A TIME FOR THE MARGINAL: LEVINAS AND METZ ON BIBLICAL TIME

Manuel Losada-Sierra
John Mandalios
Griffith University, Australia

I. INTRODUCTION

At first glance it appears problematic to try to link Emmanuel Levinas and Johann Baptist Metz. Metz is a German Catholic theologian trying to redeem theology from its idealism and to shake up the bases of both scholastic and Rahnerian-transcendental theology. Levinas is trying to prioritise ethics before and beyond ontology with support from his Judaic pre-philosophical experiences; he wants thereby to overcome the ontologization of philosophy and a parallel development in theology, to the extent that the latter participates in an intellectualism that seeks lucidity and comprehension. Levinas insists on his credentials as a philosopher; even in his Talmudic commentaries, his readings are invariably philosophical.

In their attempts to overcome idealism, however, the trajectories of Metz and Levinas intertwine; there are crucial intersections in their philosophical and theological projects from which we may benefit in exploring new ways to mediate between philosophy and theology. Both Levinas and Metz hold that the emphasis philosophy and theology have placed on Greek logos rather than Jewish wisdom has been a mistake; the two concur that reason must be awoken by stressing the hidden elements of European experience preserved in biblical thought and in the role that marginal and suffering figures play in Jewish wisdom. These roots prioritize the cry of those who suffer as a hermeneutical tool to awaken reason. Marked by the fracture of Western civilisation at Auschwitz, Levinas and Metz focus on the consequences of the Western mode of thinking in history, particularly as regards such victims. They maintain a line of resistance against the barbarism, despair, and nihilism into which the history and culture of Europe fell in the twentieth century.

Following this line of thinking, this study will show how Levinas and Metz open up a new relationship with historical time by exploiting the Jewish legacy, particularly the concepts of eschatology, apocalypse, and messianism. In this way they not only oppose the mainstream view of history as a vector of continuous progress toward its own imminent realisation, but introduce the contingency of individual experiences, particularly those of the victims of history. Initially it appears that Levinas and Metz follow different paths to splice contingency

and singularity into history: while Levinas criticises eschatologies that attempt to bestow meaning on particular instances of suffering from the perspective of a teleology visualizing the end of time, Metz views apocalyptically-directed eschatology as a vital lifeline that offers justice to victims and retrieves sensitivity towards suffering. The divergence is less emphatic, however, when one bears in mind that apocalyptic eschatology, in Metz's understanding, has nothing to do with teleology as this is normally understood. Eschatology according to Metz is living as though it is the end of time; it is a revelation (apocalypse) of suffering from the past in the *present*. As Stéphane Mosès remarks in reference to Kafka's narrative of the Tower of Babel: 'the end can be achieved "from today," in the very heart of history.'¹ The differences between the two thinkers follow rather from the political emphasis Metz places on the concept of apocalypse, where the messianic understanding of time in Levinas points towards an ethical-messianic subjectivity.

The paper has three parts. The first contrasts Levinas's critique of Hegelian historicism with prophetic eschatology; from this follows Levinas's rejection of teleologically-directed temporality and the notion of a final judgment in history. The second analyses Metz's apocalyptically-directed eschatology when confronted with a Nietzschean time without finale; although Metz retains the concept of an end of time and final judgment, he interprets the *eschaton* as a way to regard the present from the perspective of the end of time. The third part concludes by pointing out differences within an essential concordance between Levinas and Metz on the relationship between time and responsibility in history.

II. LEVINAS AND MESSIANIC TIME

The consideration of time is one of the most relevant points of discord between modern philosophical humanism and the humanism stemming from the Bible and rabbinical commentaries. As Levinas writes, 'it is through the way they [Israel and the West] experience and are affected by time, the ultimate difference, that we can still, perhaps, distinguish brotherly humanities amongst which we rank Israel and the West.'² Indeed, humanism based on the prominence of a subject who is open to progress and entrenched in a solid rationality and who is therefore tied to a consideration of time that depends on ontology, collides with a humanism that considers subjectivity a response to an essential vocation of service in which history depends on a time tied to other humans. This, at least, is Levinas's idea when confronting the Bible and the Talmud with the values of the West, particularly philosophical reason.

Prophetic Eschatology beyond Teleology

When Levinas thinks of history tied to ontology, he primarily has Hegel in mind. In fact, the oblivion of the singular absorbed into the universal is clear in Hegel's philosophy of history. Because history is a dialectic process in which the Absolute becomes reality, 'reason cannot stop to consider the injuries sustained by single individuals, for particular ends are submerged in the universal end.'³ According to Hegel, history in the philosophical sense cannot be reduced to the repertoire of contingent and empirical facts in the same way that ordinary history can. The philosophical historian is struck by the fragmentary and inconsequential character of empirical facts and looks for the divination of the meaning 'of the whole historical process, the exhibition of reason's working in the sphere of history.'⁴ Indeed, history 'concentrates its attention on the concrete spiritual principle in the life of nations [. . .] and addresses a universal thought that runs throughout the whole.'⁵ By addressing universal and not individual and contingent phenomena, philosophical world history integrates all of the different and possible experiences of nations and peoples into one unit. This unit is the universal spirit, which constitutes the aim of history from a philosophical perspective.

