Expiation in Levinas and His Understanding of Judaism, and in the Catholic Mass

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Abstract: The Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas describes ethical substitution as a suffering for another's suffering. Levinas's phenomenology would make of the act of substitution a universal calling, a calling regardless of race, culture, and ethnicity, that makes one truly human. Levinas's ethical phenomenology, imbued with his Jewish faith tradition, provides philosophical illumination on the Christian and specifically Catholic understanding of Jesus Christ as the Suffering Servant of God, as found in the New Testament and in the Liturgy of the Mass. These connections and illuminations return us to our Christian roots and re-emphasize the primordially ethical basis of Christian spirituality and worship, an ethics of vicarious substitution and expiation celebrated in the Holy Eucharist.

Keywords: Suffering Servant, expiation, Emmanuel Levinas, ethics, vicarious substitution, Eucharist

Introduction

This paper sets out to relate the interiority evident in the ethical phenomenology of Emmanuel Levinas to the interiority of the Catholic Mass, especially in the interior workings of the Catholic understanding of conscience. Throughout this essay the reading of Levinas maintained

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mainly by Jewish scholars (as opposed to the mainstream atheistic reading) of Levinas is assumed. The understanding of the Catholic Mass and Catholic Conscience treated here is orthodox as laid out in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC). This relation sheds phenomenological light on our traditional Catholic understanding of the Mass.

Emmanuel Levinas and the Jewish Tradition of the Suffering Servant

Levinas's interpretation of the notion of the Suffering Servant involves the understanding of the entire people of Israel as the Servant of God. Israel adheres to his calling to be a holy people by maintaining a "position outside nations."[1] Their adherence to Torah has given them a heightened moral awareness of "felt responsibilities and obligations which it demands from no one, but which sustain the world."[2] Levinas expands the vocation to be a holy people to beyond the people of Israel: Levinas maintains that the proper venue for the salvation of humanity now becomes the individual's call to holiness.[3] For Levinas, any "pagan" who knows and obeys the Torah is constitutive of Israel, and lives out Israel's singular task to be a light among the nations, as permitted by the Talmudic Rabbi Meir.[4] Rabbi Meir even claimed that such a pagan is the equal of a High Priest![5] In *Ethics and Infinity* Levinas asserts:

> It is I who support all. You know that sentence in Dostoevsky: *'We are all guilty of all and for all men before all, and I more than others.'*[6] This is not owing to such or such a guilt which is really mine, or to offenses that I would have committed; but because I am responsible for a total responsibility, which answers for all the others and for all in the others, even for their responsibility. The I always has one responsibility *more* than all the others.[7]

From whence this universal call to holiness? It is borne from Levinas's deep trust in every human's likeness to the image of God.[8] The Suffering Servant is in the

[1] Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism,* trans. Seán Hand, John Hopkins Jewish Studies, eds. Sander Gilman and Steven T. Katz (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1990), 22.

[2] Levinas, *Difficult Freedom,* 22.

[3] The individual's infinite responsibility, or what Levinas calls "the exigency of holiness" in his *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo,* interview by Philippe Nemo (Radio France Culture, February-March 1981), trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 105.

[4] See Levinas, *Difficult Freedom,* 22.

[5] See again Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 22.

[6] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* trans. Constance Garnett (New York: New American Library, 1957), 264; cited in Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity,* 98.

[7] Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity,* 98-99; emphasis original.

[8] "[T]he holy is the most immediately manifest in the human" according to David Patterson

background of Levinas's ethics which calls everyone regardless of cultural or ethnic identity to the task of holiness, and which serves as the locus of expiation for the universal problem of sin.

Levinas and Theodicy

Levinas reviews the biblical heritage of making suffering more bearable by placing it within a divine plan in an essay titled, "Useless Suffering." Levinas observes that the practice of theodicy is at least as old as the Bible, "where the drama of the Diaspora reflects the sins of Israel."[9] He adds that this practice has, in light of recent history, been put under question. The violence and the scope of the brutality of 20th century wars and genocides abolish all sense of balance implicit and explicit in theodicy.[10] Levinas underscores the gravity of these events, and writes that in the suffering of the Jewish people in Auschwitz, Nietzche's declaration about the death of God can even be said to have become concrete.[11] Alongside the apparent death of God in Auschwitz, theodicy becomes a meaningless enterprise. So Levinas writes in *Difficult Freedom*: "Chapter 53 of Isaiah was drained of all meaning for them."[12]

However, in this pain of suffering and loss which questions the reality of God, Levinas asserts that the Jewish people, whose very gesture "still belongs to Revelation," had been the "principal actors," because the event as it played out still constituted Sacred History.[13] Levinas holds to the belief that the Jewish people are continuing their own story in relation to divine revelation, especially as portrayed in Sacred Scripture:

> [T]he acute consciousness that the holy Story it [the Bible] tells is not simply a series of finished events, but that it has an immediate actual relation with the fate of the Jewish dispersion in the world. Every intellectual doubt relative to the implicit dogma of this or that other point of this ancient book lost its meaning and effect in what is always serious in real Jewish history.[14]

Levinas, in agreement with Emil Fackenheim, believes that the Holocaust was perpetrated for "the annihilation of Israel and the forgetting of the ethical message

("Emmanuel Levinas: A Jewish Thinker," *Revista Portuguesa de Filosfia* 62/2 [Apr.-Dec. 2006]: 593, JSTOR), commenting on Levinas as a Jewish thinker.

