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# Amidst Fractured Faith and the Fragility of Reason

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## Abstract

In his controversial Regensburg Address, Pope Benedict referred to 'reason's grandeur'.

In this essay I will argue that the best way to engage 'the whole breadth of reason' is to remain in close, sympathetic dialogue with the challenges and evidence of what seems to gainsay reason's grandeur without being mired by what Benedict rightfully rebukes as the 'self-imposed limitation of reason to the empirically verifiable'. Thus, in light of mass atrocities, many perpetrated in the name of reason or 'God', one must approach all theological and philosophical investigations with heightened humility and openness to the opposing views of the Other. Such an approach will also seek to flesh out a 'Biblical faith', which will not be bereft of elements of rupture, doubt, and loss.

A few questions will form the core of this essay: What is the relationship between admitting a fractured faith and recognising the fragility of reason? Why would such admissions ultimately strengthen one's religious identity and provide fertile grounds for ecumenism and interfaith dialogue? Lastly, as a Catholic theologian, why would I contend that such a stance is more in tune with both the spirit of the gospels and Catholic social teaching?

## Keywords

Faith and reason, Regensburg Address, theodicy, testimony, theological doubt, kenosis, Shoah, Levinas

## Introduction: Interweaving

John Paul II has written: 'Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth'.[1] In Pope

[1] John Paul II, 'Faith and Reason' in James C. Swindal and Harry J. Gensler, S.J., eds., *The Sheed and Ward Anthology of Catholic Philosophy* (Lanham: Sheed and Ward, 2005), p. 415.

Benedict XVI's controversial Regensburg Address, he expressed a similar hope in the need for 'faith and reason coming together in a new way'.[2] In fact, towards the end of his lecture, Benedict announces: 'The courage to engage the whole breadth of reason, and not the denial of its grandeur – this is the program with which a theology grounded in Biblical faith enters into the debates of our time'.[3] I, too, seek the interweaving of faith and reason. However, leery of a position preoccupied with reason's grandeur, I will examine and argue for the additional need to acknowledge a fractured faith and the fragility of reason. Here one balances a hermeneutic of suspicion with a profound moral conviction that faith and reason, while distinct as *Gaudium et Spes* notes,[4] remain integral for the fullness of the other. If one hopes to speak of the grandeur of reason, one needs to point to the Divine that remains the ultimate quest and aim of one's investigations and hopes. However, in light of mass atrocities and other human-devised horrors perpetrated in the name of reason or 'God', one must approach all theological and philosophical investigations with heightened humility and openness to the opposing views of the Other.

Therefore, I will argue that the best way to engage 'the whole breadth of reason' is to remain in close, sympathetic dialogue with the challenges and evidence of what seems to gainsay reason's grandeur without being mired by what Benedict rightfully rebukes as the 'self-imposed limitation of reason to the empirically verifiable'.[5] I will also seek to flesh out a 'Biblical faith', which will not be bereft of elements of rupture, doubt, and loss and contend why such a path is spiritually and theologically relevant and beneficial in our world today.

A few questions will form the core of this essay: What is the relationship between admitting a fractured faith and recognising the fragility of reason? Why would such admissions ultimately strengthen one's religious identity and provide fertile grounds for ecumenism and interfaith dialogue? As a Catholic theologian, why would I contend that such a stance is more in tune with both the spirit of the gospels and the most promising recent developments of Catholic social teaching?

[2] Pope Benedict XVI, 'Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections,' Lecture given at the Aula Magna of the University of Regensburg, 12 September 2006. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html. Accessed 10 June 2009. For Benedict's clarification of the use of the quotation that stirred so much controversy, see his footnote number 3.

[3] Ibid.

[4] In *Gaudium et Spes*, we read: 'This sacred Synod, therefore, recalling the teaching of the First Vatican Council, declares that there are 'two orders of knowledge' which are distinct, namely faith and reason' [Walter M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II*, (New York: Guild Press, 1966), p. 265 (59)].

[5] Ibid.