The prioritisation of a singular occurrence in human life over the universal meaning of historical events is clear in *Totality and Infinity*. In his 1961 book, Levinas emphasises the discontinuous character of the prophetic eschatology and contrasts it with the ontology of totality. While the latter relies on the Hegelian final judgment of history, the former connects with 'being beyond totality or beyond history.' That is, eschatology does not consist of 'teaching the orientation of history' or adding 'information about the future by revealing the finality of being.'⁶ The final judgment of history would mean the sacrifice of single events and particular existences to a final and universal meaning in which singularity is 'integrated into a whole.'⁷ In the teleological dynamic, the voices of the deaths and the cries of the victims are lost. The only voices that are heard are those of the historiographers, who are the voices of the survivors who write the history after the victory of the powerful. Indeed, within historical time, particular beings are lost, counted, and recapitulated: 'Birth and death as punctual moments, and the interval that separates them, are lodged in this universal time of the historian, who is a survivor.'⁸ In this regard, in the Talmudic commentary of the 'Model of the West' from the Tractate Menahoth, Levinas wonders whether the fundamental difference between Israel and the West does not rest precisely in the Western historicism that 'relativises and devalues every moment,' while 'Israel attaches itself to an "always" – in other words, to a permanence in time, to a time held by moments of holiness . . . where not

one of these moments is lost, or to be lost, but they are all to be dependent, that is to say, sublimated?'⁹

The judgement of the historiographers appears clear in the appropriation and interpretation that the works of the dead undergo in world history. Separated from the will that produced them, the works remain in history ready to be interpreted and used to others' will. History is, therefore, the act of appropriating and interpreting works; history is always related to works and actions. Interior life is not historical, and meaningless actions are not relevant to history. From Levinas's perspective, historiographers 'interpret, that is, utilise the works of the dead,' and therefore, historiography is 'the usurpation carried out by the conquerors, that is, by the survivors; it recounts enslavement, forgetting the life that struggles against slavery.'¹⁰ The problem that Levinas detects in history is what Ombrosi calls 'an attack upon life [. . .], upon the unique and single life of those who lay prostrate. Of those who no longer exist. Who no longer speak.'¹¹ The 'virile judgement of history' decides what is relevant and what is not important enough to be recognised. In this judgement, only the visible is taken into consideration because 'Western humanism has never managed to doubt triumph or understand failure or conceive of a history in which the vanquished and the persecuted might have some value.'¹²

Levinas's philosophy is the revitalisation of the moment and the individual experience of persecution and domination that aims for compromise. In a text from *Existence and Existents* with evident Bergsonian echoes, Levinas argues that time is not a succession of instants, 'a time composed of separate instants' that cannot provide a reason for the tears or offer hope for the present¹³. Hope is not a promise of a better future that would attenuate present misfortunes. The disappearance of a single person, with his/her soundless pain and nuisances, will not be compensated by a better future for those who come after him/her. In focusing on the instants rather than on the final result of history, Levinas therefore seeks to break the solidity of the temporality conceived from knowledge and presence and rescues the value of single lives. In other words, by cutting off teleology from history, Levinas, as Catherine Chalier notes, intends to give weight 'to the instant lived by every unique life' without awaiting the wider development of history.¹⁴

For Levinas, the grand event of history 'would be the apparition of the human which would signify the interruption of the pure perseverance of a being in its being.'¹⁵ The continuity of time, therefore, must be interrupted to ground the personal responsibility for the human pain

and suffering that springs from the unicity of each life. This responsibility is grounded in 'biblical humanity'¹⁶ because Greek spirituality is always bound to knowledge and therefore to lucidity. From a Greek perspective, '[r]eason rises like a fantastic sun that makes the opacity of creatures transparent. Men have lost their shadows! Henceforth, nothing can absorb or reflect this light which abolishes even the interiority of beings.'¹⁷ 'Biblical humanity,' on the other hand, will provide a frame for thinking about responsibility for the suffering and death of the other. This 'new reason'¹⁸ goes beyond lucidity and is able to hear the words of the marginal. This reason is open to the new, to the stranger, to the exterior.

Being beyond history, eschatology is nonetheless reflected 'within the totality and history, within experience.'¹⁹ and his purpose is to save history by introducing a breach in time. This breach is eschatological in the sense described by the Bible, 'which consists of feeling responsible in the face of the future one hopes for others.'²⁰ In this eschatology, the causes of the dead, the weak, and those who suffer unjustly 'are ready to be heard'²¹ in each instant, and not just the causes of the heroes when history is written at the end of a war. The eschatological fissure in time constitutes a positive meaning to the extent that it introduces personal responsibility into universal and continuous time. The prophetic expectations of Levinas's perspective do not intend to place messianic salvation in the final era of the times, and even less so in a world-to-come. Despite the central role Metz attributes to the end in the consideration of time, this finale is nonetheless a present a responsibility for the suffering. Although there is a difference in the valuation of time with a finale, Metz, in this sense, is essentially in accord with Levinas.