[9] Emmanuel Levinas, "Useless Suffering," in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other,* ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood, Warwick Studies in Philosophy and Literature (London and New York: Routledge, 1988; electronic ed., 2003), 161, Taylor & Francis e-library.

[10] Levinas, "Useless Suffering," 161-62.

[11] See Levinas, "Useless Suffering," 162.

[12] Levinas, *Difficult Freedom,* 12.

[13] Levinas, "Useless Suffering," 162.

[14] Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 24.

of the Bible, which Judaism bears."[15] For Levinas and Fackenheim, "Auschwitz would paradoxically entail a revelation of the very God who nevertheless was silent at Auschwitz: *a commandment of faithfulness*."[16] Levinas goes one step further than Fackenheim by including the rest of humanity in the call to faithfulness:

> Is humanity, in its indifference, going to abandon the world to useless suffering, leaving it to the political fatality—or the drifting—of the blind forces which inflict misfortune on the weak and conquered, and which spare the conquerors, whom the wicked must join? Or, incapable of adhering to an order—or to a disorder—which it continues to think diabolic, must not humanity now, in a faith more difficult than ever, in a faith without theodicy, continue Sacred History; a history which now demands even more of the resources of the *self* in each one, and appeals to its suffering inspired by the suffering of the other person, to its compassion which is a non-useless suffering (or love), which is no longer suffering 'for nothing,' and which straightaway has a meaning?[17]

In the preceding, Levinas affirms that faith minus the comfort afforded by theodicy has to be continued by the rest of humanity, who must now count themselves as part of Sacred History. The response to suffering must be one of compassion, of love, of suffering which is a response to the other's suffering. This kind of suffering ceases to be meaningless, but is infused with meaning. Sacred History is outside the order of politics, but can be found in the personal call to responsibility "without concern for reciprocity, in my call to help him gratuitously, in the asymmetry of the relation of *one* to the *other*."[18] Thus faith without the comfort and certainty of theodicy becomes purified, relying not on the political or the cultural aspects which that faith has taken on in the past, but relies now on the inter-personal: on the loving response to the other's suffering.[19]

Personal Holiness as a "Transubstantiation" or Messianism

Levinas in his essay "A Man-God?" cites Jr 22:16: "He judged the cause of the poor and needy;... Was not this to know me? saith the Lord."[20] Here, Levinas elevates the human to the very heights of divinity, and brings divinity down to the human,

[15] Levinas, "Useless Suffering," 163-64.

[16] Levinas, "Useless Suffering," 163. Emphasis mine.

[17] Levinas, "Useless Suffering," 164. Emphasis original. See also Joshua Shaw, "Is Levinas's Philosophy a Response to the Holocaust?" *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 18/2 (2010): 134, EBSCO who also quotes this and argues a similar understanding of Levinas's essay.

[18] Levinas, "Useless Suffering," 165.

[19] See Levinas, "Useless Suffering," 165.

[20] Levinas, "A Man-God?," in *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other,* trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav, European Perspectives: A Series in Social Thought and Cultural Criticism, ed. Lawrence D. Kriztman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 58.

in what he calls, "the transubstantiation of the Creator into the creature."[21] The very "secret of subjectivity," for Levinas, rehabilitates the philosophical reduction of the subject to consciousness. His notion of substitution, as the one responsible for the many, re-establishes the humanity of man, which contemporary philosophies have surrendered to naturalism.[22]

Moreover, this humanity not having come from this world, and outside of its common everyday pursuits based on natural "needs," manifests as a transcendent but persecuted truth in individuals who allow this ethical grace to work in their lives: "The persecution and humiliation par excellence to which [transcendence] is exposed are modalities of the true [...] it does not come to take its place in the world with which it would be confused immediately, as if it did not come from beyond."[23] These "'ethical peculiarities'—the humanity of man—is a rupture of being."[24] This "rupture" is in line with the "light to the nations" that gives sight to the blind, release to captives, and which shines in the darkness of Is 42:6-7. The case for a light from beyond being that truly humanizes is not so foreign to these concepts of rupture and transubstantiation in Levinas.

