made sure to build modern schools and universities in the Rift Valley and in the Coastal region to attend to the educational needs of his ethnic group. Politically, the Kenyan people forced him to adopt a multi-party system, which produced an important new factor of political insecurity for him and his party’s power. According to Human Rights Watch, “since the end of one-party rule in Kenya, election years have been consistently characterized by political violence. Politicians who have been implicated in past incidents

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<sup>29</sup> Stephen Orvis, “Morality and Political Tribalism in Kenya’s ‘Virtual Democracy’,” *Africa Issues* 29, 1/2 (2001): 8.

<sup>30</sup> Bujra, “African Conflicts: Their Causes and Their Political Environment,” 23.

of political violence have not been held to account.”<sup>31</sup> The improved economy during the presidency of Arap Moi sharpened social exclusion, marginalization and discontent among the poor in cities and villages. Intermittent clashes between ethnic groups took place over land throughout the decade of the 1990s. Thus, as Abdalla Bujra rightly argues, “it can be safely argued that by 1990, two decades of policies to advance ethnic and individual economic interest, has created a volatile ethnic situation in Kenya.”<sup>32</sup>

Today, Bujra continues,

the issue of the distribution between the ethnic groups of the wealth to be generated from the private sector has not yet been resolved. Clearly, the history of independent Kenya has been a struggle between [political leaders who use] the ethnic groups to capture state power in order to siphon off wealth [for their own interest] or to their region or ethnic group.<sup>33</sup>

In Congo Brazzaville, Côte d’Ivoire, and Kenya, the struggle for power, the desire for self-aggrandizement along with the accumulation of wealth for oneself and/or for one’s family, tribe, ethnic group, or to use Jean-Francois Bayart’s expression “the politics of the belly,”<sup>34</sup> has been and continue to be the primary causes of conflict in these nations. The picture of this observable hopelessness, shared both by Westerners and Africans, is troubling. Yet, not all hope is lost. Sub-Saharan Africa can still enjoy peace and meaningful life in spite of the continuing socio-political and ethnic conflicts. This would occur when a human person is placed at the center of all policies. The question becomes: how can Sub-Saharan Africans, in the context of poverty, injustice, oppression, struggle for power, dictatorship, and frequent ethnic and civil wars, seek answers to the question

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<sup>31</sup> Human Rights Watch, May 31, 2002.

<sup>32</sup> Bujra, “African Conflicts: Their Causes and Their Political Environment,” 24.

<sup>33</sup> Bujra, “African Conflicts: Their Causes and Their Political Environment,” 25. For studies that reinforce this view, see Githu Mugai, “Ethnicity and the Renewal of Competitive Politics in Kenya,” 161-195; Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*, 54.

<sup>34</sup> Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*.

of what it is to be human? How can they find within the intersubjective relation obligation and responsibility for the other human person? Again, this chapter suggests that the turn to the other/neighbor in Levinas's philosophy and liberation theology offers better prospects for a more peaceful and flourishing contemporary sub-Saharan Africa.

## **II. The Turn to the Other/Neighbor: A Road Map for Better Contemporary Sub-Saharan African Societies.**

The promise of a flourishing and prosperous sub-Saharan Africa cannot come with the application of Western socio-political and economic models of economic and political development. Rather, sub-Saharan Africa must take a path that values and places the human person at the center of its socio-political and economic models. The study of the conceptual affinities between Levinas's ethics of responsibility and liberation theology shows that these two approaches address this issue. Both are characterized by their rejection of a certain conception of human subjectivity as that which gives an inadequate meaning to the human other.

Levinas's philosophy, as it has been argued throughout this work, seeks to develop a phenomenological alternative to the ontology of Husserl and Heidegger, which reduces the subject's relation to the other person to knowledge. His argument is that ethics, that is, intersubjectivity and responsibility for the other human person, should replace traditional metaphysics as first philosophy. Indeed, the type of metaphysics Levinas associates with relates to the world and

centralizes our experience and opens us to the infinite otherness of transcendence...it endorses the primacy of an ethical philosophy which shows how man's relationship to man can transcend the natural rapport of possession, power, and belongingness, in search of a Good beyond Being.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Richard Kearney, "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas," in *Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage* (Manchester, NH: Manchester University Press, 1984), 48.

Levinas, therefore, is closer to Plato's concept of the Good and Descartes' Idea of the Infinite. For Levinas, this implies an appreciation of a human subject as fundamentally ordered toward the other human person who bears the trace of the Good and the Infinite. The subject's encounter with the other is expressed in terms of responsibility to the point of substitution, sensibility, hostage, proximity, and vulnerability. The ethical relation of infinite responsibility enacts the human person into subjectivity itself. Humanity at its best is enacted rather than a state of being; to be human is to act ethically.

The struggle for political power among African elites continues to play a major role in socio-political and ethnic conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa and in its inability to become politically and economically stable. It substantiates a fragility of behaviors among most Africans and African leaders in particular.<sup>36</sup> In Levinasian terms, this fragility of behaviors would be an expression of the attitude of the "same." The same, for Levinas, suggests a totalizing system in which the subject, not only identifies himself/herself in opposition to the other, but also displays his/her concrete egoistic attitude in relation to any exteriority. In this sense, in the subject's *séjour* (sojourn) in the world, he/she "feels" free and in control of everything because he/she is at home (*Chez soi dans sa Maison*), in his/her dwelling. This is the way or structure of identification of the same which is "the concreteness of egoism."<sup>37</sup>

In recent years, most sub-Saharan African countries have suffered a greater degree of violence due to some individuals' desire for self-realization and misuse of institutional power. The cause of most national conflicts stems from harmful actions of

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<sup>36</sup> The following are the expressions of the fragility of behaviors: corruption, contempt of human dignity, tribalism and/or ethnicity, embezzlement of public funds, wasting of national wealth on prestigious projects and the poor administration of public property.

<sup>37</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 37-38.

political leaders and people entangled in compound social realities. The desire of some political elites to gain power, control the ministrations of the state, and accumulate large sums of personal wealth by killing have led many Africans to embrace an ontological dexterity of self-enjoyment that consists in the satisfaction of one's own needs. Everyone longs to possess, to have a measure of control for himself/herself, for his/her tribe and/or ethnic group, etc., because of the unforeseeable nature of the future. By so doing, he/she suspends the independence, the otherness and difference of other human beings. He/she tries to comprehend, grasp other human beings by the hand and to make sure that they are under his/her control.<sup>38</sup> Ultimately, here we reduced otherness to ourselves, to our desire to satisfy our needs, because, "needs are in my power; they constitute me as the same and not as dependent on the other."<sup>39</sup> The relation with the other, for Levinas, is not characterized by needs. This other, who disrupts my comfort in being at home, "over him I have no power; [h]e escapes my grasp by an essential dimension even if I have him at my disposal. He is not wholly in my site. But I, who have no concept in common with [him], am, like him, without genus. We are the same and the other."<sup>40</sup> The subject's relation with the other is desire. In Levinas's work, desire is always far reaching and can never be satisfied due to its own structure. It is like goodness, which in its remoteness and separation from the subject does not fulfill him/her, but further deepens it because it is "the alterity of the other and of the Most-High."<sup>41</sup> It expresses "the very dimension of height [that] is opened up by the metaphysical of desire."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 158-159.