The apparition of the human is, for Levinas, the interruption of history. It is the novelty that breaks the inhuman time of progress. The face of the other is the face of suffering, whose 'very epiphany consists in soliciting us by his destitution in the face of the Stranger, the widow, and the orphan.'²² In fact, responsibility can only occur in a time when the instants do not succeed one another in a mechanical form toward a final judgement of history but are open to the *new* in every instant. In his early works, *Existence and Existents* and particularly *Time and the Other*, Levinas defines time as the 'very relationship of the subject with the other.'²³ Time is not a reflexive experience of the solitary subject; rather, it happens in the intersubjective relationship. This conception of time remains solid in most important works, *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. In the former, time appears in terms of the other who, being infinity, opens time; and in the latter, time is represented in the concept of diachronic time, a time that is not contemporaneous with the

other. The messianic redemption, therefore, is accomplished in history and coincides with the moment when each man takes the other's suffering as his own.

Messianic Redemption

Eschatology concerns Messianic redemption; therefore, the questions of the identity of the Messiah and the time when messianic salvation will be accomplished remain central in Levinas's appreciation of time. In fact, if messianic time is detached from the end of times and from the perspective of the world to come, the identity of the Messiah as someone who will come to provide consolation and to offer the promised reward to those who have remained loyal to God is unnecessary. Thus, who is the Messiah? And when will he come? Levinas's comments on the Talmudic text demonstrate the tension among the Talmudic masters, particularly in relation to the conditions for the coming of the Messiah.

In this regard, Levinas analyses two positions represented by Rabbi Johanan and Rabbi Samuel in the Tractate *b.Sanhedrin* relating to the nature of the messianic redemption and, therefore, the time in which it will be accomplished. Rabbi Johanan believes that the messianic era 'consists in fulfilling all the prophecies, a promise of a delivered and better humanity'.²⁴ The messianic era will therefore be a type of interim period in which all political and social contradictions stop and the way is cleared for a spiritual and metahistorical dimension that moves into an indefinite future called 'the world to come.' According to Levinas, Johanan's position has nothing to do with the history of peoples and their destinies; rather, it concerns the salvation of individuals in their personal and interior dimensions. For this reason, Johanan 'believes in the ideal of a disincarnated spirit' that is distant from any drama in human life. In this stance, the other 'no longer appears as poor, but as a friend'.²⁵ Against this framing, Rabbi Samuel, in relation to the messianic era, points not only to the overcoming of political violence but also to solidarity with the other, and 'the Other is always the poor one; poverty defines the poor person as Other, and the relation with the Other will always be an offering and a gift, not an 'empty-handed' approach'.²⁶ Therefore, in Samuel's approach, the messianic era is part of history, and from this relationship, new historical responsibilities arise. Messianic times are those in which every man has a responsible relationship to the other, which is understood as the poor and the victim.

From the same perspective, Levinas rejects the consideration of messianic times in terms of eternity or in terms of the mythical life to come. Real life occurs in the world of contradictions and dramatic reality, not in a perfect reality to which only perfectly righteous

people have access. The attention of the other thus becomes the indispensable element to identify the notion of messianism and the way to make its salvific content precise. In defining the messianic era in terms of responsibility for the other, Levinas positively values the efforts of men who work concretely within the interior of history. History is in fact the scenario in which intersubjective relationships intertwine and conflicts arise. Therefore, the days of the Messiah are differentiated from the world to come because the former needs the 'fecundity of time' and the 'positive value of history.'²⁷ To this point, Levinas has challenged history for its connatural tendency to ignore the concrete experiences of single lives, especially those of the defeated, the weak, and the victims. However, a positive value is set forth in the commentary of the Talmud *Sanhedrin*. Levinas's Talmudic perspective does not contradict his critique of historicism; instead, the redemption of history occurs through the irruption or epiphany of the other, who with his presence breaks the progressive historical development by claiming attention and solidarity. In this way, it is possible to understand Levinas's claim, '[w]hen the man truly approaches the other, he is uprooted from history.'²⁸

Messianic Subjectivity

The presence of marginal figures in Levinas's stance about messianism is directly related to the identification of the Messiah. As stated previously, Levinas rejects the mythical identification of the Messiah as a supernatural character who, displaying his powers at the end of time, judges men's history. Levinas also criticises the political identity of the Messiah tied to the figure of the King Messiah, who would release the entire population of Israel without the personal involvement of the interested. Salvation, in Levinas's estimation, does not stand as an end of history or act as its conclusion. 'It remains *at every moment* possible.'²⁹ If the coming of the Messiah is at every moment possible, why is this so, and who therefore is the Messiah?