Levinas concludes that the constitution of the self is found in becoming victim for another's wrongdoing: "I alone can, without cruelty, be designated as victim. The *I* is the one who, before all decision, is elected to bear all responsibility for the World. Messianism is that apogee in Being—a reversal of being 'persevering in his being'—which begins in me."[25] This means that for Levinas, holiness as prioritizing the other over oneself is unquestionably a human thing and not just a cultural thing, exclusive to a particular section of humanity or to the West specifically.[26] This Levinasian insight is phenomenological and not yet theological. Yet here Levinas demonstrates that to the human being belongs the call to be another messiah, precisely in the human being's inherent dignity as the bearer of the divine image.[27]

Ethics as Divine Encounter and the Foundation of a Sincere Faith

Some final comments on Levinas's "Useless Suffering" serve as the conclusion to this section. Levinas observes that Job already protests the sense of imbalance present in his suffering, just as in the experience of humanity (and the

[21] Levinas, "A Man-God?," 58.
[22] See Levinas, "A Man-God?," 58.
[23] Levinas, "A Man-God?," 56.
[24] Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity,* 87.
[25] Levinas, "A Man-God?," 60; emphasis original.
[26] For this point, see esp. Levinas, "Philosophy, Justice, and Love," interview by R. Fornetand A. Gomez, October 3 and 8,1982, in *Entre Nous,* 109.
[27] See esp. Levinas, "Philosophy, Justice, and Love," 110.

Jewish people in particular) in its recent history.[28] Job protests his own friends' attempts at theodicy, and God states against these would-be theologians/apologists:

> My wrath is kindled against you [Eliphaz] and against your two friends [Bildad and Zophar]; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and *my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly*; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has done (Jb 42:7-8 NRSV; emphasis added).

Reflecting on the preceding, Levinas perceives that Job's friends are "hurrying to the safety of Heaven, [and] would make God innocent before the suffering of the just."[29] But Job's faith is different. Citing Immanuel Kant, Levinas observes that Job did not base his morality on his faith, as did his friends who, rushing to judge Job on the basis of their faith judged him to be wrong. Instead, Job bases his faith on his sense of morality: "in which case faith, however weak it may be, is nonetheless one of a pure and authentic kind, a kind which does not found a religion of solicited favours, but a well conducted life."[30]

Reviewing the faith of Job, from the beginning Job's faith is presented as proceeding from his moral sense; he offers sacrifices for himself and for his own family, in case any of them have sinned (see Jb 1:5). Then in chap. 42, he intercedes for his friends, whose prayers are no longer heard by God because God is angry at them. These friends were his "worthless physicians" (Jb 13:4 NRSV) and his "miserable comforters" (Jb 16:2 NRSV), who in their self-assured but misguided faith tormented him and wronged him (Jb 19:2-3; see also Jb 6:15-21). Yet Job, even though he is the innocent one—indeed, precisely because he is the innocent one and his friends are not—offers prayers on his friends' behalf just as he did for his family. As Levinas said to Philippe Nemo, "I am responsible for the persecutions that I undergo. But only me!"[31]

In summary, Levinas's understanding of the Righteous One of God in Isaiah is a calling that is not exclusive to one people but is extended to all of humankind. The universal expiation in Levinas occurs when the subject designates himself as

[28] Jb 6:2-3a NRSV: "O that my vexation were weighed, and all my calamity laid in the balances! For then it would be heavier than the sand of the sea."

[29] Levinas, "Useless Suffering," 167 n. 8.

[30] Immanuel Kant, *"Uber das Misslingen aller philosophischen Versuche in der Theodicee"* [On the Failure of all the Philosophical Attempts at a Theodicy, trans. provided in text] *Berlinische Monatsschrift* (Sept. 1791), 194-225; cited from Levinas, "Useless Suffering," 167 n. 8.

[31] Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 99.

the victim for the other, even for his very own persecutors, as a messianism in the very image of the Creator who becomes "transubstantiated" in the person who claims responsibility. This is the very secret of subjectivity in Levinas, that humanity is a creature of God and made in his image. In other words, subjectivity is not the reification of the subject after the "I think therefore I am" which Levinas argues covers up the human with ideologies not essential to him.[32] Levinas's alternative proposes that the subjectivity of the human is what instead sets him apart in his "holiness."[33] Therefore, as not belonging to, nor conforming to this world of beings, this secret can only manifest as a persecuted truth. In the suffering involved in the elected responsibility, there springs forth a pure faith, in the true and honest relationship with the divinity and with the other.

Expiation in Christianity

The present essay seeks the ethical basis of our Catholic Eucharist and its' phenomenological articulation. The previous section presents Levinas's notion of subjectivity as holding a secret, a secret which breaks from being-in-this-world, and which leads to the subject's reversal of his being to the point of becoming a victim for another. Phenomenologically, this establishes the humanity of the subject, and distinguishes him from the hard fact of being. In the act of compassion towards the poor and the needy, the Creator is "transubstantiated" in the subject, or becomes messianic in his existence. In this the ethical subject has a spontaneous relation with the Creator and becomes the basis of a pure faith. Levinas's ethical subject, thus properly humanized, becomes responsible for the many. From these Levinasian insights we now turn to the Catholic Christian understanding of the expiatory work of Jesus Christ, the unique messiah and mediator between God and humanity who saves humanity from its sins.