<sup>39</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 116.

<sup>40</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 39.

<sup>41</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 34.

<sup>42</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 34-35.

Pre-originally, before all freedom, a true human person or subject is commanded to say *hineni* (Here I am, *me voici*), that is, to respond with infinite responsibility for the other. This prophetic attitude becomes for Levinas an expression of a human person rightly understood as it is “a moment of the human condition itself [and] the fundamental fact of man’s humanity.”<sup>43</sup> It is a difficult freedom of the individual subject which constitutes his/her humanity; it has the merit, in history as eschatological infinity, of breaking any tendency to self-centeredness and calling for infinite commitment to the other’s well-being in terms of *affective responsibility* or love of neighbor. Thus, every human person is responsible for one another, but I more than any other. It is possible to argue that Levinas might say regarding the situation in sub-Saharan Africa that what matters is one’s “unlimited responsibility”<sup>44</sup> for one’s compatriot regardless of one’s ethnic group and/or social status for the construction of a lasting peace between people and nations. The course ahead for sub-Saharan Africa lies in thinking a human other otherwise. It is vital that the human other receives acceptance into the community. No person should be allowed to go hungry or be marginalized to satisfy one’s selfish socio-political and economic interests. Levinas’s argument suggests that sub-Saharan Africa could overcome its contemporary history of socio-political and ethnic violence if each African recognizes in his/her neighbor a transcendental dimension expressed through the face of the other that cries out: “Do not kill me!” His work offers a significant philosophical framework for an establishment of a better sub-Saharan Africa. It keeps the subject everlastingly awake to the humanity of the other in an experience of interruption that goes beyond human consciousness and freedom. The redefinition of human

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<sup>43</sup> Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 113-114.

<sup>44</sup> Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 81.

subjectivity in Levinas's work, as it was argued earlier, provides a philosophical framework that relegates the subject's intentional consciousness to the second place. It aims at keeping the human subject awake to the humanity of others. He/she is constantly in the state of *vigilant insomnia*, watching over the needs of the human other that can never be satisfied. In this way, the subject's humanity is no longer constituted by his/her knowing and willing or self-centeredness, but, it is enacted by his/her *affective responsibility* or love of neighbor. Levinas's philosophical rethinking of human subjectivity offers a possibility for lessening the hatred of the human other that remains one of the factors for the socio-political and ethnic crisis in nations such as Congo Brazzaville, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, and other sub-Saharan African countries. It offers a better prospect for dealing with the issues of corruption, excessive power, wealth accumulation, ethnicity, and civil strife in the continent.

The closest Levinas's philosophy gets to addressing concrete socio-political issues is through the introduction of the third party. His view on politics could be said to be analogous to the entrance of the third party on the scene; as such, it lays the foundation for a good political practice. He writes:

The extraordinary commitment of the other to the third party calls for control, a search for justice, society and the State, comparison and possession, thought and science, commerce and philosophy, and outside of anarchy, the search for a principle. Philosophy is this measure brought to the infinity of the being-for-the-other of proximity, and is like the wisdom of love.<sup>45</sup>

The third party (*le tiers*) requires a re-organization within the ethical relation, which he uses as a basis for political reflection. The duo self-other private relation is interrupted so as to open up to a relation with other human neighbors. With the arrival of the third party

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<sup>45</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 161.

comes the necessity for justice and human fraternity in the political sphere. It brings Levinas's thought to concrete human societies where justice should be done for the other. This, however, does not restore reciprocity between the duo self-other as "it arises from the fact of the third who, next to the one who is an other to me, is 'another other' to me."<sup>46</sup> Levinas calls this moment, "the hour of inevitable justice – required, however, by charity itself."<sup>47</sup> Levinas is aware of the imperfection of political institution or system; "left to itself," he argues, it "bears a tyranny within itself; it deforms the I and the other who have given rise to it, for it judges them according to universal rules, thus, as in absentia."<sup>48</sup> Levinas suggests that the multiplicity of human beings, living together in a society whereby one's presence necessarily limits the other's, while a significant factor in human relationships, is by no means the sole determinant for most wars and violence in human society.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, the tyranny of political systems also plays a substantive role. Wars and violence do not have a final word in human history. But the only way this statement would be true is through human subjects whose moral consciousness embraces the "certitude of peace" over and against "the evidence of war."<sup>50</sup> Hence, "morality will oppose politics in history and will have gone beyond the functions of prudence or the canons of the beautiful to proclaim itself unconditional and universal when the eschatology of messianic peace [prophetic eschatology of peace] will have come to superpose itself upon the ontology of war."<sup>51</sup> To the logic and "objectivism" of wars and violence, Levinas opposes "a subjectivity born from the eschatological vision of peace,"

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<sup>46</sup> Levinas, "The Other, Utopia, and Justice," in *Entre Nous: On the Thinking-of-the-Other*, 229.

<sup>47</sup> Levinas, "The Other, Utopia, and Justice," in *Entre Nous: On the Thinking-of-the-Other*, 229.

<sup>48</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 300.

<sup>49</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 222ff.

<sup>50</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 22.

<sup>51</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 22.



which everlastingly opens up to the human other.<sup>52</sup> The goal of any political institution should always be a building up of a society rooted in values such as freedom, equality, tolerance, solidarity, and above all love of neighbor.<sup>53</sup> For Levinas, “politics must be able in fact always to be checked and criticized starting from the ethical.”<sup>54</sup> He insists that true justice for the other would be possible only if it is guided by *affective responsibility* or love of neighbor which takes place in a kind of *mauvaise conscience*.<sup>55</sup> Thus, Levinas’s philosophy challenges real time situations in light of what his philosophical model of true subjectivity calls the ethically responsible subject to be. Again, it lays the foundation for a good political practice.

The implication of Levinas’s rethinking of the human other calls for a rethinking of *political practice* in sub-Saharan Africa. Levinas’s critique of totality has been a consequence of his “political experience,” which he was not ready to forget.<sup>56</sup> Levinas referred to his experience of the World War II, where he endured as a prisoner of war. During the years of Nazi tyranny, humanity was completely discredited because of bad political choices. Without affirming that Levinas was indifferent to political reflection, it is important to note that he did not put forward a clear political system.<sup>57</sup> To be sure, in

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<sup>52</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 25.