To respond to these questions, Levinas starts his reflection by underscoring how the three first names with which the Messiah is identified in *b.Sanhedrin* 98b represent the names of the respective rabbinic schools: Shiloh, Yinnon, and Haninah. The fourth name, Menahem (the comforter), seems to emphasise the individual and personal accent of the messianic vocation. Levinas outlines how, in the messianic era, it is the individual who receives personal recognition 'beyond the recognition he receives for belonging to humanity and the State. It is not within his rights that he is recognised, but within his person, his strict individuality. Persons do not disappear within the general nature of an entity.'³⁰ Therefore, individuals in the messianic era are not crushed by the weight of the history of progress; they

are not the Hegelian innocent flower trampled for the benefit of the whole. Individuals are taken into consideration and receive the Messiah's personal attention. To know who the Messiah is, it is necessary to go 'beyond the notion of a mythical Messiah appearing at the end of History and conceive of messianism as a personal vocation among men.'³¹

This personal vocation appears for Levinas in two passages of the Talmudic text that were noted previously. The first unveils the essence of the identity of the Messiah. In fact, in reference to the well-known text of Isaiah 53, the Rabbis say: 'His name is the leper scholar.'³² This text is decisive for revealing the identity of the comforter. The Messiah is therefore the suffering man who takes upon himself the suffering of the others. The second passage concerns Rabbi Nahman's words, which claim, '[i]f he [the Messiah] is of those living [today], it may be one like myself, as it is written, *And their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governors shall proceed from the midst of them* (Jeremiah 30, 21).'³³ Moving beyond the opinions of scholars who have tried to explain the meaning of Nahman's estimation, Levinas points to a philosophical explanation of the text in relation to the structure of subjectivity. Nahman says that the Messiah 'may be one like myself,' in relation to the King of Israel, who will be one of themselves. Levinas's bold interpretation is a hermeneutical transposition in which the subject is the sovereign who commands himself to take on the suffering of others. Levinas wonders, 'who finally takes on the suffering of others, if not the being who says "Me" [*Moi*]?' This is why, 'the Messiah is myself; to be myself is to be the Messiah.'³⁴ In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas says something similar: 'To utter 'I,' to affirm the irreducible singularity in which the apology is pursued, means to possess a privileged place with regard to responsibilities for which no one can replace me and from which no one can release me.'³⁵ Levinas adds in the Talmudic commentary, 'the fact of not evading the burden imposed by the suffering of others defines ipseity itself. All persons are the Messiah.'³⁶ The Messiah is therefore:

one who has promised itself that it will carry the whole responsibility of the world . . . Messianism is no more than this apogee in being, a centralising, concentration or twisting back on itself on the self [*Moi*]. And in concrete terms, this means each person acts as though he were the Messiah. Messianism is therefore not the certainty of the coming of a man who stops History. It is my Power to bear the suffering of all. It is the moment when I recognised this power and my universal responsibility.³⁷

III. METZ AND APOCALYPTICALLY-ORIENTED ESCHATOLOGY

Johann Baptist Metz shares with Levinas a preoccupation about the marginal role that Judaism has played in modern Western reason. Indeed, both Levinas and Metz recognise the

Judaic heritage in Europe, and at the same time, the concealment of this heritage by the Hellenisation of philosophy and theology. As a Catholic theologian, Metz seeks to shake both the Rahnerian transcendental and the traditional Thomistic theologies by leading theology toward its roots in the biblical tradition. The price paid by idealistic theology has been a lack of sensibility regarding the suffering and injustices that have plagued modernity, particularly the crimes of Auschwitz in the twentieth century. Therefore, Metz's new political theology has the task of recuperating these roots, and in doing so, recuperating the subject's responsibility to the other who suffers. In critiquing the characteristic of the 'endangered self,' Metz has in mind the Enlightenment in modernity and the effects that forgetting the Jewish spirit has had on the subject.³⁸ Not surprisingly, the Jewish philosopher and the Catholic theologian both critique philosophical and theological Western reason and criticise the role of Christianity during the terrible events in Europe during the 'final solution.'

Metz introduces a corrective to such a theology; this corrective is tethered to memories of the injustices in history and is grounded thereby in a biblical conception of time from which a universal ethico-political compromise emerges. In becoming a theology, Christianity lost its sensitivity to suffering and also to time; or, rather, in losing its sensitivity to bounded time, it lost in parallel its sensitivity to suffering. Metz confronts biblical time (that is, time with a finale) with time without a finale, which is the time of the mythical eternal recurrence of the same resuscitated by Nietzsche, and the time of progress. In Metz's view, apocalyptic biblical time is both a response to the post-modern man grounded in the Nietzschean endless temporality and also a stumbling block [*Ärgernis*] to the time of indefinite progress and the concept of history that stems from it.

Time Without a Finale

In his essay 'On the Way to a Postidealistic Theology,' Metz sees time without a finale as the characteristic temporality of endless progress.³⁹ This is the time of the progress of technological processes in which everything is possible, but everything can also be superseded. Therefore, this timeless time is 'an empty continuum growing evolutionary into endlessness,'⁴⁰ which removes the expectations of the finale. From this perspective, history is the act of writing 'the story of this progress through empty time.'⁴¹

Time without a finale is also the Nietzschean eternal recurrence of time. According to Metz, Nietzsche presents a rupture in the dominant consideration of time arising from the biblical tradition and incorporated in Western culture; in this dominant tradition, time has an

eschaton, that is, a finale. Indeed, by proclaiming the death of God, Nietzsche, according to Metz, is also sending a message about time: a time without a finale, that is, an eternal or endless time. It is a time that neither begins nor ends, a 'time that knows no limits and no purposes, neither celestial nor earthly, whether purposes seen speculatively, as by Hegel, or carried out by political means, as with Marx.'⁴² It is a time that wills nothing but itself, time as the last remaining monarch after all of the metaphysically built thrones have been 'overthrown'; it is time as the only postmetaphysical fascination. In Metz's view, the endless time is the time that is largely prevalent in the postmodern world. In this kind of temporality, human responsibility is diluted as a result of its inner 'diffuse atmosphere of uprooting.'⁴³ Thus, man is perceived as a sort of pilgrim without a goal and is characterised as a self-experiment rather than a memory. The Nietzschean man – that is, the man who strays 'as through an infinite nothing'⁴⁴ – is accepted as having a destiny that makes him deaf to the inexorable passing of time and happily places him in the eternal return of time.