Reflecting on the gospel narrative of Jesus as Savior, Father Thomas Weinandy, OFM, Cap. points out that ethics, or action, precedes and becomes the basis for theology. He writes in his *Jesus Becoming Jesus*:

> Jesus never articulates a 'theology' of his death and resurrection—*why* he must suffer, die, rise. Nor does he provide an explanation as to what these saving deeds will accomplish. Only through his actions—his baptism, Transfiguration, and triumphal entry into Jerusalem—does Jesus present, by way of a prophetic portrayal, the salvific meaning of his death and resurrection. [...] Jesus did not give a verbal explanation of his death and

[32] See esp. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence,* trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 57-59.

[33] See again Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 59.

> resurrection, a verbalized 'theology' precisely because salvation is not the mere obtaining of some new, and until now hidden, knowledge.[34]

Instead, Father Weinandy argues that Jesus enacts a "'theology' of his death and resurrection through his previous prophetic acts, [...] salvation is obtained not through words but through actions."[35] Father Weinandy likewise sees in the Incarnation of Jesus the primordial saving act of the Holy Trinity, which begins the series of saving acts within human history. The Incarnation is significant in this sense, that "[t]he ultimate word that the Word enacts is the word of the cross and the word of the resurrection, for both constitute the hour of Jesus' glory, the acts of salvation through which we perceive the full glory of Jesus as the Father's Son."[36] The acts of the Word incarnate reveal the divine origination, and reveal the very glory of God.

Indeed, Father Weinandy brings up the point that both Judaism and Christianity are founded upon the divine acts which lead humanity to a relationship with divinity.[37] Adherents of both essentially believe in what has been revealed, by way of theophany. The biblical accounts in the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures, relate the divine power of the Hebrew liberation from Egypt, and the theophany witnessed by the people who assembled at Mt. Sinai/Horeb. Father Weinandy treats Jesus's passion, death, and resurrection, which make up the Christian Gospel, as the same type of divine revelation, having been initiated by God for the sake of establishing a relationship with those who believe and live in faith by what has been revealed.

The preceding insights from Father Weinandy demonstrate that in Christianity, based on the traditional witness of the synoptic gospels, a pure faith likewise springs from the relation between Divinity and humanity which manifests in concrete acts. This pure faith is first modeled by Christ in his own saving acts, in "the word of the cross and the word of the resurrection."[38] Christ's acts committed in union with the will of the Father for him reveal their Divine source, and this perfect union between the human subject and the Divinity together reveal God's glory.[39]

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[34] Thomas Weinandy, OFM, Cap. *Jesus Becoming Jesus: A Theological Interpretation of the Synoptic Gospels* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 284. Emphasis original.

[35] Weinandy, *Jesus Becoming Jesus*, 285. The four prophetic acts Weinandy highlights are Jesus's baptism, Peter's confession, the Transfiguration, and Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. See Wenandy, *Jesus Becoming Jesus*, 281.

[36] Weinandy, *Jesus Becoming Jesus*, 285 n. 2.

[37] See Weinandy, *Jesus Becoming Jesus*, 287 n. 3.

[38] Weinandy, *Jesus Becoming Jesus*, 285 n. 2.

[39] See also CCC 515.

The Traditional Christian Interpretation of the Isaianic Suffering Servant

The Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 is the very figure of the one who suffers for the many. In the Christian traditional sources, the synoptic gospels of the Christian New Testament repeatedly explain the actions of Christ in terms of the Isaianic Suffering Servant. Even from the start, at the account of Jesus's baptism, the synoptics echo the opening verses of the Servant Songs (Is 42:1-2), in the descent of God's Holy Spirit on Jesus "like a dove," and a heavenly voice proclaiming at Jesus's baptism, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:16-17 NRSV; par. Mk 1:10-11 and Lk 3:22). The corresponding text in Isaiah speaks of "my beloved servant, whom I uphold, my chosen in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him."[40]

The Isaianic prophecy as used by the synoptics serves to point the reader to a specific truth about the purpose and identity of Jesus Christ, and of his ministry. In Jesus's first preaching at the synagogue in Galilee, his hometown, he reads from the Servant Songs in Isaiah: "He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free" (Lk 4:18 NRSV). This reading calls to mind the text of Is 42:6-7, which alludes to the chosen people as the "light to the nations" (v. 6) who were called "to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness" (v. 7 NRSV). This allusion is reinforced in the Matthean version of the text, which takes up another part of the Book of Isaiah: "Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned." (Mt 4:15-16 NRSV; cf. Is 9:1-2).

This New Testament identification between Jesus and the Isaianic Suffering Servant is preserved in the Catholic liturgy. The first reading for Mass on the twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B) comes from the Isaianic Servant Songs:[41]

> (But the LORD was pleased to crush him in infirmity.) If he gives his life as an offering for sin, he shall see his descendants in a long life, and the will of the LORD shall be accomplished through him. Because of his affliction he shall see the light in fullness of days; Through his suffering, my servant shall justify many, and their guilt he shall bear (Is 53:10-11 NAB).

In the Gospel reading for the same Mass, Christ himself explains his own mission in Suffering Servant terms:

[40] Weinandy, *Jesus Becoming Jesus,* 350.

[41] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Divine Worship, *Liturgical Calendar for the Dioceses of the United States of America 2018* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2016), 38, PDF. usccb.org.