<sup>53</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “La laïcité dans l’Etat d’Israël,” in *La laïcité*, edited by A. Audibert et al. (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1960), 557 quoted by Vincent Tsongo Luutu, *Penser le socio-politique avec Emmanuel Levinas* (Lyon : Profac, 1993), 73.

<sup>54</sup> Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 80.

<sup>55</sup> On the discussion of *mauvaise conscience*, see chapter one, pp. 34-35.

<sup>56</sup> Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 78-79.

<sup>57</sup> In terms of political systems, Levinas seems sympathetic to democracy as it provides, in his estimation, a constant revision and reinvention of the judicial system. He writes: “That is perhaps the very excellence of democracy, whose fundamental liberalism corresponds to the ceaseless deep remorse of justice: legislation always unfinished, always resumed, a legislation open to the better. It attests to an ethical excellence and its origin in kindness from which, however, it is distanced – always a bit less perhaps – by the necessary calculations imposed by a multiple sociality, calculations constantly starting over again. Thus, in the empirical life of the good under the freedom of revisions, there would be a progress of reason. A bad conscience of justice! It knows it is not as just as the kindness that instigates it is good. But when it forgets that, it risks sinking into a totalitarian and Stalinist regime, and losing, in ideological deductions, the gifts

Levinas's ethical responsibility, the subject's responsibility is directed to others – as particular individuals – and not to others socially and politically localized. This remains one of the major criticisms of his thought. The crucial issue that his philosophy addresses has been the issue of true subjectivity – to be for others – which is at the foundation of all concrete social and political engagement.

Levinas's concern for the human other, as it has been shown throughout this work, shares some affinities with liberation theology's commitment to the love of neighbor. While Levinas's ethics of responsibility defines subjectivity in terms of the encounter with the face of the other that takes in an asymmetrical relation both *beyond* and *within* human experience, and represents a viable philosophical anthropology for liberation theology, it is, however, never readily available to the real time of history. This non-intentional consciousness has been questioned. How can his philosophy address the socio-political and ethnic crisis, in real time, in sub-Saharan Africa? Here, liberation theology complements what is lacking in Levinas's ethics of responsibility. It analyzes the significance of the turn to the neighbor from where Levinas's thought left it, that is, in its inability to explicitly translate into the real time of history the transcendental philosophical category of *otherwise than being*. Liberation theology emphasizes the turn to the neighbor in the concrete situation of injustice in the world. Its concept of *conversion to the neighbor*, which opens up a possibility for the subject to act with *affective responsibility* in history in terms of Purcell's *being otherwise*, is the closest one can get to Levinas's *otherwise than being*. Levinas makes reference to liberation theology

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of inventing news forms of human coexistence.” Levinas, “The Other, Utopia, and Justice,” in *Entre Nous: On the Thinking-of-the-Other*, 229-230.

as a concrete example of the application of his thought in history.<sup>58</sup> His endorsement of liberation theology might suggest Levinas's openness to a transformation of his *otherwise than being* into a historicized *being otherwise*. Liberation theology, in its conceptually thematized categories of being, analyzes the issue of otherness within the Christian theological tradition and addresses a reality of poverty, oppression, and marginalization in the concrete history of Central and Latin America. Gutiérrez and Sobrino take their distance from theory and metaphysics and confront social systems of distortion and replace the theoretical cognition of God with personal commitment to the other that leads to social-political responsibility. Ontologically, it posits the subject as "ethically enacted" through a "relativization of intentionality."<sup>59</sup>

Dussel, Marion, and Purcell are indebted to Levinas's phenomenology for the possibility of a relationship between philosophy and theology. Each of these thinkers, however, engages in a critical use of Levinas's insights and sees the significance of his thought for theological anthropology. Marion mirrors Levinas in rejecting onto-theology. He proposes a theology of agape/caritas, which echoes Levinas's ethical responsibility as an event that enacts the human subject in his/her subjectivity. Dussel and Purcell, however, while insisting on the relevance of Levinas's turn to the other/neighbor that *reveals* God, regret the fact that his *otherwise than being* is not readily available to the real time of history. Dussel, who develops his philosophical theology of liberation in terms of Levinas's concept of the other, has been critical of Levinas's reduction of history to consciousness. He deplores the fact that Levinas's philosophy does not offer an

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<sup>58</sup> Emmanuel Levinas and Richard Kearney, "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas," in *Face to Face with Levinas*, 32-33; Richard Kearney, "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas," in *Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage*, 68 ; Levinas, "Questions and Answers," in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 81-82.

<sup>59</sup> Baird, *On the Side of the Angels*, 87.

expressive political philosophy that addresses concrete socio-political and economic lived experiences. Hence, he fears that it might be inadequate for the task of changing situations of oppressions and injustice in the Third World. Purcell's dissatisfaction with Levinas's ontology of being cannot be overemphasized. He laments Levinas's inability to see ethical responsibility, which would correspond to Plato's idea of the Good within human beings' ontological existence. For him, Levinas's *otherwise than being* while asserting "an absolute uncompromisable value of the other offers no way of linking responsibility with practical commitment to the other."<sup>60</sup> Human beings, notwithstanding their weaknesses, also are capable of actualizing the good in them. Dussel's and Purcell's observations support this dissertation's argument that liberation theology historicizes Levinas's ethics of responsibility. Liberation theology offers Levinas's philosophy a possibility to conceive of the human subject as ethically responsible within the ontological system of thought. For liberation theology, the spirituality of conversion to the neighbor is a never-ending turning toward the other human in *affective responsibility*. This experience calls for a permanent turning to the other human person with sensibility and affection in the real time of history.

Levinas's *utopia of conscience* corresponds to the being-human of a Christian as an expression of the *utopia of the kingdom of God*.<sup>61</sup> For liberation theology, the *utopia of the kingdom of God* consists in the *already and not yet* of salvation. It addresses real problems and the hopes of real men and women who, in spite of the existence of evil in history, continue to hope for a better life here on earth. The historical evil takes the form of poverty, injustice, oppression, marginalization, and corruption. Jesus himself in the

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<sup>60</sup> Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, 329.

<sup>61</sup> Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness*, 117-131.

scriptures fought against all kinds of evil; he proclaimed the kingdom of God in words and service to the neighbor. He directed his ministry to the *utopia of the kingdom*, that is, “the triumph of justice over injustice.”<sup>62</sup> The historical dimension of the kingdom of God would be connected to “the triumph of the justice of God, and the practice of that justice.”<sup>63</sup> The *utopia of the kingdom of God* calls for the recognition of the dimension of the divine that opens forth in the human other’s face and takes the form of the “*practice of love*.”<sup>64</sup> Liberation theology, however, is aware that the eschatological nature of the *praxis* of salvation, while anticipated in history, takes place definitively at the end of history. Hope is a requirement to journey forward. The *here* and *now* of history has also to be understood as having a basic orientation toward the future.<sup>65</sup> For liberation theology, the human person realizes him/herself only through love of neighbor in imitation of Christ. Liberation theology supplements the deficiencies in Levinas’s philosophy, which lacks the ability to address concrete situations of injustice and inhumanity in history.