One of the consequences of this temporality is forgetting the suffering in history. In fact, Metz acknowledges Nietzsche as a paradigmatic example of the cultural amnesia that has to reckon with the oblivion of the past to achieve happiness. In fact, Nietzsche claims that 'in the case of the smallest and the greatest happiness, it is always just one thing alone that makes happiness: the ability to forget.'⁴⁵ In the same line of thinking, he adds a few lines later, 'Anyone who cannot forget the past entirely and set himself on the threshold of the moment, anyone who cannot stand, without dizziness or fear, on one single point like a victory godless, will never know what happiness is.'⁴⁶ From Metz's perspective, the Nietzschean death of God prevents human beings from finding happiness other than in the oblivion: 'the prototype of happiness would be [. . .] the amnesia of the winner; its *conditio sine qua non*, the merciless forgetting of the victim.'⁴⁷ For this reason, Metz calls Nietzsche 'the first postmodern prophet of the post-Christian age.'⁴⁸ The modern and post-modern world is bent on maintaining a relationship with time that is open to progress and cut off from the past, particularly from the past of the defeated and the victims. If the past is remembered, it is only to celebrate the victories of the winners. It is also understood from this perspective that progress has a human cost that is represented by the inevitability of victims produced in the process of the amelioration of human society; however, these consequences are inevitable and provisional to the extent that the same progress will repair the damage caused.

According to Metz, the 'enchantment of the cultural amnesia'⁴⁹ has a twofold consequence. In the first place, humans lose their humanity concurrently with their loss of history, meaning

that they lose the moral motivation to resist unjust suffering, to inspire a more encompassing justice, and to attend to the suffering of others. Furthermore, the lack of a historical view of suffering affects humanity as a whole because it is associated with the loss of ‘the fundamental civilising trust’ upon which humanity rests.⁵⁰ In drawing attention to this risk, Metz highlights memory as fundamental for the configuration of the civilising values that bind humans socially.

While the time of the death of God is expressed as cultural amnesia, the biblical message of God as time with an end is expressed in the memory of human suffering. Time is continually interrupted by the other’s demands, to which the subject feels compelled to respond. The victims are not forgotten, and they claim justice from the margins of continuous and uninterrupted progress. Responsibility stems from a limited time during which ‘action grows more urgent, priorities emerge, and decisions become meaningful.’ Conversely, ‘[w]hen time is unlimited, forever more of the same, then life too becomes a pointless trajectory.’⁵¹

The Demystification of the Eschaton

Metz proclaims that it is necessary for theology to take the path of apocalyptic eschatology, which in historical terms points to time with a finale or an end. This is the central message of the Bible, in which God appears ‘not as that which transcends time, but as the end which is pressing upon it.’⁵² According to Metz, Israel thinks about God not as beyond time but as the limiting end of time. Time has a limit, and within this limitation, God is coming; time indicates the placement of God in the world. The Abrahamic traditions in which God promises, ‘I will be with you’⁵³ are the clear example of this experience of God. The words of revelation in the Bible ‘are not primarily words of statement or of information, nor are they mainly words of appeal; or of personal self-communication by God, but they are *words of promise*.’⁵⁴ These are promises related to the end of the world, the Kingdom of God, and finally, the coming of the Messiah.

Within this view of time, Metz strips the *eschaton* of both its common understanding as a final catastrophe and of the concept of teleology to which eschatological history points. In fact, despite the bad reputation of apocalypticism, which is usually related to annihilation and catastrophes, according to Metz, it is essentially a message about time. Metz’s *eschaton* is apocalyptic, meaning time with a limit, with an end. Apocalyptic literature is a ‘pictorial commentary on the ultimate nature of the world’s time itself’⁵⁵ that emerged during a period of crisis for Israel. The apocalypse has nothing to do with speculation about the exact point in

time of such catastrophes. In this sense, the *eschaton* does not point to the course of history, 'but gets at the sources of our fears.'⁵⁶ For Metz, human fears are not only about the end of the world or the fear of annihilation, as is commonly believed; rather, they are more radically about the endlessness of the world, the view that nothing comes to an end anymore and 'that everything is sucked into the swell of a faceless evolution that finally rolls over everything from behind, like the sea rolls over grains of sand.'⁵⁷