> You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:42-45 NAB; par. Mt 26:28; Lk 22:19-20).[42]

The Suffering Servant Ethics of Christ

Indeed, Jesus embodies a servant-ethics of expiation, based on the Servant Songs of Isaiah. Father Weinandy explains:

> [T]he human causes that effect humankind's salvation are the same actions we witness within Jesus' passion and death as perceived through the lens of the Suffering Servant Songs. These actions are not simply those of Jesus being mocked, spit upon, scourged, crowned with thorns, and crucified. Rather, what is salvific within these actions is Jesus' own Spirit-filled human acts: his willingly assuming in love; his actively appropriating into his own humanity humankind's iniquity, transgressions, and punishment; and lovingly offering his human life to his Father on humankind's behalf. The mockery, scourging, crowning, and crucifying testify not merely to what is being brutally imposed upon Jesus, but more significantly to what Jesus is actively doing, that is, performing those human acts that causally achieve humankind's salvation.[43]

The salvation brought on through the substitution of Jesus Christ for humanity comes from his decision to accept the penalty for sin upon himself. Christ actively makes this decision because in his decision, he "makes possible in such an hour the human decision for God."[44] The God-man Jesus, in his active decision to take on the role of ransom, has made it possible for other individuals to likewise pursue this holy life. Mt 16:24-25: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (NRSV par. Mk 8:34-35; Lk 9:23-24; Jn 12: 24-26).

The Epistles of the Christian New Testament contain numerous exhortations to the reader to follow in Christ's footsteps. As just one example, take the First Letter of Peter:

[42] Here the biblical translation used is the NAB, which is the version used in the Catholic liturgies.

[43] Weinandy, *Jesus Becoming Jesus,* 355.

[44] Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary,* trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 428; cited by Joseph Ratzinger in his *Jesus of Nazareth Part Two: Holy Week From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection,* trans. Philip J. Whitmore (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), 155.

> For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed (1 Pt 2:21-24 NRSV).

As unpacked by Daniel Keating, this passage explains that unjust suffering is the vocation or calling of every Christian.[45] Christ bore our sins on the Cross as the righteous victim for us who are unrighteous in a substitutionary expiation (see 1 Pt 3:17).[46] His human will, having been obedient unto death, permits us to follow in a similar way of life, that of persistently handing over the self to the Father through the course of multiple sufferings throughout one's life.[47] In 1 Pt 3:14, Peter declares blessed those who suffer because of righteousness. He assures his readers that "the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil" (1 Pt 3:12; par. Ps 34:15 NRSV).

The Obedience of Christ as Regards the Father's Will

The New Testament roots this servant-ethics of Christ and of Christ's followers in the dynamics of God's love for us and in turn our response to that love. For example:

> For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.
>
> Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God. (Jn 3:16-21 NRSV)

[45] See Daniel Keating, *First and Second Peter, Jude,* Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture, ed. Peter S. Williamson and Mary Healy (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011; Ebook ed., 2012), 68, Baker Publishing Group. Keating lists all the references in these verses that come from the Suffering Servant of Isaiah.

[46] See Keating, *First and Second Peter*, 69.

[47] See Keating, *First and Second Peter*, 71.

The text quoted from John indicates the connection between faith and obedience. "Those who do what is true come to the light [...] their deeds have been done in God." The obedience demanded by faith is a response of love corresponding to God's gratuitous love; on the other hand those who chose against the obedience of faith "loved darkness rather than light." In other words, faith demands a corresponding way of life whose basis is God's own love. To live otherwise from what faith demands betrays a lack of the necessary relation of love to the source of that love.

The object of loving obedience is the will of God whom we can only know by faith in him. This requires an interiority, a constant search for God's will concerning us. Those who wish to live by faith must walk the same path of obedience that Christ did: "Jesus teaches us that one enters the kingdom of heaven not by speaking words, but by doing 'the will of my Father in heaven' (Mt 7:21)" (CCC 2826). This interior search for God's will and our desire to be obedient to his will is also the formation of the Catholic conscience. The CCC teaches:

> Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, sounds in his heart at the right moment. . . . For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God. . . . His conscience is man's most secret core and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths.[48]

The interior search for the will of God as regards one's own life becomes an interior search for the infinite and becomes for the faithful his own break from being. The Lord's prayer, in beseeching that God's will be done "on earth as it is in heaven" shows the disparity that exists between the ways of the world and the ways of God, and how the faithful cling to God's will and promote it on earth (see for instance CCC 2825). In a similar way, the obedience of Christ, wherein he always places the will of the Father first before all else, constitutes Jesus's break from being's dictates. It is especially evident in the accounts of his temptation in the dessert (see esp. CCC 538-40), and while awaiting his betrayal in the garden of Gethsemane (Mt 26:36-46; Mk 14:32-42; Lk 22:39-46). In addition, the concept of obedience does not contradict the teaching on the two wills in Christ. That is, Christ's deference to the will of the Father does not annihilate his own human will:

> because the human will, as created by God, is ordered to the divine will. In becoming attuned to the divine will, it experiences its fulfillment, not its annihilation. [...] The drama of the Mount of Olives lies in the fact that

[48] Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes* (7 December 1965), 16; cited by the CCC 1776.