Latin American liberation theology served as a model for the emergence of African theology of liberation in the 1980s. African theology of liberation emerges from a desire to condemn structures of poverty, oppression, injustice, and marginalization in sub-Saharan Africa. These structures, as Jean Marc Ela argues, are not natural or beyond human beings’ control; they are not a consequence of any human limitations; but rather, “they are produced by people, by groups in power, and by models of society and

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<sup>62</sup> Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation*, 123. For Sobrino, Jesus’ concern was “to represent in symbolic form – but also actually to present, at long last – some historical reflex of the reign.”

<sup>63</sup> Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation*, 120.

<sup>64</sup> Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation*, 122. (Sobrino’s italics)

<sup>65</sup> Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims*, 89-93.

culture.”<sup>66</sup> African theology of liberation calls for a re-reading of the Gospel message of love through a re-appropriation of African anthropological values. Again, African philosophical anthropology focuses on relationship and solidarity in the concreteness of lived experience in time and space. This conception of the human person in sub-Saharan Africa provides a crucial link between Christian anthropology and Christological formulation. The gospel of Jesus that the church in Africa preaches is the good news of the kingdom of God. It is a proclamation of a new social order in which the horizontal dimensions of the message are expressed: feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, setting prisoners free etc. Indeed, Jesus’ message takes into consideration both people’s bodily and spiritual needs. This stance echoes the turn to the other/neighbor in Levinas’s ethical responsibility and liberation theology.

What sub-Saharan Africa can learn from Levinas’s philosophy’s and liberation theology’s turn to the other/neighbor is the recognition of the dimension of otherness and difference in the human other. The other human person should be seen and appreciated in his/her uniqueness as a human other that bears the trace of God’s transcendence, but not, according to people’s ethnic groups. In Congo Brazzaville, Côte d’Ivoire, and Kenya, the human other is more than just a “Mbochi,” “Lari,” “Batéké,” “Vili,” “Bémbé,” “Baule,” “Akan,” “Anyi,” “Akye,” “Dan,” “Senufo,” “Aowin;” “Kikuyu,” “Luo,” and “Luhya.” Wherever the human other is seen just according to his/her socio-political and ethnic identity, this penchant has often led into economic and/or physical violence that is still very much present in today’s twenty-first century sub-Saharan Africa. The regionalism that is connected with the politics of ethnicity has in many cases given birth to corruption,

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<sup>66</sup> Jean Marc Ela, *My Faith as an African*, translated by John Pairman Brown and Susan Perry (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988), 111.

contempt of human dignity, wasting of national resources, embezzlement of public funds, and the killing of the human other. This characterizes a concrete egoistic attitude of Levinas's "same," preoccupied by his/her self-enjoyment. Sub-Saharan Africans should appreciate ethnic difference without hostility or violence by seeing in a human other what is absolutely transcendent. The transcendental dimension Levinas, Gutiérrez, and Sobrino speak about is that of the face of the other as he/she reveals him/herself to the subject in his/her absolute otherness and difference; it opens a dimension of height that goes beyond being and knowledge. The face of the other is what disturbs the subject's good conscience and provokes his/her ethical movement; the subject is not an I unto himself/herself, but an I standing before the other who commands him/her and gives meaning to his/her existence.

As we have argued throughout this chapter, rethinking human subjectivity is the necessary direction toward a construction of more flourishing sub-Saharan African societies. It calls for an appreciation of an authentic human other. The turn to the other/neighbor in Levinas's ethics of responsibility and liberation theology puts forward a hopeful way for rethinking the place of the human neighbor in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa. Levinas's philosophy and liberation theology need each other to present a balanced perspective to an intersubjective approach that would prove meaningful to address socio-political and ethnic conflicts in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa. For Levinas, Gutiérrez, and Sobrino, as it has been argued, subjectivity rightly understood is substitution, responsibility, and expiation for others. It is a road map to help sub-Saharan Africa find its way back to an African philosophical anthropology that focuses on human relationships and solidarity with one another. This way of thinking offers an opportunity

to alter its policies and rewrite its future by placing the human person at the center of all socio-political and economic concerns. This dissertation formulates a hope that one day things will be different in sub-Saharan Africa. Our hope is not in vain because history is replete with examples of people, who have turned toward their neighbors in love and responsibility during moments of crisis. It is a mark of admiration that the community of faith calls these people saints; for others, they are heroes and/or models of what it means to be human. In a world where various socio-political, economic, religious, and cultural powers seek to exercise total control over human life, these “great souls”<sup>67</sup> teach us that it is possible to live our lives *otherwise than* in the sense of Purcell’s *being otherwise*, that is, to center it on a truth (“the divine ground”) which is beyond all human powers and which calls humans to love and solidarity.<sup>68</sup> At this point, this study would give two examples of the turn to the other/neighbor in Levinas’s ethics of responsibility and liberation theology that take place in the real time of history.

### **III. Two Examples of the Turn to the Neighbor in the Real Time of History**

This dissertation concedes that a direct applicability of Levinas’s *otherwise than being* is not possible unless a human being first exists. In chapter three, we argued that for Levinas’s ethical responsibility to be more meaningful, it must be translated into a real time of history in terms of Purcell’s *being otherwise*. Levinas articulated his ideas in writing, as it was shown, because of his experience of unjust suffering and death of the human other during the World War II. He never turned his eyes away from violence,

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<sup>67</sup> David Aikman, *Great Souls: Six Who Changed the Century* (Nashville: World Publishing, 1998).

<sup>68</sup> We are here indebted to William Thompson-Uberuaga’s use of the term “divine ground.” In the rich approach he offers regarding the notion of the “divine ground,” he defines it as the source and origin of all objects in the world. It transcends all objects and yet constitutes the ground (community of being) within which human beings open themselves to the divine and live in mutual solidarity and communion with one another. See his *Jesus and the Gospel Movement: Not Afraid To Be Partners* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 183-189.



oppression, and marginalization that he saw throughout his life. He saw in liberation theology an embodiment of his ethical responsibility, aware that it is in history that justice should be done. Our view is that it is possible to find in contemporary history people who model Levinas's ethical responsibility or *utopia of conscience*.<sup>69</sup> Recent history has many examples of "great souls" who arose above their times and their circumstances and tried to live out Levinas's "ideal of holiness" and liberation theology's *conversion to the neighbor* through a life of courage, self-sacrifice, and sincere concern for others, be it for religious and/or political motivations. Their lives historicize Levinas's *otherwise than being* in terms of *being otherwise* through *affective responsibility*. Among so many, two of the most poignant contemporary examples are Jacques Désiré Laval, C.S.Sp (religious motivation) and Nelson Mandela (political motivation).