Furthermore, apocalypse, as the name signifies, is a revelation. More precisely, it is a revelation of the faces of the victims against the amnesia of the victors, against the mysticism that is hidden in the history of human suffering, and against the metaphysical covering up of the misfortunes in the world. These strategies of concealment aim to make 'invisible and inaudible the cries of the victims.'⁵⁸ Thus, apocalyptic views look for the trace of God in the faces of those who suffer to keep their cry in memory and to put a dateline to their time. Apocalyptic time stands for a biblical vision of time with a finale, in which the praxis in favour of the other takes root and allows one to encounter God in the faces of the victims. Thus, Metz's contention is that the apocalyptic concepts of resurrection and last judgement permit humans to overcome the individualistic accounts of subjectivity. In fact, the hope for the resurrection of the dead and the power of God that is recognised in the concept of the last judgement expresses the longing for a universal justice in which the victims' past and present does not remain untouched. Therefore, it is the time of the other and no more the time of the individual and the isolated subject; it is time that leads the subject toward the other's suffering and death. This approach is the only way to know and communicate what is understood about God. For Metz, the memory of suffering finds its place in a bounded time in which human beings anchor their ethical commitments to the weak. The remembrance of God takes place in the remembrance of the suffering of human beings.

In relation to teleology, to which eschatology has usually been linked, Metz considers, in line with Benjamin, that *eschaton*, the Kingdom of God, is an end and not a telos, or goal.⁵⁹ The *eschaton* as a goal or telos is typical of the history of progress. In Metz's apocalyptic time, however, the *eschaton* is discontinuity and rupture.⁶⁰ As a limitation of time, the apocalypse introduces the pressure of time and activity into life. In Metz's stance, eschatology is an imminent expectation of the second coming, and this expectation creates an urgency of action. This expectation is not a continual expectation that has lost social and political power by making the subject indifferent; on the contrary, apocalyptic expectations 'avert the danger of an ineffectual state of permanent reflection.'⁶¹ Metz exemplifies this idea with the biblical

text on the last judgement discourse of Matthew 25, which is ‘thoroughly apocalyptic in character,’ to the extent that the end and judgement are closely related to the need to act in favour of others, particularly the weak and marginalised.⁶² In fact, in this text, the King separates the just from the unjust according to the following criterion: ‘As you did (or did it not) to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it (or did it not) to me.’⁶³ From Metz’s perspective, the expectation of the second coming does not result in sacrificing current social and political responsibilities, ‘but the reverse: injecting the urgency imposed by time and the need to act into a responsibility that has been robbed of its tension by extending the expectation of the second coming to infinity.’⁶⁴

This horizon of active commitment to the present in the eschatological view of time is also clear, according to Metz, in Paul. The apostle, in Metz’s view, valorises the present, and the ‘now’ can only be uttered against the background of limited time. He is ‘in no way a fanatic of the end of the world.’⁶⁵ This perspective has also been highlighted by Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, who indicates that Paul is concerned not with ‘the last day . . . but [with] the time that contracts itself and begins to end.’⁶⁶ This contracted time, in Agamben’s view, is the time of the now, which chronologically ‘spans from creation to the Messianic event.’⁶⁷

Therefore, eschatological time – that is, time that has an end or a limit – does not mean emptying and devaluing the present. On the contrary, for Metz, eschatological time is the authentic foundation of responsibility. In fact, man plays with his fate at every moment. There is no recourse to indefinite evolution or eternal recurrence, that is, to the mythical forms of time in which there is always time because basically there is none. Within the evolutionary concept of time, there is a devaluation of the problems of this world (poverty, death, war) because it is understood that everything is resolved with the passing of time. The *eschaton* of progress, as Reyes Mate affirms, is an asymptotic ideal ‘whose realisation recedes indefinitely as we advance.’⁶⁸ The optimism of progress implies an evolutionary mentality, that of the indefinite time. In the Bible, conversely, a limited conception of time is necessary to intervene, decide, and interrupt because everything is played in the now of time.

By grounding responsibility in eschatological-apocalyptic time, Metz counters critics who arise in relation to limited time. In fact, the problem with this approach is, as Levinas has demonstrated, that this temporality points to the universal and to totality, and it lacks a sense of individual and contingent experiences. However, the risk of totality and the ignorance of individuality are rejected by Metz, who considers that the logos of theology must be affected

by and even forced to review the singularity and contingency of historical catastrophes.⁶⁹ The *eschaton* of the apocalypse is the *eschaton* that allows us to see existence from the end, that is, living time taking its end into account. In fact, for Taubes, ‘the apocalypticist conceives the entire course of history from beginning to end – he describes the history of election from its end retrospectively. His vision has the character of a preemptive eschatological disclosure.’⁷⁰ This expiration (limited time) involves an active commitment to the other.

The commitment to singularity and contingency in history requires a new valuation of singularity above the traditional primacy of the universal. In contrast to the Greek views of being and identity, philosophy and theology will have to develop a rationality that is sensitive to contingency. The influence of Greek thought in early Christianity led to a theologisation and dogmatisation of its contents of faith. In temporal terms, this dogmatisation signified a lack of sensitivity to the suffering of the world. The absence of any mention of Auschwitz in Christian theology is the consequence of this loss caused by the idealism that plagued theological thinking. From this perspective Metz calls for a second nominalism that, much like the first one in medieval theology, takes into consideration particulars instead of universals. Metz mentions Jürgen Goldstein’s work about nominalism, highlighting how William of Occam opposes the idealistic subordination of the singular, contingent, and concrete being with the metaphysical universality without denying the possibility of metaphysics. This perspective of nominalism, which has been normally viewed as a story of the failure and decadence of the ‘great’ medieval systems, is therefore more positive.⁷¹

Theology must say goodbye to a desubjectivised historical universalism that is alien to particular situations and disinterested in the unhappiness of others in relation to the disasters and catastrophes of history. The logos of theology cannot suppress, forget, or idealistically sublimate the history of human suffering. This challenge of making the suffering of victims unforgettable is assumed by political and liberation theologies. These are steps in theology’s farewell to historical idealism without human faces.