> Jesus draws man's natural will away from opposition and back towards synergy, and in so doing he restores man's true greatness.[49]

The synergy of both wills in Christ is evident from his temptation in the desert, up until the Cross: Jesus's whole life held steadily to his purpose, as the savior of humankind by the will of the Father.[50] The positive implication for the human person is the fulfillment of one's individual humanity in Christ, when one defers to Christ's will rather than one's own. In the CCC the Church teaches us that as what Christ did, adhering to the Father's will in a synergy of both wills, the same must unfold in the life of the follower of Christ: "Christ enables us to live in him all that he himself lived, and he lives it in us. 'By his Incarnation, he, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man.' We are called only to become one with him, for he enables us as the members of his Body to share in what he lived for us in his flesh as our model."[51]

The Eucharist as Christ's Universal Expiation and the Church's

According to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Jesus appropriated the prayer of "the righteous man who suffers, who for the sake of God can no longer find any place in this world, who for the sake of faith endures suffering."[52] This prayer, Ratzinger notes, was renewed and deepened in the psalms and the prophets, having been taken up from "the Servant of the Second Isaiah right up to Job and to the three young men in the fiery furnace."[53] "[H]e made it intimately his own, filled it out, offered his own self for its sake, and thereby finally gave the key that opened up this prayer."[54]

In particular, Ratzinger points to the Eucharistic words of Jesus from the Last Supper as the connection between the Jewish tradition of the Righteous One of God, and Jesus's death on the Cross. He points out that the words unquestionably recall the Temple sacrifices in identifying the bread and wine as his own Body and Blood.[55] To this he likewise notes that Jesus adds words from the Suffering Servants Songs, in saying that his body "*is given for you*," and that his blood "*is shed for you and for many*."[56] In the same vein, John Paul II also taught in his *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*:

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[49] Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth Part Two*, 160-61.

[50] The synergy of the human and the divine wills in Christ comes from St. Maximus the Confessor. See ibid.

[51] CCC 521 with a quotation from *Gaudium et spes*, 22.

[52] Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *God Is Near Us: The Eucharist, The Heart of Life,* ed. Stephan Otto Horn and Vinzenz Pfnür, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2003), 28.

[53] Ratzinger, *God is Near Us*, 28-29.

[54] Ratzinger, *God is Near Us*, 29.

[55] See Ratzinger, *God is Near Us*, 32, and the reference provided in n. 6.

[56] Ratzinger, *God is Near Us,* 33. Emphasis original.

> This aspect of the universal charity [which knows no measure] of the Eucharistic Sacrifice is based on the words of the Saviour himself. In instituting it, he did not merely say: "This is my body," "this is my blood," but went on to add: "which is given for you," "which is poured out for you" (*Lk* 22:19-20). Jesus did not simply state that what he was giving them to eat and drink was his body and his blood; he also expressed *its sacrificial meaning* and made sacramentally present his sacrifice which would soon be offered on the Cross for the salvation of all.[57]

Ratzinger notes that while Israel saw itself as the Servant of God who could offer their own personal sufferings as sacrifices to God for the many (within Israel), the truth remained that they were still "stained," and "cannot play the part of the servant of God properly and completely."[58] At the same time, this was the opening towards an expectation for the one who could truly fill this role as "the undefiled witness to God in this world."[59]

At the Last Supper and in his suffering and death, Jesus Christ shows that he is this person. In pairing his Eucharistic words which contain both senses of sacrificial offering and substitutive suffering found in the Old Testament with his own subsequent suffering and death, "the senselessness of death is given meaning; in which what is irrational is transformed and made articulate; in which the destruction of love, which is what death means in itself, becomes in fact the means of verifying and establishing it, of its enduring constancy."[60] The blood of Jesus is the pledge of God's love for humanity.[61] As summarized by Lawrence Feingold,

> [The Son of God] offers Himself with unlimited charity, both for the glory of His Father and for the love of all men, for whom He offers Himself. Every man can say with St. Paul that the Son of God "loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20). The holocaust is maximum and superabundant because He offers Himself to the worst and most humiliating kind of death with total freedom, holding nothing back. As John says in John 13:1, which introduces the Last Supper and the Passion: "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end."[62]

The celebration of the Eucharist therefore calls each of those present to the same kind of love both for God and their neighbor, the love that does not hold anything back, that loves to the very end. Communion, the reception of the Body

[57] John Paul II, Encyclical on the Eucharist and its relationship to the Church *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17 April 2003), 12. Emphasis original.

[58] Ratzinger, *God is Near Us*, 34.

[59] Ratzinger, *God is Near Us,* 34.

[60] Ratzinger, *God is Near Us*, 29-30.

[61] See Ratzinger, *God is Near Us*, 30.