#### *Nelson Mandela*

Nelson Mandela was born on July 18, 1918 at Qunu, Umtata.<sup>70</sup> His life of struggle against *apartheid* in South Africa presents an example of *affective responsibility* in the real time of history. Here, this *affective responsibility* takes the form of political protest for the establishment of justice, freedom, and peace in South Africa. The necessity for justice and human fraternity in the political sphere, for Levinas, is an imperative, considering the reality of the arrival of the third party on the scene. Mandela's involvement in politics (political awakening) began in 1942 when he joined the African National Congress (ANC) while studying in Johannesburg. After some years, he became

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<sup>69</sup> On the discussion of Levinas's *utopia of conscience*, see chapter three, 161-162.

<sup>70</sup> Works consulted: Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom. The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (Boston & New York: Little Brown, 1994); Aikman, *Great Souls: Six Who Changed the Century*; Ronald Harwood, *Mandela* (New York: New American Library, 1987); Mary Benson, *Nelson Mandela, the Man and the Movement* (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 1989). Dickson A. Mungazi, *We Shall not Fail: Values in the National Leadership of Seretse Khama, Nelson Mandela, and Julius Nyerere* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2005).

the leader of the movement and together with others, elaborated a peaceful plan for political actions in defense of his people from many years of dictatorship, domination and exploitation by the white minority. South African blacks during the *apartheid* era were denied any political and civil rights. Mandela called for boycotts and strikes. He understood his leadership role as an opportunity to serve his people and make his own contribution to the struggle for freedom. In 1962, the ruling South African government arrested him. They charged Mandela with instigating a strike and protest against the ruling National party's government. At the infamous Rivonia trial in 1964, the South African government sentenced him to life imprisonment with some of his colleagues. While in prison, he continued his struggle by rejecting any concession for his liberation. The South African government released Mandela on February 11, 1990. In 1991, the people of South Africa elected him president. After four years in power, he stepped down and retired from politics.

Mandela's personal struggle to gain independence led him to become a leader to free all people of color to live as dignified human beings. Gradually, this freedom for himself and the people who looked like him was transformed into a hunger for the freedom for all people, white and black.<sup>71</sup> His closing remarks at the Rivonia trial eloquently express what it means to be human, that is, to be for the other. He said,

During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to the struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 624-625.

<sup>72</sup> Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 368.

When he was released from prison at age seventy-two, he pledged to continue to serve all South Africans, white and black, and liberate them all “from the continuing bondage of poverty, deprivation, suffering, gender, and other discrimination.”<sup>73</sup> Mandela sought to transform South Africa into a new nation; “never, never, and never again [he argues] shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another...The sun shall never set on so glorious a human achievement.”<sup>74</sup> Mandela recognized that with freedom comes responsibility for himself and for all. He insists that his long walk is just a first step toward a full humanity for all. The road is still long, it is not yet ended. He invites people perpetually to keep their eyes wide open toward the needs of all.<sup>75</sup> Since his retirement from politics, Mandela remains critical of some African leaders. He criticizes those who despised their people by changing their constitution to remain in power and those who initiate public programs that do not aim to meet everyone’s basic needs.

Mandela, therefore, is a symbol of Levinas’s *utopia of conscience*. His struggle for freedom and liberation is a call to see in every human person a dimension of transcendence that cries out for ethical responsibility. Mandela’s political struggle was a fight for the recognition of the human other and political values. What matters is the other human person, not his/her color and/or his/her status as a person. The story of this ordinary man reminds people that it is possible to be a being in the world *otherwise than*; and only through this way of being can we build up a society rooted in values such as freedom, equality, tolerance, solidarity, and above all, love of neighbor.

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<sup>73</sup> Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 621.

<sup>74</sup> Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 621.

<sup>75</sup> For Levinas’s philosophy and liberation theology, this would correspond to *vigilant insomnia* and *conversion to the neighbor*, respectively.

### *Jacques Désiré Laval*

Throughout the Catholic Church's long history of evangelization, its concern for the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized, the abandoned continues to serve as a source of inspiration for men and women to found religious congregations to work to meet the needs of these people. It has led them to take action through service to others. This is true for the founder and reformer of the Holy Spirit Congregation, Poullart des Places (18<sup>th</sup> century) and Libermann (19<sup>th</sup> century), respectively, who committed their lives to educating the poor students and marginalized people mainly in poor black communities.<sup>76</sup> Many Spiritans, including Jacques Désiré Laval, followed their example and became servants to the poor and downtrodden.

Jacques Désiré Laval's story provides an example of an *affective responsibility* based on religious motivation. Laval, born in Croth, Normandy, on September 18, 1803, learned at an early age from his parents to have a concern for others, especially for the less fortunate. At the age of seventeen, Laval joined the seminary-college of Evreux. He did not stay long because of poor academic performance. When he returned home, his father made him work at a strenuous job that required manual labor, which motivated the young Laval to go back to school. After high school, Laval went to Paris to study at Saint Stanislaus, where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in 1825. He later earned a doctoral degree in medicine at Sorbonne in Paris.<sup>77</sup> As a medical doctor, people admired him in his village "because he was not in the least concerned about payment for his services. Instead, he preferred to live on the income of the legacy his deceased parents

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<sup>76</sup> Congregation of the Holy Spirit, *Information Documentation* (i/d), no. 60, February 2007, 14.

<sup>77</sup> Henry Koren, *To the Ends of the Earth: A General History of the Holy Ghost Congregation* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1983), 226.

had left him.”<sup>78</sup> Spiritually, the young doctor was no longer strictly adhered to the practices of the Catholic Church; yet, his conscience gave him no peace. After a prolonged spiritual crisis, he re-converted to the practice of the Catholic faith. Eventually, Laval expressed a desire to enter religious life as a priest. In 1835, he joined the seminary of St. Sulpice in Paris. Laval received ordination to the priesthood in 1838. After ordination, he returned to work in his native Normandy. After two years of pastoral work in his diocese, Laval joined the project of his old friends, Le Vavas seur and Tisserant, to start a religious order with the main purpose of working for the emancipation of the ignored slaves in the colonies. The French medical doctor by profession joined the Holy Spirit Congregation and went on his first mission to the Island of Mauritius.<sup>79</sup>

Motivated by the example of Jesus Christ and by the suffering of so many, Laval spent twenty-three years of his life as a missionary in multi-racial, multi-lingual, and multi-religious Island of Mauritius. He identified himself with the recently freed African slaves by sharing lodging, food, and other conditions with these people. In the wake of the abolition of slavery in 1835, there was a need to guarantee freedom and equality among citizens. Jacques Désiré Laval dedicated his life to serve the emancipated slaves by defending their dignity and rights against those who wanted to maintain the status quo. Laval sought in his personal ministry to love and care for the black people of Mauritius, whom nobody wanted to give this kind of treatment. Laval’s affective response to the poor emancipated slaves of Mauritius expressed his faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. He translated his faith into concrete commitment. He spoke their language (Creole) and committed himself completely to their service. The people of

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<sup>78</sup> Koren, *To the Ends of the Earth*, 227.