IV. CONCLUSION: *ESCHATON* WITHIN HISTORY

This paper demonstrates how Levinas and Metz, who are profoundly marked by the catastrophes of the twentieth century, turned to biblical categories to rescue history from the devastating consequences of terror and death. This approach allows both to grant justice to victims by interrupting continuous and eternal time via the presence of those who do not count in the official historiography. For both thinkers the interruption of time is a direct

consequence of the claims of those who suffer. In this sense, time is alterity's resistance to the apprehensive subjectivity that stems from the occidental logos. To accomplish this purpose, Metz avails himself of apocalyptic time, that is, a time with an end, which rests on the concept of a last judgment. Levinas gives weight rather to the present moment, and maintains that nothing justifies waiting for a last judgment or for a judgment by God at the end of time.

By overthrowing teleology through the concept of eschatology, however, Metz also highlights the present moment; this is the only scenario in which a political compromise of solidarity can arise. For Metz it is not necessary to wait for the end, but it is necessary to look at the present *from* the end to do justice to the past. The concept of eschatology allows Metz to contrast individual eschatology, which renders the concept of the *eschaton* 'politically impotent through privatisation,'⁷² with apocalyptic eschatology, in which '[i]t is impossible to privatise the eschatological promises of biblical tradition: liberty, peace, justice, reconciliation.'⁷³ Therefore, the concept of the end of history does *not* entail the oblivion of singularity or a fall into totality, but rather a scenario of political compromise of the subject in favour of the innocent victims of history. In line with Benjamin, Metz shows an interest in the political consequences of theology. This view envisages political action based on a memory of mankind's history of suffering: it offers inspiration for a new form of solidarity and responsibility toward those most distant from us. Metz's political theology is a reaction against the privatisation of traditional and modern theologies, which take refuge in the privacy of the individual, with the purpose of placing political praxis on the horizon of theology.

Levinas's messianic time is the 'now' of the compromise, strongly rooted in a prophetic eschatology that places the messianic 'now' at the centre of ethics. If Metz's apocalyptic eschatology is primarily political, Levinas's messianic eschatology is essentially the personal response of an individual's conscience to the suffering of the other who asks that the individual assume responsibility. It is not a final judgment that matters; rather, it is the judgement of each moment 'before the accomplishment of history, before the fullness of time, while there is still time.'⁷⁴ For Levinas, '[t]he invisible must manifest itself if history is to lose its right to the last word, necessarily unjust for the subjectivity, inevitably cruel.'⁷⁵ In each moment, the subject can act as if he/she were the Messiah, and that moment coincides with a universal responsibility for the suffering of the other, when the voices of the invisible victims of history claim attention.

This study also attempts to present new ways to build a bridge between philosophy and theology. In fact, although Metz argues for political action in response to the suffering of the victims of history, this action is nonetheless ethically and anthropologically founded. In fact, as Michael Purcell demonstrates, '[fundamental] theology is theological anthropology.' What Purcell tries to prove is that theology primarily concerns 'the person who is able to ask the question of God.'⁷⁶ Purcell's principle is applicable to Metz's political theologising, which is explicitly manifested in *Faith in History and Society*; that is, it is imperative that political theology start with the concrete person in his historical situation and not with a 'conflict between ideas.'⁷⁷ When asked about the reception of his philosophy in Latin America, Levinas answered that liberation theologians and liberation philosophers 'have also seen "the same thing"'.⁷⁸ Levinas refers to the liberation theologians and philosophers who use religious categories to think philosophically, particularly Enrique Dussel and Juan Carlos Scannone. Levinas's 'same thing' is essentially personal responsibility for the suffering other, who, in Dussel and Scannone, as well as in Metz, calls for a political compromise involving social transformation. Purcell remembers Levinas's claim that the 'primordial bond of responsibility 'for the other' is '[a]n original ethical event that is also primary theology.'⁷⁹ For this reason, Purcell claims that 'the human person is the point of departure not only for phenomenology but also for theology.'⁸⁰

Notes

1 Stéphane Mosès, *The Angel of History: Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem*, trans. Barbara Harshaw (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 9.

2 Emmanuel Levinas, *Beyond the Subject: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, trans. Gary D. Mole, (New York: Continuum, 2007), p. 17.

3 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction: Reason in History*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 43.

4 William Henry Walsh, *An Introduction to Philosophy of History* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1992), pp. 142–143.

5 Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, p. 30.

6 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: an Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 22.

7 Ibid., p. 54.

8 Ibid., p. 55.

9 Emmanuel Levinas, *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, trans. Gary D. Mole (New York: Continuum, 2007), p. 17.