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## Purging Religious Triumphalism after Auschwitz

While one must be clear to distinguish between the *Logos*[6] from which human reason aspires to and is inspired by, it is of the terrestrial, flawed, and fragile reason of humanity that is my focus. Ultimately, what is the value and meaning of a Christian asserting the 'grandeur of reason' in light of the horrors and miseries that plague our world? Do not such assertions ring hollow in the extant treatment and attitude of many Christians towards the non-Christian? In fact, such care to avoid grandstanding language is also to heed the voice of Jewish Holocaust theologians like Irving Greenberg who have warned Christians against a sense of triumphalism that is vacuous and insensitive after Auschwitz. In the context of a Christian supercessionism that falsely interprets the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and other calamitous events in Jewish history, Greenberg writes:

> In their triumphalism, Christians overlooked the extent to which theirs was a one-sided and partial reading of the biblical tradition in the light of their redemptive experience; they ignored the possibility that God had supplied the Jews with a different interpretive key. Instead, Christians concluded that Jews had to be superficially deaf and dumb or willfully devilish to resist Christian understandings. From this conclusion, it was not a big jump to medieval Christianity's demonizing and dehumanization of the Jews, and from there, to the Holocaust.[7]

As Greenberg states above, Christians concluded – based on their apparently logical interpretation of events – that Jewish life and existence after Christ could have no viable meaning. More dangerously, they cited God's hand in events of destruction, misery, and catastrophic suffering. Through misreading the signs of the times, many Christians produce(d) a haughty, closed, and falsely-triumphant faith.

## Reading the Signs of Loss, Silence, and Mass Atrocity

Only the Father knows 'about the day or hour' (Mk 13:32). Other things, too, the Father no doubt knows – which we do not. In *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, we read that: 'Faith is certain. It is

[6] In the Regensburg Address, Benedict seeks to recover a 'rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek inquiry' through his discussion of the *Logos*, which, as God, means 'both reason and word – a reason which is creative and capable of self-communication, precisely as reason.'

[7] Irving Greenberg, 'Covenants of Redemption' in *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth: The New Encounter Between Judaism and Christianity* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2004), p. 224.



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more certain than all human knowledge because it is founded on the very word of God who cannot lie. . .' Quoting John Henry Newman a few lines below, the *Catechism* adds: 'Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt'.[8]

Perhaps. In the chilling work *Machete Season*, we read how one Hutu of the Rwandan genocide of 1994 describes how Hutus and Tutsis participated together in choir rehearsal at Church on the Saturday before the genocide began, and after Sunday mass (which only Hutus attended because Tutsis were hiding by then), the Hutus 'left the Lord and our prayers inside to rush home. We changed from our Sunday best into our workday clothes, we grabbed clubs and machetes, we went straight off to killing'.[9] In our world today, if one does not doubt; if one does not struggle with the possibility of despair; one's faith – as a number of Jewish thinkers have reminded us – may dangerously be removed from the lived experiences of so many. Vatican II called for a greater immersion between Church and society, in the concrete realities of this world. As Christine Firer Hinze writes: '*Gaudium et Spes* addressed the peoples of the modern world as a compassionate companion, eager to dialogue and to humbly share the wisdom about life's meaning afforded by the gift of faith'.[10]

In writing of the process of maintaining one's faith amidst a post-Auschwitz world, Irving Greenberg writes: 'if faith be wounded in the process, let it be recognized that after the Holocaust no faith is so whole as a broken faith'.[11] I thus echo the language of Greenberg's 'wounded faith' or Wiesel's 'broken faith'.[12] Such a faith does not mean – how could it? – that this world is only condemned with genocides, mass starvation, catastrophic earthquakes, and cruel, enervating diseases. If such were the case, what precisely does one have faith in or for? In his encyclical *Spe Salvi*, Pope Benedict gives the title 'Faith is Hope' to the first section of the main body of the encyclical, and points out how faith and hope seem 'interchangeable' in many

[8] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 'Faith and Understanding,' (New York: Doubleday, 1995), p. 48 (157).