<sup>79</sup> Koren, *To the Ends of the Earth*, 227-228.

Mauritius recognized Laval as a “national saint” and they called him, “Apostle of the Blacks.” For people of Mauritius, he is a symbol of Christ’s love and compassion for others. Pope Jean-Paul II beatified him on Sunday April 29, 1979 in the Basilica of Saint-Peter’s in Rome. In Mauritius, Christians and non-Christians, including Hindus, Buddhists, Confucianists, and Muslims, see in his commitment to the poor and marginalized blacks an example of a life lived for the sake of others.<sup>80</sup> In Levinas’s terms, Jacques Désiré Laval understood the nature of what it meant to be a human being *otherwise than being* through *affective responsibility*.

In Jacques Laval’s and Nelson Mandela’s life, this study finds “great souls” who express what Levinas and liberation theology say of human subjectivity and Jesus Christ respectively. Here human responsibility or the turn to the other human person is motivated essentially by the transcendental dimension of the human other.

### *Conclusion*

It is our contention in this chapter that the re-imagining of sub-Saharan Africa requires a redefinition of human subjectivity as the one-for-the-other by using the work of Levinas and liberation theology. The socio-political and ethnic conflicts that affect most sub-Saharan African nations today is the result of a philosophical anthropology that establishes freedom, self-consciousness, and self-subsistent autonomy as fundamental aspects of what it is to be human. This philosophical anthropology reflects itself in the relationships between the Western world and sub-Saharan Africa and among Africans themselves and their political leaders. It is sad to see that after almost fifty years of

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<sup>80</sup> Bendt Sundkler & Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 494-495. Paul Bernier, *Père Laval*, translated by Michael O’Carroll (Turin: Rotocalco Caprotti, 1978); Michel Joseph, *Le Père Jacques Laval: le saint de l’Ile Maurice 1803-1864* (Paris: Editions Beauchesne, 1976); Joseph Lecuyer, *Jacques Laval: extraits de sa correspondance* (Paris: Editions Beauchesne, 1978).

independence of many sub-Saharan African nations many of them remain politically unstable. The non-recognition of the human other receives expression through greed, corruption, dictatorship, and ethnic violence. The totalizing effects of these discordant elements have generated circumstances that deny sub-Saharan African nations a chance to live a meaningful life together in peace. We presented in this chapter the turn to the other/neighbor in Levinas's thought and in liberation theology as a possible path toward a more flourishing sub-Saharan Africa. We also argued that liberation theology historicizes Levinas's ethical responsibility as it provides a more concrete example of the *affective responsibility* in tangible ethical acts of concern for the poor and the oppressed. Liberation theology has also been instrumental in the emergence of African liberation theology.

What Africans, more importantly African leaders, need is Levinas's and liberation theology's redefinition of human subjectivity. It is our conviction that Levinas's ethics of responsibility and liberation theology both put forth, each in its own right, a hopeful way for the articulation of human subjectivity as the one-for-the-other in love and responsibility. The ability to rethink human subjectivity in sub-Saharan Africa calls for an appreciation of the human other as the condition of possibility for the subject's subjectivity both philosophically and theologically.

A commitment to good political leadership that promotes values such as integrity, honesty, justice, and peace calls for responsibility for the other without reciprocity. The leader remains the one who supports the people because he/she always has "one responsibility *more* than all the others."<sup>81</sup> The lives of Jacques Désiré Laval (religious motivation) and Nelson Mandela (political motivation) exemplify Levinas's *utopia of*

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<sup>81</sup> Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 99.

*conscience* in the real time of history. *Affective responsibility* in terms of Purcell's *being otherwise than* self-centered, is an attitude required of all Africans, especially of their political leaders. A commitment to this project would, hopefully, lessen the hatred of the human other already experienced in a number of sub-Saharan African nations.

At this point we are left with one of question: how do we get people to follow this pathway or intersubjective model? How do we convince people to be otherwise? This challenging question calls for existential, concrete and as many practical answers as possible. We saw in the lives of Nelson Mandela and Jacques Désiré Laval concrete attitudes of an enactment of love of neighbor and justice. The articulation of this intersubjective model into the contemporary real time of history passes through education in families, schools, churches, and the larger society. In this regard, the continuing commitment of the Catholic Church toward the less privileged and suffering sub-Saharan Africans cannot be overemphasized. Her practice of solidarity, hospitality and justice, bears witness to ethical responsibility which can serve to promote social, political, and even legal change.

In contemporary sub-Saharan Africa examples of individuals and/or groups that serve as role models and educational resources can be multiplied. Suffice it here to mention the work of Missionary Congregations and some non-governmental organizations (NGO). Their concern and commitment toward the poor, the despised and exploited people and/or communities in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa would be one of the ways we could get people to act otherwise and work for social justice. They offer credible examples of enactment of the turn to the neighbor or ethical responsibility. For these groups, ethical responsibility or love of neighbor is a manifestation of God's love,



mercy, and compassion. Most of these missionaries and people of good will leave behind their countries, families, friends, and/or comfortable life style to work in difficult rural areas in solidarity with local people. Their unwavering commitment to the needs of other human beings exposes people around them to situations of the degradation of the lives of other human beings and invites them to respond with *affective responsibility* by attending to their needs and taking a position against any intolerable plan to oppress, marginalize, and/or murder the other person. The major strength of these groups is that it educates people in their respective fields of work to serve as leaders and mentors for the concern of the other human person within their own local communities and within the larger socio-political and economic structure of nations.

The work of the members of the Holy Spirit Congregation (Spiritans) in Sub-Saharan Africa and throughout the world testifies to it. For three hundred years plus, the Spiritans have been engaged, on behalf of the Gospel, in fighting poverty, injustice and the degradation of the human other. For the Holy Spirit Congregation, mission is not only about converting people to Christianity, but more importantly, it is about *affective responsibility* and solidarity toward "... those whose needs are the greatest, and to the oppressed"<sup>82</sup> so that they will live in full dignity as human beings. Constitutive of this mission is the promotion of justice and solidarity among people, the education and formation of committed and responsible leaders that would work for the respect of the human other and the promotion of social change.