[62] Lawrence Feingold, *The Eucharist: Mystery of Presence, Sacrifice, and Communion* (Steubenville, Ohio: Emmaus Academic, 2018), 383-84.

and Blood of Christ, is to receive from Christ his very own loving presence that abides within, which has the unique power to atone for all humanity.

> It is an unquestionable fact that the work of our redemption is continued, and that its fruits are imparted to us, during the celebration of the liturgy, notable in the august sacrifice of the altar. Christ acts each day to save us, in the sacraments and in His holy sacrifice. By means of them He is constantly atoning for the sins of mankind, constantly consecrating it to God. Sacraments and sacrifice do, then, possess that "objective" power to make us really and personally sharers in the divine life of Jesus Christ.[63]

In this way, *"God himself gives to us, that we may give in turn."*[64] At the prayers of the Roman Canon (Eucharistic Prayer I), the faithful are called to participate and not simply to act as outside observers. The Roman Canon "is the genuine vehicle of the sacrifice" by which Jesus transformed his death into a prayer.[65] By participating in the transforming prayer, "we can share in his death."[66] By virtue of the sincere participation in the prayer of Christ, in union with his sacrificial offering on the Cross, those who make this conscious prayer in their own lives make of their own sufferings and sacrifices their offering of their very own lives to God. In this way the faithful participate in Christ's universal expiation. "Offering the immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him, they [the faithful] should learn to make an offering of themselves. Through Christ, the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and each other."[67]

The Eucharist therefore calls the individual to a moral transformation. At the Mass there is the awareness of having been loved to the point of the Cross, and in Communion worshippers receive this love of Christ in the Sacred Host. As John Paul II puts it, the awareness of being so loved, and of partaking of "Christ's self-giving love" calls and also "equips" the worshipper to "live this same charity in all his thoughts and deeds."[68] And as Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI observes, "a Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented."[69] And he explains again in words that find resonance with Levinas's phenomenology:

[63] Pius XII, Encyclical on the Sacred Liturgy *Mediator Dei* (20 November 1947), 29.

[64] Ratzinger, *God is Near Us*, 45. Emphasis original.

[65] Ratzinger, *God is Near Us*, 49.

[66] Ratzinger, *God is Near Us,* 49.

[67] Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (4 December 1963), 48; cited in Benedict XVI, on the Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the Church's Life and Mission *Sacramentum caritatis* (22 February 2007), 52.

[68] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis splendor* (6 August 1993), 107; cited *Sacramentum caritatis*, 82.

[69] Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus caritas est* (25 December 2005), 14; cited in *Sacramentum caritatis*, 82.

> It is before all else the joy-filled discovery of love at work in the hearts of those who accept the Lord's gift, abandon themselves to him and thus find true freedom. The moral transformation implicit in the new worship instituted by Christ is a heartfelt yearning to respond to the Lord's love with one's whole being, while remaining ever conscious of one's own weakness.[70]

Synthesis – A Phenomenology of the Interiority of the Catholic Mass based on Levinas's Interiority of the Ethical Relation

The faithful's participation in the Holy Mass constitutes the Church's universal expiation. This is an interior participation, especially expressed in the Eucharistic prayers. Its interiority finds articulation in the phenomenology of Emmanuel Levinas, particularly his notion of substitution. The faithful, receiving the grace of Christ in the Eucharist, become able to designate themselves as the victim who suffers for the suffering of others, and even for their own persecutors. This eucharistic version of substitution is a constant handing over of oneself, after Christ, to the will of the Father. Therefore, such a form of eucharistic devotion is to be distinguished from a religion of solicited favors, normally revolving around concerns still within the realm of Being. Rather, this kind of faith constitutes a break, or a rupture from conventional designations of the self.

Levinas's phenomenological break from being

For Levinas, the break from Being reveals the secret of the human subjectivity and, as not belonging to Being, is promptly exposed to persecutions. On the other hand, this rupture is necessary as it alone affords the communion with Divinity which living as a being among beings obscures or renders null.[71] Levinas provides a phenomenological expression of the necessity of a break from being:

> To affirm the priority of *Being* over *existents* is to already decide the essence of philosophy; it is to subordinate the relation with *someone*,

[70] *Sacramentum caritatis,* 82.

[71] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being,* 59, on the distortion and dimming of the human's relation of unique responsibility to another:

> The suspicions engendered by psychoanalysis, sociology, and politics weigh on human identity such that we never know to whom we are speaking and what we are dealing with when we build our ideas on the basis of human facts. But we do not need this knowledge in the relationship in which the other is a neighbor, and in which before being an individuation of the genus *man,* a *rational animal,* a *free will,* or any essence whatever, he is the persecuted one for whom I am responsible to the point of being a hostage for him, and in which my responsibility, instead of disclosing me in my "essence" as a transcendental ego, divests me without stop of all that can be common to me and another man, who would thus be capable of replacing me. (emphasis original)

> who is an existent, (the ethical relation) to a relation with the *Being of existents,* which, impersonal, permits the apprehension, the domination of existents (a relationship of knowing), subordinates justice to freedom.[72]