[9] Adalbert, interviewed by Jean Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak*, trans. Linda Coverdale (New York: Picador, 2006), p. 140.

[10] Christine Firer Hinze, 'Straining Toward Solidarity in a Suffering World: *Gaudium et Spes* 'After Forty Years'', in William Madges, ed., *Vatican II Forty Years Later*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006), pp. 166–7.

[11] Irving Greenberg, as quoted in Alice and Roy Eckhardt, *Long Day's Journey Into Night: A Revised Retrospective on the Holocaust* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), p. 11.

[12] 'Yes, my faith was wounded and still is today,' Eli Wiesel writes, 'but it is because I still believe in God that I argue with him' [Elie Wiesel, *And the Sea is Never Full. Memoirs 1969* – trans. Marion Wiesel (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), p. 70].



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biblical passages.[13] Such hope, according to Benedict, is borne by a faith in the risen Jesus that 'offers' us redemption.[14] And yet, faith and hope must also be clarified. On one end of the spectrum, recall Dostoevsky's comment in *The House of the Dead:* 'No man can live without some goal to aspire towards. If he loses his goal, his hope, the resultant anguish will frequently turn him into a monster'.[15]

We also, however, are painfully cognisant of how hope and faith are often manipulated by others to prevent necessary action in the present. One chilling example is a quotation from Tadeusz Borowski's *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*: 'We were never taught how to give up hope, and this is why today we perish in gas chambers'.[16] Any discussion of faith and hope needs to address both these polar positions but must not allow the manipulation of faith and hope in some instances to annul their necessity and value. Therefore, while the temptation to despair must (always?) be overcome and false hopes identified, one dreams and hopes and endures because of the flashes and lasting encounters of the beauty and goodness of this world; a beauty that can overwhelm as much as the ugliness; a beauty for which words are often lacking, enveloped in the sublime as much as in banal act of kindness.

I, therefore, write of a fractured faith because of two opposing realities.[17] The first is the certitude of my faith in a loving and merciful God who asks each one of us: 'Do you also wish to go away?' (John 6:67) and 'What do you want me to do for you?' (Mk 10:51). At the heart of both Gospel quotations are the responsibilities we have to establish the reign of God on earth, even amidst doubt, failure, and uncertainty. In the first quotation, Jesus' Bread of Life discourse is rejected or not understood by the majority. For a moment, Jesus seems alone, floundering in irrelevance. Like Jesus' birth in a manger, the scene is haunting if one reflects on the notion of a vulnerable God. And yet, it is a vulnerability that calls for a response, and asks if we, too, will not go away. The second quote reveals the importance of our need for God. Here the blind beggar Bartimaeus asks Jesus for sight (and mercy). Once Bartimaeus can see, he immediately follows Jesus, giving us a hint, as Ched Myers argues, that more than

[13] Pope Benedict, *Spe Salvi*, Para. 2. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi_en.html. Accessed 10 June 2009.

[14] Ibid., Par. 1.

[15] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The House of the Dead*, trans. David McDuff (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 305.

[16] Tadeusz Borowski, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen,* trans. Barbara Vedder (New York: Penguin, 1976), p. 122.

[17] For my analysis of the need for a fractured faith in the context of theodicy, see my 'Testimonies of Mass Atrocity and the Search for a Viable Theodicy', *Bulletin ET*, 18 (2007), pp. 88–99.



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physical sight is sought.[18] Most importantly, we need to know what to ask for – another aspect of our human responsibility to discern what is essential despite conflicting and competing interests. In both passages, Christ – as victim and liberator – is the conduit through which answers are given.

The second reality is the crushing fact that Christians, in the name of Christianity, have abused so many souls and bodies. How, and whether, these two realities (the problem of theodicy) can be resolved is a cross my faith continues to endure. Thus, my theology springs ultimately from the cry of the cross – but a cry that reverberates in an empty tomb with its stone rolled away. Whether my 'fractured' faith is substantially different from the 'wounded' or 'broken' faiths of a Wiesel and Greenberg, therefore, remains an open question.

