**Chapter 2**

**From the “Poetry” of Liturgy to the “Prose” of Emmanuel Levinas: On Not Already Being Lost in Wonder, Love and Praise[[1]](#footnote-1)**

What is it that invites rather irresistibly the late modern Jewish thinker Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995) into a conversation on sacramentality, liturgy, and ethics? It seems to be the conspicuous under-determination of, and occasionally even oblivion toward, the ethical as interpersonally enacted in the rightly enlarged liturgical-sacramental imaginary within and beyond the rites of corporate worship that permeate Alexander Schmemann’s theology. Inviting Levinas’s participation, I submit, is the search for a contrapuntal modulation vis-à-vis the most hopeful aspirations and the most vexing occlusions of the whole discursive and imaginative field of sacramental-liturgical inquiry which Schmemann’s work represents rather emblematically. Like Schmemann, Levinas is a diasporic thinker – in more than one sense. Unlike Schmemann, Levinas is a comfortably Western and manifestly Occident-centered thinker. The Jewish thinker was born in Kaunas (Kovno), Lithuania, during its subjugation by the Russian empire, grew up during the turbulent era of the Russian revolutions, First World War and the establishment of the independent Lithuania, but eventually spent most of his life in France.[[2]](#footnote-2) Despite having endless reservations about engaging with theology, the line between specifically Jewish religious reflections and presumably non-confessional philosophical inquiries about the idea of God seems at times to be rather blurred in Levinas’ thought. Similarly to the other two primary interlocutors of this dissertation – Alexander Schmemann and Edward Said – Levinas was multilingual culturally and intellectually, and had a rather poly-locational sense of (non)belonging, specifically and somewhat predictably shaped by the recurrent imaginary of the Jews being the perennial intra-European “other” or even subaltern. Levinas conveys his personal exilic disposition in a manner equally radical to the conceptualizations of his ethics as virtually suspended in an incessant exile of non-return and non-fulfillment:

Someone asked me the other day if, as a Jew, I didn’t feel like an outsider in France. I replied to him that wherever I am, I feel like I’m in the way, and I quoted a Psalm: ‘I am a stranger upon the earth’ (Ps.119:19). Strangeness is situated in relation to the earth.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Certain geo-cultural connections between the interlocutors notwithstanding, what could be the critical purchase of entering in conversation – conversation being neither a comparison nor an exhaustive explication of the peripeties of Levinas’ thought – with Levinas specifically on liturgy? To put it bluntly, it is, as I hope to show, Levinas’ attitude toward liturgy otherwise than what Schmemann decried as “liturgicalness.” Levinas’ “liturgy” allows the re-configuration and re-situation of liturgy beyond the complacent inertia of self-absorption and self-sufficient interiority of consuming cultic rituality. As I already indicated at the outset of this dissertation (Part I, Ch. 1), it is neither desirable nor justifiable for Christian theological reflection in the West to proceed without being attentive to the global postcoloniality and the European post-totalitarian aftermath. Attention to these pivotal events of the late modernity entails an attuned and even penitential, where applicable, theological hospitality vis-à-vis the existential actualities of life with their globally diverse yet irrevocably interdependent asymmetries, especially when it concerns human suffering and injustice. In this context the thought of Levinas is one of these specifically post-Holocaust voices that a Christian theologian ought to never pass by indifferently.

Levinas’ indomitable critique of a certain kind of liturgical piety and “the sacramental,”[[4]](#footnote-4) if engaged conversationally and constructively, offers a particularly useful and provocative counterpoint for the re-envisagement of liturgy as re-engaged with ethics. Such provocations, despite his obvious and profound suspicion of all things liturgical – in the sense of ritual or cultic action – may contribute to the possibility of re-orchestrating the vital enlargement of liturgy not at the expense of ethics but instead through ethics, beyond the unproductive competitiveness of the logic of dislocation. In other words, I engage Levinas’ ethically invested thought as a contrapuntal challenge that, I believe, suggests ways to remodulate the detrimental modern Western disengagement of sacramental liturgy and ethics by interlacing them to the point of fruitful “confusion”[[5]](#footnote-5) (to take the liberty of paraphrasing Levinas somewhat mischievously here) of liturgy as a sacramental action originating within the liturgical convocation with the “stirring” of what some theologians call “liturgy after the liturgy” or the vicarious work of mercy and justice outside the moments of upliftment in “amorous dialogue.”[[6]](#footnote-6) On the other hand, provocation seen as a rightful challenge does not determine the constructive fruit of the conversation. The present conversation with Levinas on liturgy is irrevocably mired in the mutual recognition of a noteworthy difference. It is “the mystery of mysteries of [Christian] theology”[[7]](#footnote-7) – the Incarnation of Christ – which Levinas obviously does not share yet I find absolutely pivotal together with the trinitarian vision of God. Thus I enter into the conversation by offering a partially disagreeable answer to his question “whether the true God can ever discard His incognito.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Namely, the discarding of the incognito is rather the sacramental transposition of God’s absolute incognito into an opaquely unveiled incognito of sacramental presence located in the continuity, perhaps even the trace, of the Incarnation. So the conversation undertaken here is to some extent akin to a being a “metaphysical” one according to Levinas’ idea of metaphysics as “the relation between the same and the other”[[9]](#footnote-9) which is primordially enacted as conversation (*discourse*). Conversation as an enactment of the metaphysical relation “maintains the distance between me and the Other, the radical separation asserted in transcendence which prevents the reconstitution of totality, cannot renounce the egoism of its existence…”[[10]](#footnote-10) The “distance” and “egoism” of my locus of engagement shows itself in calling in question Levinas’ insistence –I assume unsurprisingly for both parties – upon the metaphysical relation as approaching “without touching,”[[11]](#footnote-11) as disinterested and disengaged from all participation.[[12]](#footnote-12) Participation for Levinas is a term of trespassing across the ontological abyss of difference between the uncreated and creation, a term of erotic heresy of the habitual, egoistic self, a term of fusion and totalization.[[13]](#footnote-13) But in certain classical Christian theological traditions, participation does not signal univocal proximity and unadulterated intimacy of fusion; rather it constitutes the language of the antinomy of ontological and epistemological distance. Yet the enduring distance of the radical ontological difference between God and creation is simultaneously offered into a creaturely uncontrollable and exhaustively incomprehensible, yet irrevocable, proximity and availability in the trinitarian economy of incarnational sacramentality – but always *per gratiam* and under no conceivable circumstances *per naturam*, to use a Thomistic distinction. Hence, the God-creation relationality here is already contaminated, or hybridized, by the incarnational hospitality toward and unapologetically non-patriarchal appreciation of touch[[14]](#footnote-14) even though – *pace* Levinas – without annihilating the ethical and without inescapable “naturalization” of alterity in the “metaphysical relation” of conversation. In sum, this is a conversation between two specific, tradition-based creativities which have already touched and will continue to touch each other even as they remain mutually exterior and grounded in their respective primeval revelations – in the word of God and in the incarnate word of God,[[15]](#footnote-15) and also in the hope that truly “each discourse on contact with each other becomes larger.”[[16]](#footnote-16)