10 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 228.

11 Orietta Ombrosi, 'History, Memory, Forgiveness: the Philosophy of History of Levinas and Benjamin,' *Bamidbar* 1, no. 1 (2011): p. 51.

12 Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Sean Hand, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 282.

13 Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995), p. 91.

14 Catherine Chalié, *La trace de l'infini. Emmanuel Levinas et le source hébraïque* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2002), p. 145.

15 Emmanuel Levinas, 'Being-for-the-other,' in Jill Robins (ed.), *Is it Righteous to be?* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 119.

16 Ibid., p. 120.

17 Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, p. 209.

18 Levinas, 'Being-for-the-other,' p. 120.

19 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 23.

20 Levinas, *Beyond the Verse*, p. xviii.

21 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 23.

22 Ibid., p. 78.

23 Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 2011), p. 39; Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, pp. 93–96.

24 Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, p. 60.

25 Ibid., p. 63.

26 Ibid., p. 62.

27 Ibid., p. 67.

28 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 52.

29 Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, p. 84.

30 Ibid., p. 87.

31 Ibid., p. 88.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., p. 89.

35 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 245.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., pp. 88–89.

38 Michael Kirwan, 'Awakening Dangerous Memories,' *The Way* 47, no. 4 (October 2008), pp. 25–36, accessed August 3, 2013, www.theway.org.uk/Back/474Kirwan.PDF.

39 See Johann Baptist Metz, *A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity*, trans. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), pp. 50–53.

40 Ibid., p. 51.

41 Steven T. Ostovich, 'Messianic History in Benjamin and Metz,' *Philosophy and Theology* 8, no. 4 (Summer 1994), p. 280, accessed January 7, 2014, http://www.pdcnet.org/philtheol/content/philtheol_1994_0008_0004_0271_0289.

42 Johann Baptist Metz, 'Time without a finale,' *Concilium* 5 (1993), p. 124.

43 Johann Baptist Metz *Memoria passionis. Ein provozierendes Gedächtnis in pluralistischer Gesellschaft* (Freiburg: Herder, 2006) p. 126.

44 Friedrich Nietzsche, 'The Gay Science,' in Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan Large (eds.), *The Nietzsche Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 224.

45 Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On the Utility and Liability of History for Life,' in Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan

Large (eds.), *The Nietzsche Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 126.

46 Ibid., p. 127.

47 Metz, *Memoria passionis*, p. 75.

48 Ibid., p. 74.

49 Ibid., p. 123.

50 See Ibid., p. 76.

51 John K. Downey, 'Introduction: Risking Memory: Political Theology as Interruption,' in *Love Strategy: The Political Theology of Johann Baptist Metz*, ed. John K. Downey (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), p. 5.

52 Metz, *Passion for God*, p. 52.

53 Exodus 3,12.

54 Johann Baptist Metz, 'The Church and the World,' in *Love Strategy: The Political Theology of Johann Baptist Metz*, ed. John K. Downey (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), p. 18.

55 Metz, *Memoria passionis*, p. 138.

56 Ibid., p. 131.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid., p. 138.

59 See Walter Benjamin. *Reflections: Essays, aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), p. 312.

60 See Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Towards a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. David Smith (New York: The Salisbury Press, 1980), pp. 175–6; .Steven T. Ostovich, ‘Messianic History in Benjamin and Metz,’ *Philosophy and Theology* 8, no. 4 (Summer 1994), p. 279, accessed January 7, 2014, http://www.pdcnet.org/philtheol/content/philtheol_1994_0008_0004_0271_0289.

61 Johann Baptist Metz, ‘The Second Coming,’ in John K. Downey (ed.), *Love Strategy: The Political Theology of Johann Baptist Metz* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), p. 152.

62 Ibid., p. 153.

63 Matthew 25, 40.

64 Metz, ‘The Second Coming,’ p. 153.

65 Metz, *Memoria passionis*, p. 130.

66 Agamben, Giorgio, *The Time that remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. the Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 62.

67 Ibid., p. 63.

68 Reyes Mate, ‘Jacob Taubes. Mesianismo y fin de la historia,’ in Reyes Mate and José A. Zamora (eds.), *Nuevas teologías políticas* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 2006), pp. 53–54.

69 See *Memoria passionis*, p. 44.

70 Jacob Taubes, *From cult to Culture: Fragments Towards a Critique of Historical Reason* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), pp. 73–74.

71 Metz, *Memoria passionis*, p. 45.

72 Ostovich, ‘Pauline Eschatology,’ p. 2.

73 Johann Baptist Metz, *Theology of the World*, trans. William Glen–DoepeI (New York: Herder, 1971), p. 114.

74 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 23.

75 Ibid., p. 243.

76 Michael Purcell, ‘Is theology Fundamental?’ in Johan de Tavernier et al. (eds.), *Responsibility, God, and Society: Theological Ethics in Dialogue* (Leuven: Uitgeverij peeters, 2008), p. 125.

77 Metz, *Faith in History*, p. 10.

78 Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous*, trans. Michael B. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 119.

79 Emmanuel Levinas, *Unforseen History*, trans. Nidra Poller (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), p. 130.

80 Purcell, 'Is Theology Fundamental?' p. 125.