Recall how Thomas will not believe in the risen Christ unless he 'see[s] the mark of the nails in his hands, and put[s his] finger in the mark of the nails and [his] hand in [Jesus'] side' (John 20:25). While the disciples at Emmaus recognise Jesus in the breaking of the bread (Lk 24:30), Thomas recognises Jesus through his wounds. Thus, scars and wounds remain visible, even after healing, even amidst or after resurrection. Reflecting on this passage, we can get a further image of the possibility for a living, dynamic faith that remains fractured. Bartimaeus' faith, indeed, healed him. He could see. But a faith no longer in need of healing is a faith either supernatural or unknowingly blind.

## Instilling (if not Finding) Doubt and Faith in Catholic Social Teaching

In the next two sections I want to situate myself within Catholic social teaching and within the biblical tradition. I will then seek to examine how and why the two criteria below (in light of the two realities discussed above) are essential in order to develop a meaningful relationship of faith and reason, and thus, a dynamic, integral Christianity. Obviously such a task requires systematic and comprehensive treatment, so it can only be sketched in here. The first criterion is the following: Christian theology is called to a sustained turning to the words and silences of the marginalised and victimised. The second criterion is that this turning must be accompanied by a Biblical and Christian tradition that is challenged and cleansed through dialogue and partnership in solidarity with the non-Christian Other[19].

[18] Ched Myers, *Say to This Mountain: Mark's Story of Discipleship* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997), p. 134. See also his *Binding the Strong Man* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992).

[19] See also my 'Healing the Distorted Face: Doctrinal Reinterpretation(s) and the Christian Response to the Other', *One in Christ,* 42 (2008), pp. 302–317.



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Because the notion of the fragility of reason and a fractured faith may seem 'new' or antithetical to Catholic tradition, I want, albeit briefly, to locate my position as a post-Auschwitz and post-Vatican II Catholic. Writing of the neoscholastic approach towards faith and reason in pre-Vatican II encyclicals, David Hollenbach notes that for Johann Baptist Metz: 'modern Catholic social teaching before the Council did not seek to mediate between faith and society but rather to defend the Christian tradition against the corrosive currents of modernity. . . Faith and reason were not seen envisioned as interacting or transforming each other. In the same way, Church and society were not seen as in dialogue to the mutual benefit of both'.[20] Amidst our mutiglobalised and multipluralised world, where faiths and reasons and views of God or the Absolute coalesce and collide, there may be elements of our faith that cling to the rock of certainty. But even this certainty will need to be nuanced and developed further below in light of the criteria above.

To return to the context of Vatican II for the moment though, David Hollenbach incorporates the term 'dialogic universalism' to describe the Council's approach in *Gaudium et Spes* in situating itself amidst the tension of universality and particularity. Commenting upon the interaction of rational discourse and the concrete and specific milieus of the one(s) engaging in that discourse, Hollenbach writes: 'This dependence of rational inquiry upon tradition is evident not only in ethics and theology but in other domains as well. At the same time, a dialogically universalist orientation is fully committed to respect for the dignity of those outside the communal tradition of the inquirer, in this case, those who are not Christian'.[21]

Reason, thus, remains both muddled and energised by the cultures that help to condition it. Then, though often grudgingly at first (and sometimes after the expenditure of much pride and claimed superiority), one's rational discourse is encouraged to listen to and observe (and begin to absorb) the insights, challenges, and questions of the Other. In the midst of encountering a non-Christian's joys and sorrows and his or her human and divinely-inspired words and deeds, the certainty of one's faith, rightfully pauses and hesitates. The fragility of our humanity, and hence of reason, confronts us. Consider two distinct, but pertinent, examples: in the first instance – and despite some theologically challenging notions – how can we not react accept with appreciation when the Sufi Rumi sings: 'Lo, *I am with you* always means when you look for God, / God is in the look of your eyes, / in the thought of looking, nearer to you than yourself, / or

[20] David Hollenbach, 'Commentary on *Gaudium et spes*' in Kenneth R. Himes, ed., *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2005), p. 276.