1. **Resisting the Captivity of Splendor and Levitation: Religion as Rite and “Liturgy”**

It strikes me as rather ironic to engage Emmanuel Levinas on the theme of liturgy, most often associated with the pernicious egocentric pieties of religious “enthusiasm.” Liturgy is a superbly ambiguous notion in the texts of Levinas. First, “liturgy” often serves for Levinas as the point of departure for dismissive critique of certain pointedly Christian versions of lived religion and – by extension – certain compromised or assimilated versions of Jewish religious practices. The “liturgy” which is infinitely suspected on the grounds of egoistic abdication from the ethical responsibility is the codeword for individualistic religion of exclusively cultic and ritual worship as the sole interface for all commerce with God. Religion as “liturgical” relation to God is the exercised religion effectively “reduced to the interiority of the house of prayer.”[[17]](#footnote-17) Such practiced religion as pious interiority is at its best irrelevant and at its worst idolatrous:

The reduction of religion to private worship in anachronistic… it is not that in itself worship seems to us an outmoded formula; but when it is jealously private, it lives and breathes in a hothouse, communicates no vital energy and does not project itself into life. The inner life, reduced to being present at temple, interrupting a man’s daily activities, before he returns to serious things, is perhaps enough in a world free of rifts in which eternal and daily matters each remain peacefully in their proper place. The Christian churches set themselves up within this distinction and inaugurated an academism of the spiritual in which the inner life frees itself of all responsibility.[[18]](#footnote-18)

The site of a true religion for Levinas is not the hothouse of ritualistic worship wherein the “absolute is reduced to this very worship” and attendance of “pretty ceremonies” while “savoring the metaphysical anxiety and the presence of the Sacred in social quietude…”[[19]](#footnote-19) Religion worthy of its name for Levinas has little to do with the privatized sphere of rapture, ecstasy, mythological enchantment, or “that drunkenness of the Sacred”[[20]](#footnote-20) – always forgetful of the suffering and non-redemption of the present world, always preoccupied with solitary salvation,[[21]](#footnote-21) and always dangerously abstract in its *Schwärmerei* of intoxication with the violence of magical actions.[[22]](#footnote-22) True religion is rather a counterpractice vis-à-vis “the unctuous, mystical, pious, homiletic, clerical notion of religion.”[[23]](#footnote-23) Hence, true religious practice within Judaism, according to Levinas, is to be reflective of the “expansiveness of a God whom a temple could in no sense contain.”[[24]](#footnote-24) Reflecting on the thought of Franz Rosenzweig, Levinas envisions true religion as a distinct configuration of relationality: “Religion, before being a confession, is the very pulsation of life in which God enters into a relationship with Man, and Man with the World.”[[25]](#footnote-25) But religion, very soberly, is also “the certainty of the absolute’s hold over man” and “burns inwards… as infinite responsibility.”[[26]](#footnote-26) Thus religious relation can only be an ethical relation through which God’s presence and revelation are encountered:

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 of the other, God is drawn out of objectivity, presence and being. He is neither an object nor an interlocutor. His absolute remoteness, his transcendence, turns into my responsibility – non-erotic par excellence – for the other. And this analysis implies that God is not simply the ‘first other’, the ‘other par excellence’, or the ‘absolutely other’, but other thanthe other [*autre qu’autrui*], other otherwise, other with an alterity prior to the alterity of the other, prior to the ethical bond with another and different from every neighbor, transcendent to the point of absence, to the point of confusion with the stirring of the *there is.[[27]](#footnote-27)*

Ethics as spiritual optics is an optics of apophatic (negative) distance, theologically circumscribing any ontological speculative knowledge of God, yet contrapuntally co-sonorous with positive interpersonally enacted knowledge of God[[28]](#footnote-28) where the finite creaturely ethical action, in a sense, enacts more than it acts:

…the Other is not a new edition of myself; in its Otherness it is situated in a dimension of height, in the ideal, the Divine, and through my relation to the Other, I am in touch with God.

The moral relation therefore reunites both self-consciousness and consciousness of God. (..) Ethics is not the corollary of the vision of God, it is that very vision. Ethics is an optic, such that everything I know of God and everything I can hear of His word and reasonably say to Him must find an ethical expression.[[29]](#footnote-29)

The discourse of negative theology – non-presentability of the transcendence, its unavailability for thematization does not result in a vacuum of “positive” ethical relation and action. Negative theology, as it were, flows into positive ethical performance as one is “ordained” to the service of, indeed, a traumatic hospitality:

In this order which is an ordination the non-presence of the infinite is not only a figure of negative theology. All the negative attributes which state what is beyond the essence become positive in responsibility, a response answering to a non-thematizable provocation and thus a non-vocation, a trauma. This response answers, before any understanding, for a debt contracted before any freedom and before any consciousness and any present, but it does answer, as though the invisible that bypasses the present left a trace by the very fact of bypassing the present. That trace lights up as the face of a neighbor, ambiguously him *before whom* (or to *whom*, without any paternalism) and him *for whom* I answer.[[30]](#footnote-30)

The positive response to the summons of the Infinite consists in the conversion of strictly religious response into a religio-ethical responsibility: “The positivity of the infinite is the conversion of the response to the infinite into responsibility, into approach of the other. The Infinite is non-thematizable, gloriously exceeds every capacity, and manifests, as it were in reverse, its exorbitance in the approach of a neighbor, obedient to its measure.”[[31]](#footnote-31) Religious praise is exercised, under the auspices of this conversion, as service. The most lofty apophatic theology is ethically converted into a performance of obediently humble acts of service.