In most Spiritan missions, the turn to the other/neighbor is about setting the standard of moral obligation on behalf of Jesus Christ for the triumph of love over hatred, justice over injustice, peace over violence, so as to influence people's socio-political

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<sup>82</sup> *Spiritan Rule of Life*, no. 4.

actions. In Eastern Cameroon, for instance, Spiritans have been instrumental in bringing to an end the mistreatment of the Baka Pygmies by the Bantus.<sup>83</sup> The Baka Pygmies and the Bantus are peoples who live in the heart of the equatorial forest in Eastern Cameroon. The Baka are semi-nomadic and hunter-gatherers; they are estimated to be around 60.000 in a population of 400.000 Bantus and rely mainly on the forest for their food and other necessities. Bantus are mostly farmers and rely mainly on agriculture for foodstuffs. For centuries, these two ethnic groups have been living in a kind of alliance of blood pacts. Over the years, the Baka have been marginalized by the Bantu population. The Baka strongly believe in the blood pact to the point of thinking that they are the Bantu headmen's natural slaves. The Bantus treat them as slaves, hire them to work on their farms for insignificant salaries, and exclude them from any form of development and justice.<sup>84</sup> Spiritans, working in this area, are committed in changing the mentality and improving the relationship between them. They put in place a structure of development called "Activities for the self-development of the populations of Eastern Cameroon" (AAPPEC) that serves as a forum for the education of both the Baka and the Bantus on issues of rights and dignity of the human person, solidarity, social justice and development. Today both groups understand better their duties and rights as full citizens of the country, and are encouraged to acquire official documents such as birth certificates and national identification cards. Positions of leadership and responsibility in different activities (health care, primary education, agriculture, justice and peace, formation, communication and catechetic) are shared among them. For instance, in the area of

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<sup>83</sup> The Bantus here refers to an ethnic group that lives next to the Baka in Eastern Cameroon as opposed to the linguistically related group of tribes located in central and southern Africa.

<sup>84</sup> See *Spiritans Life*, no. 15, January 2006, 3-4, 6.

healthcare, Baka and Bantu nurses and assistants travel together by motorcycle or by car to give treatment to patients in the Bantu and Baka villages.<sup>85</sup>

In conflict and post-conflict situations such as in Congo Brazzaville, Congo Kinshasa, and Sierra-Leone, Spiritans are promoting *affective responsibility*, using basic Christian communities, youth ministry, education and human formation, as media for national reconciliation and the rebuilding of interrelationships. In these various communities and activities, they try to awaken in people a sense of service to one's fellow human person and the capacity to be critical and to condemn all types of injustice, whether cultural, religious, political or economic. They are also involved in social outreach in areas of education, health-care, orphanage, and personal care of the displaced refugees.<sup>86</sup>

In Congo Brazzaville, the Spiritans run two centers of formation for children and youth. The first is "Le Centre Espace Père Jarot" in Brazzaville that serves as a home and training center for street children. The stress is on their reintegration in the society through school and job-training. The second is called "Centre de Formation Professionnelle de Sala Ngolo" in Dolisie. Established in 1996, this center was partly plundered and destroyed in 1999, at the time of the civil war. Its main goal is human formation and job-training center for youth who have dropped out of the school system.

In Congo Kinshasa, from the year 2000 up to the present, Spiritans are healing wounds of years of civil war through attentive presence to the displaced people and the education and formation of children and youth. Today, Spiritans are assisting the displaced population in Lubumbashi, Kinshasa, and Kongolo. With regard to education,

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<sup>85</sup> *Spiritan Life*, no. 15, 7-8.

<sup>86</sup> *Spiritan Life*, no. 15, 16-34.

in the Kongolo region, they have established primary and secondary schools to give poor children an opportunity for education. A new school will open this year in the Manono region.<sup>87</sup>

In Sierra Leone, Spiritans are participating in the country's reconstruction program through humanitarian works and education. In Freetown, they are working with the UN in the rehabilitation program for war-affected children and in the structure of distribution of food aid to refugee camps in Kissi, Waterloo, Bo, etc. In the area of education, they established "Pre-school" programs for refugee children in Freetown and around the country. Small Christian communities are serving as places for healing, reconciliation, and discussion on the peace process. It is also there that people come to seek information about their displaced family members and friends.<sup>88</sup>

Worth mentioning also is the ministry of some Spiritan confreres in the refugee camps in the diocese of Kigoma, Tanzania where they continue, along with other groups, to defend and assist refugee communities. They are in constant dialogue with the Tanzanian government so that it facilitates the return home of some of the refugees from Burundi or to give legal status to those who have been on Tanzanian soil for more than thirty years if they so wish. Efforts are being made to get the Burundian government to change the land laws that would allow refugees who return home to reclaim their land.<sup>89</sup> We make no claim to have exhausted here all aspects of Spiritan commitments toward the other human person in sub-Saharan Africa. These few examples are representative of

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<sup>87</sup> *Spiritan Life*, no. 15, 21-24.

<sup>88</sup> *Spiritan Life*, no. 15, 25-29.

<sup>89</sup> *Spiritan Life*, no. 15, 30-34.

their dedication to the values of love, justice and peace in imitation of Jesus Christ and their founders that constitute examples of an enactment of the turn to the neighbor.

Many people have joined the Spiritans in this mission. Today, Spiritan lay associates as well as members of Spiritan fraternities in sub-Saharan Africa, share in this noble service to the human other. The participation of the laity in this mission offers a chance of getting more people on board and stimulates in them attitudes of *affective responsibility* toward other humans. These laywomen and men are themselves living examples of ethical enactment and symbols of inspiration in their various milieus. Their closer ties with families, friends and the wider society, gradually create a network of people convinced of the need for justice, hospitality, and solidarity. Whether or not these friends and families identify themselves as Christians and/or believers, their concrete commitment toward the other person's needs contribute more directly and in various ways to an effort of encouraging awareness on the centrality of the issue of ethical responsibility. And progressively, more people in the society would be exposed to stories and situations of degradation of the lives of human others, and would feel the need to respond with *affective responsibility* in the real time of history. The key attitudes are: respect for human life, human freedom, human dignity, solidarity, hospitality, and social justice. What is demanded of believers and non-believers today are concrete acts of respect of the sanctity of every human life, especially of the lives of those others who are poor, marginalized, and oppressed.

It is our conviction that the missionary groups, non governmental organizations, and people of good will who work daily in difficult situations in sub-Saharan Africa are living examples of an enactment of ethical responsibility or love of neighbor. They offer

a possibility to build communities where every human person will flourish. Again, in the context of sub-Saharan Africa, the defense of the human person will be of no relevance unless it can be translated into concrete situations. A better socio-political and economic future is possible in sub-Saharan Africa and it passes through recognition of the face of the neighbor who bears the trace of the divine and begs us not to kill him/her.