The break from being reveals oneself to oneself as having always been responsible.[73] The immediate demand of the interior, of *conscience*, is to take responsibility for the other who faces me. The break from being likewise requires a self-denial, or the act of relinquishing any and all perceived "rights" and entitlements. To claim or declare "mine" anything that constitutes my comfort, satiety, and personal glory is, for Levinas, the very moment of violence.[74]

Becoming a substitute requires this dispossession. "[Subjectivity] is sacred in its alterity with respect to which, in an unexceptionable responsibility, I posit myself deposed of my sovereignty. Paradoxically it is qua *alienus*—foreigner and other—that man is not alienated."[75] It is in dispossession, according to Levinas, that man can relate to other men in his holiness. Then, in witnessing the other in his persecution, man can hear the call of conscience reminding him of his originary responsibility.[76]

A possible phenomenological account of conscience

The Eucharistic Sacrifice, in phenomenological terms, calls us back to this same originary responsibility for each other. From the Catholic perspective, the communion with Christ in the reception of the Holy Eucharist affords the grace of conforming to Christ's love and conforming to his will. Cooperation with this grace received in the sacrament of communion, which we express in phenomenological terms as passivity, is an obedience to this alterity discovered deep within (the voice of God in the promptings of conscience).

Levinas's phenomenology may be seen as a description of the interior aspect of this dynamic. For Levinas, to be truly human entails the reversal of the subject's being, so that it no longer moves according to being's disclosure and dictates.[77] Then it listens not to the movement of culture and history, nor even to nationalistic or naturalistic movements, but responds instead to the infinite found in the very fissure

[72] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority,* trans. by Alphonso Lingis, Vol. I Martinus Nijhoff Philosophy Texts (Hingham, MA: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers and Duquesne University Press. 1969, 1979), 45. Emphasis original.

[73] See again Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 59.

[74] Or, the arbitrary exercise of freedom, whereas the Other questions my so-called rights see Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 84.

[75] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 59.

[76] See again, Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 59.

[77] See esp. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 35.

of being. Passivity for Levinas is a submission to the infinitely exterior which is found likewise to be infinitely interior.[78] Furthermore, according to Levinas, one may move beyond passivity and activity, and towards "expiation as uniting identity and alterity."[79] This point of expiation, the union of identity and alterity, appears to be the point when the individual subject constitutes oneself as fully human, no longer just an "I" with its natural inclinations, but a "self" in the true sense, as signed by God and made in his image.[80]

Thus Levinasian passivity underlies the individual's acceptance of the self as responsible, apart from cultural and historical dictates, once this recurrence occurs in the interior.[81] This Levinasian dynamic finds resonance in the Catholic understanding of spiritual interiority and of conscience, as the place where God speaks to us in a primordial way. The Mass as the encounter with the person of Christ in the Holy Eucharist is the place where Christ speaks to us interiorly, therefore the Mass is the primary place where conscience is formed.[82] The resulting ethics therefore of the interiority of the Holy Mass is the constitution of the self in his original holiness, and in passivity/obedience understands that the self is uniquely responsible for others.

Conclusion

The notions of passivity and substitution, as the interior movements which turn Being's tendency to violence on its head, to the mind of this Catholic-Christian reader of Levinas, are present in the very life of Jesus, in his fulfilment of his Father's will. Levinas's interiority of the ethical subject can likewise be understood by the Christian believer as the interior path to becoming alter-Christus, or to becoming another Christ in his passivity to the will of the Father and in his self-emptying love. Levinas's sense of the transubstantiation of the Creator into the creature is similar to the traditional notion of the synergy between the human will of Christ and the divine will of the Father. His phenomenological notion of transubstantiation can be related

[78] "This passivity undergone in proximity by the force of an alterity in me," Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 114.

[79] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 118.

[80] See the discussion in Roger Burggraeve, SDB, "Affected by the face of the other: The levinasian movement from the exteriority to the interiority of the infinite," *Dialegesthai: Rivista telematica di filosofia,* 11 (2009), section 3.4, https://mondodomani.org/dialegesthai/. See also Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 114, wherein Levinas discusses the "recurrence" of self to self as having always been responsible, as recognition of its past. Recurrence is not "a return to oneself" but "becomes identity in breaking up the limits of identity, breaking up the *principle* of being in me, the intolerable rest in itself characteristic of definition" (emphasis original).

[81] See Burggraeve, "face of the other," section 3.3.

[82] Thus, the CCC recalls the teaching that the Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life" (Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, *Lumen gentium* [November 21, 1964], 11; cited in CCC 1324).

to the Catholic understanding of the communion with Christ in the Holy Eucharist and the moral transformation that this brings about in the believer's own passivity towards the grace afforded by the sacrament. In Christ we are all made new (see 2 Co 5:17, and Ga 6:15). Being made new in Christ "makes no provision for the flesh" (Ro 13:14 NRSV). In the Holy Mass, we "are made partakers in the supernatural life."[83] Once the person discovers the very infinite at the core of his humanity, the passivity of his own interior recreates the subject in Christ, especially in the interiority of Eucharistic sacrifice. PS

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