If Levinas would be willing to speak about theology at all, it would be a theology stemming from the primacy of ethics over the doctrinal, let alone liturgical, tenets of religion. As he maintains, “for me 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.”[[32]](#footnote-32) Ultimately, “the ethical order does not prepare us for the Divinity; it is the very accession to the Divinity. All the rest is a dream.”[[33]](#footnote-33) It seems that for Levinas, in religion as radically ethical and as resolutely non-“liturgical” – sobered up and purified of affectivity and enchantment of rite – “liturgy” often functions as a trope for a rogue relation with God, as the paradigmatic relation to, or submergence in, “the Sacred.”[[34]](#footnote-34) As such it is a site of escape from the ethical exigencies of life in “the privileged moments of liturgical, mystical elevation, or in dying…”[[35]](#footnote-35)

In *Totality and Infinity* “liturgy” is related to the cessation of discourse in “incantation”[[36]](#footnote-36) and “elevation.” These terms denote precisely that which distracts one from ethical relationship with the other. Such “liturgy” accommodates a self-designed transcendence of escape from ethical responsibility and therefore precludes the possibility of a genuinely non-allergic and non-indifferent relationship with the other, human and divine. References to liturgy in *Totality and Infinity* are thoroughly negative. The ethical relation “cuts across every relation that one could call mystical” – mystical in that in such a relation “intoxicating equivocations come to enrich the primordial univocity of expression, where discourse becomes incantation as prayer becomes rite and liturgy, where the interlocutors find themselves playing a role in a drama that has begun outside of them.”[[37]](#footnote-37) Here “liturgy” becomes the site and the medium of the ontological, psychological, and aesthetic derailing of the ethical. “Liturgy” is akin to the “poetic activity – where influences arise unbeknown to us out of this nonetheless conscious activity, to envelop it and beguile it as a rhythm” only to be duly disrupted by “discourse” – a conversation, a social relation of responsibility[[38]](#footnote-38) toward the other – that breaks the “rhythm which enraptures and transports the interlocutors – prose.”[[39]](#footnote-39) Affinity between “liturgy” and “poetry” appears in their ecstatic character, overwhelming rational discourse, their swooning experientialism, irrational thaumaturgy,[[40]](#footnote-40) and their privileging ludic views of reality. According to Levinas, God’s presence – to be sure, a relation without relation – can be encountered through the spiritual optics of one’s relation to fellow human beings – “the vision of God is a moral act.”[[41]](#footnote-41) Judaism’s proclivity and vocation under such constellation of relationality is to demythologize and refuse the “splendor and levitations of salvation by faith” precisely because of the grave ethical danger involved, since “the cruel acts find themselves conditioned precisely by the residual elements that are uncontrolled and impure in their supposedly pure and simple love of the transcendent God.”[[42]](#footnote-42) Thus, the participation in and infatuation with “the supernatural” for Levinas cannot possibly be “an obsession for Judaism,” since “its relationship with divinity is determined by the exact range of the ethical.”[[43]](#footnote-43)

**2. Beyond Dreams and Incantations: Liturgy as Work**

It might have already appeared that the idea of liturgy is unsalvageable as an idolatrous site within practiced monotheistic imaginaries, but it is not quite so. Levinas proposes another view on liturgy, surprisingly similar to certain Christian interpretations (see Part I, Ch.1), which also accentuate the Greek semantic connotations of έργον in λειτουργία. But before anything else is said, it has to be noted that Levinas does not advocate a wholesale extirpation of liturgical activity though rites of worship, at least when they operate in the lean manner as his preferred liturgical gestures – “verbal gestures of prayer”[[44]](#footnote-44) – distanced from “liturgical enthusiasm” and representing “the extreme conscience of justice” being grounded in, accountable to, and sustained by “the difficult and erudite work of justice.”[[45]](#footnote-45) It is fairly obvious that Levinas is not indifferent to liturgy and worship. Consequently, “no intrinsic power is accorded to the ritual gesture, but without it the soul cannot be raised up to God,”[[46]](#footnote-46) so “to criticize the thought that sees in worship the supreme expression of religious life is not to be opposed to worship.”[[47]](#footnote-47) The question here seems to be more about the quiddity of worship and the discernment between the right worship and an alien worship then about the legitimacy or value of worship as such.

So the second perspective on liturgy in the works of Levinas – liturgy otherwise than “liturgical enthusiasm” – locates liturgy in the order of the metaphysical relation with the other where it can be said to be “accomplished as service and as hospitality”[[48]](#footnote-48) to both the human other and God. This liturgy is the enactment of “the ethics of welcome – the first religious service, the first prayer, the first liturgy…”[[49]](#footnote-49) Above all, liturgy is work. At this juncture it is helpful to note that the stance of Levinas vis-à-vis the predicament of original sin in relation to human ethical capability for responsible action differs from what can be expected from a typical Western Christian, especially Protestant, theological trajectory. Interhuman responsibility for the other – into which the I is always already inscribed or conscripted as a hostage – is “more ancient than any sin.”[[50]](#footnote-50) The responsibility of the I for the other is a responsibility of a hostage, a hostage to our common, though ethically asymmetrical, createdness. It is the sharing of the created reality by being involved in the “*gnawing away at oneself* in responsibility, which is also incarnation.”[[51]](#footnote-51) This, however, must not be conceived, according to Levinas, as “the state of original sin; it is, on the contrary, the original goodness of creation.”[[52]](#footnote-52) In other words, human agency taken hostage to the responsibility for the other, is seen by Levinas as empowered to redemptive proportions as it incarnates itself in efficacious self-sacrifice.

In “The Trace of the Other” and “Meaning and Sense”[[53]](#footnote-53) liturgy is reconceptualized rather broadly as a metaphysical directionality or an “orientation in being” modeled after the Abrahamic movement without return as if in counterpoint with what Levinas sees as the habitual Ulyssean itinerary[[54]](#footnote-54) of the Occidental rationality. This orientation, which eventually is named liturgy, is a work (*oeuvre*) “conceived radically” – being “a movement of the Same toward the Other which never returns to the Same.”[[55]](#footnote-55) This work or liturgy “can be posited only as a movement going outside of the identical toward an Other which is absolutely Other” and this orientation which “goes *freely* from the Same to the Other is a Work.”[[56]](#footnote-56)

Now work is neither a game nor a pure expenditure; it is not reciprocal and there is no immediate triumph[[57]](#footnote-57) involved. This sort of work as “going outside” is situated in the order of eschatology beyond egoistically profitable teleology – in the order of “an eschatology without hope for oneself.”[[58]](#footnote-58) Hence it is “a work, distinguished from games and from calculation, is being-for-beyond-my-death (*l’etre-pour-l’au-delà-de-ma-mort*).”[[59]](#footnote-59) But this sort of work as orientation, or the dispositional comportment relative to the others, is a work which “is thus a relationshipwith the other (*une relation avec l’Autre)* who is reached without showing himself touched (*sans le montrer touché*).”[[60]](#footnote-60) So the work as liturgy for Levinas turns out to be a dynamic specification of the metaphysical, i.e. ethical, structure of relationality, enacted, as it were, in a trans-cultic and gratuitous (but not playfully gratuitous like a game) action:

I should like to fix the work of the same as a movement without return of the same to the other with a Greek term[[61]](#footnote-61) which in its primary meaning indicates the exercise of an office that is not only completely gratuitous, but that requires, on the part of him that exercises it, a putting out of funds at a loss. I would like to fix it with the term ‘liturgy’. We must for the moment remove from this very term every religious signification, even if a certain idea of God should become visible, as a trace, at the end of our analysis. Liturgy, as an absolutely patient action (*action absolument patiente)*, does not take its place as a cult alongside of works and of ethics. It is ethics itself (*elle est l’éthique même*.)[[62]](#footnote-62)

Liturgy here becomes not an occasion of incantation to appease needs – including the cravings for individual salvation – but more likely a “work without recompense”[[63]](#footnote-63) as the interface for the ethical encounter with the face[[64]](#footnote-64) of the other, proceeding rather from the desire for the O/other. Passage toward this ambivalent encounter with the face of the neighbor situated in the trace of transcendent illeity, puts “me into question, empties me of myself”[[65]](#footnote-65) – here, if not exactly in the state of hostage, then at least into the position of responsibility or diaconate. In juxtaposition to the need which “opens upon the world that is for-me; it returns to the self (…) even when sublime, as the need for salvation, it is still nostalgia, homesickness,”[[66]](#footnote-66) diaconate consists in response to the summons of the other’s face – the site of the word of God. Diaconate is a “subjectivity entirely given over to service”[[67]](#footnote-67) to embody the entering into redemptive work. This is also the entering into the solidarity of responsibility “as though the whole edifice of creation rested on my shoulders,”[[68]](#footnote-68) thereby emptying the bearer of this responsibility of his/her imperialism and egotism of salvation.

To sum up, Levinas’ reflections on liturgy here suggest the re-troping of liturgy as the work of enacting the ethical/metaphysical relation to the other in and through absolutely patient and gratuitous action toward – opaquely and ambivalently – both the neighbor and God. The “work conceived radically” as liturgy is an absolutely patient and eschatological movement toward God which can only be suffered in and through the movement toward the others: “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.”[[69]](#footnote-69) Liturgy, purified of the *Schwärmerei* of privatized piety with its needy egotism of salvation can be said to be a relation (non-inertly, but energetically) envisioned as work.

Ultimately, for a theology concerned with liturgy as a doxological response to the self-disclosure of God, Levinas’ provocation consists in recasting liturgy as an interhuman work of justice. Of course, it is not an innocent claim since this particular work of justice is the interface of revelation and relation with God. The work of justice is the “vision”[[70]](#footnote-70) of God. For Levinas, and here is the crux of his truly theological challenge, “there can be no ‘knowledge’ of God separated from the relationship with men.”[[71]](#footnote-71) It does not suggest, however, that God is subsumed without surplus in the presentation of a face or within social relations. According to Edith Wyschogord’s helpful summary, “neither does God stand apart from the upsurge of the Other, nor is He identical with what transpires in social relations.”[[72]](#footnote-72) This dynamic imaginary of liturgy as relation-being-“worked”-out or as a relation in motion can be, I submit, useful not only for a loosely analogical conception of ethical/metaphysical/religious relation such as, for example, is offered in Michael Purcell’s “theology with Levinas.” In Purcell’s reading of Levinas, the fundamentally asymmetrical nature of incommensurable ethical relation itself is seen as “liturgical.”[[73]](#footnote-73) For Purcell, liturgy as work (*oeuvre*) tends to be situated in the interiority of ethical space of relation without relation between the same and the other: “Liturgy is not so much something initiated by subject, but is a work achieved and accomplished in the subject.”[[74]](#footnote-74) Without discounting the responsive/passive nature of liturgy or even the admissibility of the philosophical elaboration of the non-allergic relation of the same with the other as liturgy,[[75]](#footnote-75) the most constructive theological challenge of Levinas’ in the context of this project appears to be located in the possibility of navigating or “reincarnating”[[76]](#footnote-76) Levinas’ liturgy as “work conceived radically” into the order of “the Third.” The order of the “the Third” would seem to be the reality of interhuman relations and justice as socially configured and socially interactive in all that ever-metamorphosing multiplicity of lived existential actualities in relation to God and the other in the plural. But from a constructive perspective, such a “reincarnation” would seem to inspire the resistance to juxtapose liturgy as a doxological “work” in relation to glorification of God vis-à-vis liturgy as “work conceived radically” in relation to one’s fellow human persons. Keeping in mind the ethical provocation of Levinas, I will explore the possibility of a non-competitive imaginary of liturgy in Part III.

**3. The Liturgy Which Comes to Mind In Conversation with the Saraband of Innumerable Cultures**

The conversation with Levinas so far has passed more in the mode of listening on my side. First, to allow enough space for the critically positioned ethical provocation from outside Christianity to sound the crevices of liturgical sensibilities, particularly those nodal points through which liturgy often devotedly derails into an unrecognized and pathetic self-mockery (one struggles not to say blasphemy) or into what Schmemann succinctly called “liturgicalness.” But second, to probe the measure of Levinasian provocation in terms of its potential fecundity for the enlargement of Christian liturgical-sacramental discourse. At this juncture, I believe, it is pertinent to detour a bit more critically and inquisitively into some questions and assumptions which are not shared in the present conversation with equal interest and urgency by both parties. It is not my intention in this project to engage in the “close reading” mode of analysis of the fundamental tenets in Levinas’ thought and to scrutinize all areas of respectful yet complete disagreement. Except that I cannot bypass the interrogation of the consistency of Levinas’ ethical imaginary in relation to the geo-cultural others who enter his ethical imaginary as “the Third” from the underside of modern Occident. Here, I believe, more ought to be said alongside raising certain other issues which so far I have narrated rather gratefully.

First of all, if the liturgical theology and, indeed, the whole imaginary of sacramentality so vigorously represented in Alexander Schmemann’s work could be somewhat schematically termed as liturgical consumption/consummation of lived religion and theological inquiry, Levinas presents a completely reversed imaginary – that of an ethical consumption/consummation of all religious thought and action. Schmemann prioritizes theologically the model of all-embracing salvation as *theosis* of all creation. Creation in all its grandeur and minuteness of materiality is the “matter” of the cosmic eucharist offered in adoration and thanksgiving by the *homo adorans*. Levinas, however, succinctly points out the lures of liturgical-sacramental utopia when the sublime sacramental materialism of salvation through incarnated Christ tends to become chronically disengaged from the actual materiality amidst most definitely unredeemed human life. Christianity, Levinas observes painfully acutely

simultaneously overestimates and underestimates the weight of the reality which it wants to improve. It overestimates it because it sees in it a total resistance to human action. The relationships that man entertains with himself and his neighbors seems to him fixed, unalterable, eternal. He underestimates it, for he hopes that a miraculous intervention on the part of divinity will transfigure this brutal weight.[[77]](#footnote-77)