## Conclusion

This dissertation has been an analysis of Emmanuel Levinas's conceptual affinities with liberation theology as presented by Gustavo Gutiérrez and Jon Sobrino. It has been carried out with a presupposition that the twenty-first century in which we live is a postmodern world, characterized by the obvious reality of the degradation of the life of the human other in history; hence, the questioning of modernity's overemphasis on the human subject's self-subsistent autonomy. Our intention was to show that Levinas's transcendental ethics of responsibility, which conceives God as the goodness that is beyond being and calls humans to responsibility for the neighbor, is a pertinent and adequate philosophical approach compatible to one of the truths of Christianity: the concern for humanity of the neighbor as articulated in liberation theology.

We began this dissertation by providing, in the first chapter, a survey of Levinas's transcendental ethics of responsibility, situating it within the phenomenological tradition of continental philosophy. We argued that while Levinas remains indebted to Plato, Descartes, Kant, Husserl, and Heidegger, he was nevertheless displeased with Western philosophy's inclination to base all knowing, willing, and meaning on the intentional consciousness of the subject. In a specific way, he takes issue with Husserl's and Heidegger's phenomenology for not explicitly addressing the question of intersubjectivity and responsibility for the other. His effort was geared toward replacing metaphysics with ethics as first philosophy. The face of the other is what determines one's subjectivity and *reveals* the trace of the infinite God. God is encounter in the ethical command of love of neighbor. For Levinas, subjectivity *rightly understood* is always a

state of *wakefulness* or *insomnia*. It is defined in terms of ethical responsibility to the point of substitution, proximity, obsession, sensibility, hostage, and maternity.

Chapter two discussed Gutiérrez's and Sobrino's theological project. It was argued that their theologies emerge in the context of socio-political and economic oppression of the poor, the exploited, and the marginalized of Latin America. Their main theological focus is an invitation to Christian theology to take the turn to the subject to its ultimate level, that is, to a commitment to one of the truths of Christianity: concern for the human neighbor created in God's image. The human neighbor's humanity is seen as a fundamental aspect for theological reflection.

The third chapter centered on the point of affinities between Levinas's philosophy and liberation theology. We established the following affinities: Levinas's philosophy and liberation theology emerged as a response to the twentieth century's tragic human situation, search for the divine transcendence in the life of commitment to the other human person, find in the Judeo-Christian wisdom a distinct way of thinking of the subject-other relationships, and call for love of neighbor and justice. They both view the turn to the other/neighbor as a power of genuine love, opening new avenues for the radical re-imagining of the world. For Levinas's philosophy and liberation theology, the creation of a better world requires a "prophetic-ethical" attitude from every human person in his/her daily encounter with the other human. This attitude values and protects the other and opens up a dimension of the divine in history. The affinities noted do not, however, suggest a perfect matching between these two approaches. While the neighbor in liberation theology is an image of God, in Levinas, he/she, only manifests the height in which God reveals God's self as a trace. Levinas's God is not the omnipotent God of



liberation theology. Besides, Levinas situates his philosophy on the asymmetrical level while liberation theology is historically based. Levinas has been suspicious of Christian theology in general for its dependence on Western philosophical tradition. Yet, he has been sympathetic to liberation theology for its emphasis on the human other's humanity. Levinas's philosophy, this dissertation argued, enhances liberation theology philosophically through the concept of *vigilant insomnia*. This concept keeps the human subject everlastingly awake to the needs of others. Liberation theology, on its part, historicizes Levinas's transcendental ethics of responsibility in terms of *conversion to the neighbor*. It functions in history as Purcell's *being otherwise* or *affective responsibility* and interrupts the subject's tendency to totality.

The fourth chapter examined three Christian scholars' use of Levinas's philosophy for Christian theology. For these scholars, Enrique Dussel, Jean-Luc Marion, and Michael Purcell, each in his own right, Levinas's thought offers a possibility for dialogue with Christian theology. Dussel argues for a philosophical theology of liberation that takes seriously Levinas's turn to the other or exteriority. Jean-Luc Marion argues for the demise of traditional metaphysics by means of phenomenology as first philosophy that remains open to the theological in terms of agape, echoing Levinas's ethical responsibility or the subject's love for the other. Purcell sees in Levinas's phenomenology some elements such as holiness, infinite, awakening, desire, love, and justice, that could fruitfully engage Christian theology. For him, Levinas's notions of awakening, desire, and face point to the direction of the theology of grace and sacraments. For these scholars, Levinas's philosophy is worthy of consideration by Christian theology.

The fifth and last chapter examined the contribution Levinas's philosophy and liberation theology could offer to contemporary Sub-Saharan Africa as it faces unprecedented socio-political and ethnic conflicts. The struggle for political and economic power and the non-recognition of the human other, through whom God's trace passes, have been the major reasons for most of these conflicts. This chapter argued that Levinas's thought and liberation theology's turn to the other/neighbor offer a possibility for lessening the hatred of the human other through a redefinition of human subjectivity as the one-for-the-other; hence, a rethinking of the place of the other.

Levinas, Gutiérrez, and Sobrino, writing from the perspective of philosophy and theology, bring forth one fundamental element, namely, the in-breaking of the dimension of the divine opens forth in the human face. They call all humans to embrace a "prophetic-ethical sense for the other, especially the preferred other of the prophets, the poor, the marginal, and the oppressed."<sup>90</sup> What we have here is an exemplification of a significant and positive parallel between Christian theology and postmodern philosophy. The common ground between these two apparently opposing areas of thought is that they both takes issue with modernity's certain conception of the subject as independent and secluded self. They posit an "uncompromisable value" of the human other as the possibility of the subject's subjectivity. The stress is on a subject's movement toward exteriority, the other, not a self-sufficient subject, but rather the one, who finds its identity or humanity in relation to the other who bears the trace of, or carries the image of God. This analysis of the subject is one that sits comfortably with postmodernity and Christian theology. It is a path which contemporary philosophy and theology should consider in addressing the issue of inhumanity in the world. It is our hope that both the

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<sup>90</sup> Tracy, "Forms of Divine Disclosure,"55.

thought of Levinas and liberation theology would advance the recognition of the neighbor, who is both God's mystery and the human other, as the precondition for peace, justice and good order in today's world. The radical transcendence of the other stands over and above the subject; this is a revalidation of one of the truths of Christianity and Christianity's vision of human life and existence that constitutes a central response to the question of human existence and authenticity. Obviously, this dissertation does not have the pretention to have exhausted this topic; it is only one among many contributions to the ongoing conversation between Christian theology and postmodern philosophy.

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