Schmemann’s reasoning has amply illustrated the hostage situation in which certain Christian theology inscribes itself by attuning and aligning itself to the sacramentally salvific *opus Dei* in which all finite created reality is “assumed to be healed” without anything remaining discarded in superfluous neutrality, while at the same time under-performing notoriously as far as the equitable actualizations of these dignified hopes in the routine daily living among innumerable afflictions of the so-called natural and moral evils are concerned. Schmemann’s wholly pertinent eschatological qualification of the immensity, indeed the qualitative infinity of the deifying *opus Dei*, and of the sacramental liturgy as participating in the *opus*, as the “slow transformation” and “slow victory” resonates sagely with Levinas’ skepticism about the effortlessness of miraculous intervention. Yet, arguably the most pointed and truly ironic Levinasian indictment of theologies consumed/consummated in sublime materiality of enlarged liturgy as bordering on nihilistic, or at least decadent, is this: “To move towards justice while denying, with a global act, the very conditions within which the ethical drama is played out is to embrace nothingness and, under pretext of saving everything, to save nothing.”[[78]](#footnote-78) The neglected ethical drama is precisely where the very sacramental inconsistency of liturgical theologies such as that of Schmemann – among others – surfaces most painfully and most soberingly through the contrapuntal calling into question their indifference toward the socially incarnated consequences of *theosis*.

Returning to liturgy, from a Christian perspective of reading Levinas, the purified liturgy as “work conceived radically” is thankfully no longer a matter of obsolete *parergon*. Even the “liturgy” of “incantation” consistently merits at least the urgency of unrelenting critique. Yet the idea of liturgy as work is nonetheless permeated by the late modern specters of a Kantian vision of lived religion as hegemonically ethical at the expense of the non-rational, the non-discursive, the non-verbal, i.e., the various undetractable aesthetic and affective dimensions of the sacramental order (of life, really!) which are all assumed to be saved within the trinitarian economy of salvation.[[79]](#footnote-79) These specters leave open also the already noted Luce Irigaray’s old question regarding the unholy fusion of the wisdom of monotheism and patriarchal passion in Levinas’ thought.[[80]](#footnote-80) In any case, what is valid as a provocatively fruitful correction does not always justify itself as full reversal, especially in conjunction with a particularly allergic reaction to all relations palpably reciprocal, analogical, and hybrid. A certain third way seems to be desirable, I submit, for the re-imaging of liturgy, learning from and allowing oneself to be provoked by both, drastically different yet equally zealous, trajectories of liturgical imaginary – Schmemann’s and Levinas’. To the interrogation of this possibility I will turn in Part III.

But this cannot happen before one ethical question is asked precisely in the context of postcoloniality: if the order or the structure of relationality of justice, i.e., reciprocity and equality, or the realm of “the Third” or social multiplicity, is not identical but nevertheless inspired and held accountable by the order of ethics, i.e., the non-reciprocal relation between the metaphysically intimate ethical party of two, then what is, for Levinas, the place of the geo-cultural other – the stranger, the widow and the orphan of the Occidental colonialism? Regarding the socio-cultural implications of Levinasian ethics, with Slavoj Žižek I contend that Levinas conspicuously passes over the actual simultaneity of orders of “ethics” and “justice.”[[81]](#footnote-81) With Zygmunt Bauman I also underscore that indeed, “the ‘primal scene’ of ethics is thereby also the primal, ancestral scene of social justice.”[[82]](#footnote-82) As underinterrogated as the order of justice appears in the works of Levinas, how does the cultural and racial stranger fare in the Levinasian intersubjective world which is at least accountable to ethics, if not constituting the very order of ethics? It is here that an inconsistency and a curious diasporic (in)sensibility toward geo-politically conditioned cultural differences cannot go unnoticed. If Levinas could ever be implicated in something like a “warm and almost tangible communion”[[83]](#footnote-83) with anything then it would perhaps be the Western European cultural traditions. Levinas does not seem at all to be interested in the emergent hybridity of cultural encounters across the intersecting asymmetrical terrains of the postcolonial reality. The Holocaust and the Western imaginaries, policies, and actualities of colonialism do not resonate for him as they did, for example, for Frantz Fanon and Aimé Cesaire among others (see Part I, Ch.2). Thus, a variation of “Europe is the Bible and the Greeks,” unquestionably an idealistic and daringly reductive statement as far as Europe is concerned, appears in numerous Levinasian texts.[[84]](#footnote-84) Besides being reductive – for it is fairly obvious that by “Europe” indeed only the Occidental Europe as a geo-cultural configuration of knowledge, power, and religion is implied – the ubiquity of the “Bible and the Greeks” statement reveals Levinas as a “liturgist” of a certain cultural “amorous dialogue” which does not produce any ethically motivated fissures but precisely leaves the “third party” listening, “wounded, to the amorous dialogue.”[[85]](#footnote-85) At least in the actual geo-political Europe, let alone beyond it. Except that here one must remember, on Levinas’ cue, that crisis of religion – and presumably of all the “liturgies” of amorous and exclusive intimacies and their dearly presumed identitarian purities – “results from the impossibility of isolating oneself with God and forgetting all those who remain outside the amorous dialogue,” all those outside of “the love of the couple” and its “closed society.” [[86]](#footnote-86) Now who might be this “third party” and “all those who remain outside?” Might it be an intra-European interstitial other such as the Lithuanians alongside whom and in whose country Levinas was born and lived diasporically, but who seemingly never merited his attention except by being undistinguishably Christian, i.e., fitting presumably smoothly and without a residue within the grand narrative of “the Bible and the Greeks,” and sharing a curiously uninterrogated liturgical non-entusiasm with the Jewish community in Kaunas?[[87]](#footnote-87) But the most obvious “Third” vis-à-vis the “Eurocentrism”[[88]](#footnote-88) of Levinas (“the Bible and the Greeks present the only serious issues in human life; everything else is dancing”[[89]](#footnote-89)) are those “underdeveloped Afro-Asian masses” who are “strangers to the Sacred History that forms the heart of the Judaic-Christian world” and whose “arrival on the historical scene” has produced a “new situation” in the West.[[90]](#footnote-90) In the aftermath of the Second World War and the Holocaust, Levinas had discerned a new-found authenticity of the dialogue in truth, entailing an irreducible equilibrium of double manifestation of truth in Judaism and Christianity. This dialogue and equilibrium was to be found within a framework of tolerant cohabitation of Judaism and Christianity which is, however, disturbed by “the rise of the countless masses of Asiatic and underdeveloped peoples.”[[91]](#footnote-91) The arrival of the postcolonial condition – or the postcolonial provincializing of Europe – registers for Levinas as a religio-cultural jeopardy based on seemingly spontaneous and solely economically determined aspirations of the non-European peoples:

I do not in any way want to qualify this rise in materialism because we hear in it the cry of a frustrated humanity, and while one certainly has the right to denounce one’s own hunger as materialist, one never has the right to denounce the hunger of others. But under the greedy eyes of these countless hordes who wish to hope and live, we, the Jews and Christians are pushed to the margins of history, and soon no one will bother any more to differentiate between a Catholic and a Protestant or a Jew and a Christian, sects that devour one another because they cannot agree on the interpretation of a few obscure books.[[92]](#footnote-92)

What is invisible in the lament about the possible postcolonial decentering and creolization of “Europe” is the typically unrecognized correlation (as noted in Part I, Ch.2) between the Western European colonialism and the Holocaust, but also the inability to recognize that

for in some sense, the Third-Worldization and hybridization in the First World merely follow upon the prior flows of population, armies, goods, and capital that in the colonial era mainly moved ‘outward’ from the center to the periphery, where displacements and disruptions of people’s relation to place were felt, endured, or suffered most acutely, and which was therefore the chief site of syncretisms and hybridities.[[93]](#footnote-93)

What obtains here rather very ironically is a veiled form of bad faith which usually pertains to those amorous dialogues against which, according to the insightful interpretation by Roger Burggraeve, Levinas has himself argued with so much premonition: “… one ‘knows’ perfectly well that one must not exclude the third person, but nonetheless acts as if one could.”[[94]](#footnote-94) From a perspective of postcoloniality, Levinas demonstrates a typically Occidental (and not simplistically Eurocentric) postmodern blind spot vis-à-vis precisely those *ethical* exigencies surrounding the Orientalized and colonized cultures, knowledges, and histories which finally “write back” or even “pray back” to the self-proclaimed center of everything, the West. Such occlusions are almost canonically ingrained throughout most of the Western intellectual milieu but are thus sufficient to mandate caution in considering the scope of relevance – precisely on the grounds of justice as hospitality to strangers – of Levinas’ seemingly historically and materially disembodied ethical theory in the context of the emerging polycentric globality and its discursive imaginaries.

On the other hand, Levinas, at least when given a generously proleptic reading which he might not have wanted, hints at the future of the Jewish-Christian “ecumenism” in the presence of the in-flow of the previously colonized cultures being as a “dialogue” which “this time will go beyond the level of the Graeco-Roman ideas common to Jews and Christians in the nations where until now they have lived on.”[[95]](#footnote-95) Ominously, the work of “dialogue” here can no longer be limited to the “amorous dialogue” of the closed society of a couple in love. This sort of “dialogue” is perhaps more reminiscent of liturgy as an orientation and as a work of “going outside of the identical toward an Other.” Namely, liturgy as “going outside” into the socio-cultural and intersubjective existential engagements with actual others and strangers, widows and orphans of the postcolonial and global late modernity, taking the courage to reason and act doxologically precisely because

the Justice rendered to the Other, my neighbor, gives me an unsurpassable proximity to God. It is as intimate as the prayer and the liturgy which, without justice, are nothing. God can receive nothing from hands which have committed violence. The pious man is the just man. *Justice* is the term Judaism prefers to terms more evocative of sentiment. For love itself demands justice, and my relation with my neighbor cannot remain outside the lines which this neighbor maintains with various third parties. The third party is also my neighbor.[[96]](#footnote-96)

These soundings of liturgy and prayer as the work of rendering justice to the near and the far are worthwhile, I submit, even when those to whom such ideas come to mind seem not to be able to always sustain the counterpoint of planetarity that disturbs their Occidentally embedded intellectual fecundity in a justice-starved realities of the present dispensation. Finally, there is much in Levinas’ ethical thought that mandates a good deal of “insomnia” about its relentless Occidentalist traction. Particularly, about its unperturbed West-centrism regarding the over-metaphorized “Europe,” let alone other parts of the world. That being said, the peregrination through the methodological challenges of re-engaging liturgy and ethics is far from having arrived at a constructive breakthough. Indeed, its gravity of challenges can be fully appreciated only if voices such as Levinas’ are part of the conversation. Yet, for a theological endeavor conscious of its age in both the postcolonial and post-Holocaust world a painstaking “de-occidentalization” of Levinas patronizing gaze over the “saraband of innumerable and equivalent cultures, each justifying itself in its own context”[[97]](#footnote-97) from the heights of his Eurocentric Western spectacle needs to be performed without hesitation. To “de-occidentalize” the saraband of cultures is not to “disorient”[[98]](#footnote-98) it destructively and unjustly. Rather it is to look into the blind spots of the Occidental gaze that still believes to have understood the supposedly equivalent innumerable cultures of the global saraband better than they have ever understood themselves.

1. I am referring here to concluding line of the last stanza of the hymn by Charles Wesley and Rowland H. Pritchard “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Biographical information comes from the interviews of Levinas with François Poiré and Myriam Anissimov in *Is It Righteous To Be? Interviews With Emmanuel Levinas* (Jill Robbins, ed.; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001): 23-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Interview with Myriam Anissimov, *Is It Righteous To Be?*, 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See the Overture of this dissertation. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This is an allusion to “God and Philosophy” where Levinas expounds the idea of illeity: “…God is not simply the ‘first other’, the ‘other par excellence’, or the ‘absolutely other’, but other than the other [*autre qu’autrui*], other otherwise, other with an alterity prior to the alterity of the other, prior to the ethical bond with another and different from every neighbor, transcendent to the point of absence, to the point of confusion with the stirring of the *there is.*” In *Emmanuel Levinas: Collected Philosophical Papers* (Alphonso Lingis, trans.; Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998): 165-166. Further abbreviated as *CPP*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “Amorous dialogue” represents for Levinas the narcissistic self-insulation in indifference toward human suffering while presuming to be individualistically enveloped in a pious intimacy with God. See Levinas, “The I and the Totality,” *Entre-Nous: Thinking-Of-The-Other* (Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshaw, transl.; New York: Columbia University Press, 1998): 21-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Levinas, “A Man-God?” *Entre-Nous*, 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Ibid*., 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Alphonso Lingis, transl.;Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2002): 39. Further abbreviated as *TI*. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Ibid*., 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Ibid*., 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. “The comprehension of God taken as a participation in his sacred life, an allegedly direct comprehension, is impossible, because participation is a denial of the divine…” in *TI*, 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Here I refer to the interrogation by Luce Irigaray of Levinas’ adherence to a patriarchal and masculine conception of monotheism with its “injunction not to touch.” See Irigaray, “Questions to Emmanuel Levinas: On the Dignity of Love,” *Re-Reading Levinas* (Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley, eds.; Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991):114. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. One of Levinas’ descriptions of difference between Judaism and Christianity, strained in its homogenizing formalism as a Christian cannot help but notice, is as follows: “… the specific face of Judaism: the link between God and man is not an emotional communion that takes place within the love of a God incarnate, but a spiritual or intellectual (*esprits*) relationship which takes place through an education in the Torah. It is precisely a word, not incarnate, from God that ensures a living God among us.” In Levinas’ perception, in Judaism, as opposed to Christianity, “spirituality is offered up not through a tangible substance, but through absence. God is real and concrete not through incarnation but through Law, and His greatness is not inspired by His sacred mystery. His greatness does not provoke fear and trembling, but fills us with high thoughts.” Emmanuel Levinas, “Loving the Torah More Than God,” *Difficult Freedom*: *Essays on Judaism* (Sean Hand, transl.; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997):144-145. Further abbreviated as *DF*. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Emmanuel Levinas, “Exclusive Rights,” *DF*, 239. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Emmanuel Levinas, “How is Judaism Possible?” *DF*, 246. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *Ibid*., 247-248. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *Ibid.,*248. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Emmanuel Levinas, “Being a Westerner,” *DF*, 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Emmanuel Levinas, “Place and Utopia,” *DF*, 101. Also, Levinas is rightfully emphasizing the absence of solidarity locally and globally from the practices of private religiosity, see, for example, “Education and Prayer,” *DF*, 270. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Emmanuel Levinas, “Ethics and Spirit,” *DF*, 7. Levinas associates violence with “poetic delirium and enthusiasm” vis-à-vis “the Sacred” – the idolatrous deity of the swooning piety of emotivism as opposed to “the Holy” – with the disposition of fear and trembling “when the Sacred wrenches us out of ourselves.” Such ec-static decentering of human person from his/her voluntary self-possession and rational self-presence is seen as regressive to pre-monotheistic forms of spiritual life and above all, detrimental to the ethical relation with the other/Other/Illeity, *DF*, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Emmanuel Levinas, “Between the Worlds. The Way of Franz Rosenzweig,” *DF*, 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Levinas, “How is Judaism Possible?”, *DF*, 248. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Levinas, “Between the Worlds”, 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Emmanuel Levinas, “Religion and Tolerance,” *DF,* 174. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Levinas, “God and Philosophy,” *CPP*, 165-166. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Levinas states that “to know God is to know what must be done.” See Emmanuel Levinas, “A Religion for Adults,” *DF*, 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence* (Alphonso Lingis, trans.; Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2004):11-12. Further abbreviated as OTB. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. *Ibid*. 12. Predictably, Levinas qualifies the leap involved in the linkage of the hostage taking neighbor and the illeity of God by stressing that “the infinite then cannot be tracked down like game by a hunter. The trace left by the infinite is not the residue of a presence; its very glow is ambiguous. Otherwise, its positivity would not preserve the infinity of the infinite any more than negativity would.” *Ibid*., 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. “On the Usefulness of Insomnia,” *Is It Righteous To Be?*, 236. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Levinas, “Place and Utopia,” 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Levinas, *TI,* 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. *Ibid*., 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. *Ibid*., 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. *Ibid*., [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Levinas is always wary to emphasize relation (touching!) due to the concerns about habitual naturalization, domestication, assimilation of the alterity, so the social relation is theorized along the lines of non-indifference: “The interhuman, properly speaking, lies in a non-indifference of one to another, in a responsibility of one for another, but before the reciprocity of this responsibility, which will be inscribed in impersonal laws, comes to be superimposed on the pure altruism of this responsibility inscribed in the ethical position of the I qua I,” “Useless Suffering,” *Entre-Nous*, 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. *Ibid*., 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. “Thaumaturgy” for Levinas is yet another sarcastic trope of cultic action and numinous enchantment in its clandestine violence of the Sacred, which by its “sacramental power” “envelops and transports me” and by acting so wounds the dignity of a responsible human being. See Levinas, “A Religion for Adults,” *DF*, 14-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Emmanuel Levinas, “For a Jewish Humanism,” *DF*, 275. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Levinas, “Being a Westerner,” *DF*, 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Levinas, “Education and Humanism,” *DF*, 271. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Emmanuel Levinas, “The State of Israel and the Religion of Israel,” *DF*, 217, 219. Levinas does not abandon the skeptical proviso though: “But if the ritual is valuable, it will be reborn only in the virility of action and thought,” 219. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Levinas, “A Religion for Adults,” *DF*, 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Levinas, “How is Judaism Possible,” *DF*, 246. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Levinas, *TI*, 300. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Emmanuel Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind* (Bettina Bergo, trans.; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998): 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Levinas, “From the Rise of Nihilism to the Carnal Jew,” *DF*, 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Levinas, *OTB*, 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. *Ibid.* Pointing to the important differences on the account of the conceptions of original sin, Stephen H. Webb helpfully reminds that for Levinas “original sin has a social provenance, and thus it is correlated to the notion of justice, not salvation.” See Webb, “The Rhetoric of Ethics as Excess,” *Modern Theology* 15:1 (1999): 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Emmanuel Levinas, “The Trace of the Other” was initially published in 1963 but the most relevant portions for the present project were also incorporated in the later essay “Meaning and Sense” (1965). I will make references to both, mostly depending on the accuracy of the translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. “The itinerary of philosophy remains that of Ulysses, whose adventure in the world was only a return to his native island – a complacency in the Same, an unrecognition of the Other.” In Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings* (Adriaan T. Peperzak, et al. eds.; Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996):48. Further abbreviated as BPW. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. *Ibid*., 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. “As an absolute orientation toward the Other, as sense, a work is possible only in patience, which, pushed to the limit means the Agent to renounce being the contemporary of its outcome, to act without entering into the Promised Land,” “Meaning and Sense,” *BPW*, 49-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. *Ibid*., 50. Eschatology for Levinas – very similarly to Schmemann – is not a futuristically utopian concept. Eschatology “institutes a relation with being *beyond the totality*, or beyond history, and not with being beyond the past and the present” and thus is “a relationship with a surplus always exterior to the totality,” *TI*, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Levinas, “The Trace of the Other,” *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy* (A. Lingis, trans.; Mark C. Taylor, ed.; Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986):349. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. The term referenced here is, of course, λειτουργία with its prominent emphasis of the έργον as a gratuitous action. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. *Ibid*., 349-350. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” *BPW*, 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. It is perhaps helpful to give a working definition of “face” (*le visage*) at this point since the term has already appeared in this chapter. Face is an apparition of precariousness and mortal vulnerability of created (human) life and especially its suffering which – ambivalently, but divinely or godly – mandates/commands respect and restraint from violence in the form of sacrificial sustenance of its existence and wholeness, in and because of its precariousness as participatory in immemorial human “fraternity” in which every subjectivity is pre-consciously and pre-deliberatively conscripted. In the texts under my attention here Levinas particularly describes the face as “the movement of an encounter” which is not added to face perceived as static; face is “a visitation and transcendence” in “Meaning and Sense,” 64. However, it is “in the trace of the Other that the face shines,” so that “the God who passed is not the model of which the face would be an image. To be in the image of God does not mean to be an icon of God but to find oneself in his trace,” *ibid*., 63-64. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Levinas, “The Trace of the Other,” *Deconstruction in Context*, 350. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Jill Robbins, Introduction: “*Après Vous, Monsieur*!” *Is It Righteous To Be*, 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Levinas, “The Trace of the Other,” *Deconstruction in Context*, 353. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” *BPW*, 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Levinas, *TI*, 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. *Ibid*. Similarly to Martin Buber (see Part I, Ch.1), Levinas aims at prohibiting the thought of genuinely religious relation with God “being accomplished in the ignorance of men and things,” *ibid.* With a characteristic Levinasian accent, this “relation with the Transcendent” must be free “from all captivation by the Transcendent,” i.e., it must be a social relation, *ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000): 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Michael Purcell, *Levinas and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006):137. Purcell’s constructive project of Levinasian theology of grace assigns ethics the place of fundamental theology, constructing an analogy of ethics being the first theology with Levinas’ dictum that ethics is first philosophy, *ibid*., 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. *Ibid*., 139. *Oeuvre* or liturgy for Purcell is the original structure of (metaphysical, ethical) relationship with the other; the structure itself being “the work of the other in me,” 141. Very interestingly, Purcell’s interpretation links liturgy as *oeuvre* with eucharistic existence – the existence as “for-the-other,” wherein liturgy/*oeuvre* ends in the death of the subject. Thus eucharistic existence is understood as “*kenosis in extremis*.” Ultimately, eucharistic existence is the “excoriation of the self by the other and on behalf of the other…” wherein liturgy is construed, in a Derridean reading of Levinas, as a gift-giving as sheer expenditure, *ibid*., 142-144. I do not futher pursue this trajectory of interpretation of liturgy for the same reasons I find Jean-Yves Lacoste’s re-imaging of liturgy unproductive, see Part I, Ch.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. I am using here the term of Zygmunt Baumann’s reflections on the unsustainability of the structure of society of love, the intimacy of the same and the Other in the moral party of two “when the ‘Other’ appears in a plural” and when Levinasian ethics “reincarnates as, or is reprocessed into, social justice,” in Baumann, *Does Ethics Have a Chance In a World of Consumers?* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2008):45. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Levinas, “Place and Utopia,” *DF*, 99-100. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. *Ibid*., 101-102. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. David Bentley Hart has offered a most acerbic critique of Levinas’ ethics with particular attention to the demonization of aesthetics. Levinasian ethics is so scrupulously purged “of the fruits of being – joy, beauty’s ‘cold splendor’, delight, the affectivity of love, even laughter (in short, life) – that it becomes an almost demonic category” in Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003): 85-86. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Irigaray is concerned in her “Questions to Emmanuel Levinas”– as many should be – that the patriarchal passion is likely to be concealed in the supposedly monotheistic injunction not to touch while “monotheistic religions cannot claim to be ethical unless they submit themselves to a radical interrogation relative to the sexual attribution of their paradigms, whether these be of God, the ways in which God is referred to…” and even more pointedly suggests that Levinas “knows nothing of communion in pleasure” and of “the transcendence of the other which becomes im-mediate ecstasy in me and with him – or her,” *Re-Reading Levinas*, 114;110. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Slavoj Žižek argues convincingly, as part of a spirited wider critical engagement with Levinas, that “the Third is always-already here. Prior to encountering the Other as a face in front of us, the Other is here as a paradoxical background-face; in other words, the first relationship to an Other is that to a faceless Third (…) the limitation of our ethical relation to responsibility toward the Other’s face which necessitates the rise of the Third … is a positive condition of ethics, not simply its secondary supplement.” Žižek, “Neighbors and Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence” in Slavoj Žižek, Eric L. Santner, Kenneth Reinhard, *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005): 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Zygmunt Bauman, “The World Inhospitable to Levinas,” *Philosophy Today* 43:2 (1999): 156. Bauman adds insightfully that “Levinas’ writings offer rich inspiration for the analysis of the endemic aporia of moral responsibility. They offer nothing comparable, though, for the scrutiny of the aporetic nature of justice. They do not confront the possibility that… the work of the institutions that Levinas wished to be dedicated to the promotion of justice can fall short of moral ideals or even have consequences detrimental to moral values,” 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Levinas, “Loving the Torah More Than God,” *DF*, 145. This phrase describes Christianity as differing from both Judaism and atheism. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. For example, see Emmanuel Levinas, “The Bible and the Greeks,” *In the Time of the Nations* (Michael B. Smith, trans.; London and New York: Continuum, 2007):119-121 among many other occasions. Further abbreviated as ITN. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Levinas, “The I and the Totality,” *Entre-Nous,* 21. See also footnote 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. See the Interview with François Poiré, *Is It Righteous to Be*, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. As noted, Levinas’ “Eurocentrism” consists in awarding a superlative position to the Occidental culture, with the presumed reductive identification of Europe with the geo-political and socio-cultural configuration more appropriately called the West or Occident. What Levinas affirms is the presumed universal cultural and religious centrality of the Occident. See, for example, Interview with François Poiré, 64-67, and “Being-Toward-Death and ‘Thou Shalt Not Kill’,” 134,137 in *Is It Righteous to Be*; “Meaning and Sense,” *BPW*, 57-59; “The Bible and the Greeks,” *ITN*, 119-121. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. “Intention, Event, and the Other,” *Is It Righteous to Be*, 149. Levinas adds that he does not think that such a statement is racist. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Levinas, “Jewish Thought Today,” *DF*, 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. *Ibid*., 165. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg, Introduction, *Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity* (Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg, eds.; Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996):8-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Roger Burggraeve, *The Wisdom of Love in the Service of Love: Emmanuel Levinas on Justice, Peace, and Human Rights* (Jeffrey Bloechl, trans.; Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2002):124-125. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Levinas, “Jewish Thought Today,” *DF*, 165. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Levinas, “A Religion for Adults,” *DF*, 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” *BPW*, 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-98)