[21] Ibid., 278.



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things that have happened to you / There's no need to go outside. / Be melting snow. / Wash yourself of yourself'?[22] In the second instance, silence seems to be the Christian's best and most compassionate response when hearing the Tibetan nun Beri Laga say that she survived her torture and captivity at the hands of the Communist Chinese because of her Buddhist faith: 'I had prayed night and day to the Three Jewels to come through the ordeal; and my faith kept me going'.[23]

What Hollenbach refers to as 'Dialogic Universalism' may be the best way to make the Church and Catholic social teaching relevant in light of such voices – even as one seems faced with a sense of vulnerability, ambivalence, and appealing, but opposing, truth claims. It is for this reason that Catholic theologians, in particular, must try to retrieve or further analyse the roles that theological doubt, protest, and licit (as well as 'illicit') theological dissent[24] have played in the history of the Church, in the development of Church doctrine, and in the Christian interaction – and judgement upon – the Other.

## The Bible and a Stuttering Faith

Despite containing stories of loss, failure, and turning away from God, the Bible, ultimately, resonates with hope and God's aim to heal and embrace humanity in God's perfect, encompassing love. Such an eschatological and soteriological frame thus encapsulates and influences how one reads the scenes of loss and failing. And yet, because of my demand that we remember the stories and victims of loss and atrocity in this world, one could say that my Biblical position situates itself particularly in solidarity with the *cantus firmus* of the cross; amidst the cries of the women of Jerusalem who were said to 'eat their children' according to Lamentations; and by the side of the unnamed Syrophoenician woman who was chased away by the disciples, and initially turned aside by Jesus in her quest for her daughter to be healed.

Theologically, of course, we refer to such a stance as the preferential option for the poor, especially as Jon Sobrino continually defends it[25], though I would also add some of Stephen Pope's

[22] Rumi, 'Be Melting Snow,' *The Essential Rumi.* trans. Coleman Barks (New York: Quality Paperback Club, 1998), p. 13.

[23] Quoted in Mary Craig, *Tears of Blood: A Cry for Tibet* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 1999), p. 206.

[24] See, for example, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 'Norms of Illicit Dissent,' in Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, S.J., eds., *Dissent in the Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), pp. 127–8.

[25] Jon Sobrino, 'Depth and Urgency of the Option for the Poor' in *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic–Utopian Essays*, trans. Margaret Wilde (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008), p. 26.



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clarifications.[26] Regardless, when present amidst mass atrocity and at the sight of such rejection and suffering, words tend to falter and felicitous phrases become fragile and brittle. As Levinas writes: 'The language of the Old Testament is so suspicious of the rhetoric which does not stutter that its chief prophet was 'slow of speech and tongue.' There is undoubtedly more to this than just the avowal of being limited in this defect: there is the awareness of a kergyma which does not forget the weight of the world, the inertia of men, and the deafness of understandings'.[27] In this interweaving of faith and reason, we can perhaps refer to the stuttering certitude of faith, or as noted above, a fractured faith because one acknowledges that all theology should be said in fear and trembling. Such a position is exemplified in an example from the provocative tradition of *piyyutim* in the Jewish liturgy. Such are hymns or poetic embellishments spoken or sung before or after a standard liturgical piece of liturgical praise. In one example Anson Laytner writes that:

> Sandwiched between two pious assertions lies Issac bar Shalam's bitter protest. 'There is no God besides You,' says the liturgy. – 'There is none like You among the dumb,' says Issac bar Shalam . . . . . In the prayer book, protest came to co-exist with faith: the celebration of the redemptive past became coeval with the lamentation of the unredeemed present.[28]

As Laytner argues, a theological position that does not address or remain in constant tension with these poles – expressing to God their 'doubt and anger as well as their praise and thanksgiving'[29] – contributes to the perceived conflict of faith and reason. A faith that acknowledges these tensions strengthens the reason it informs. And yet, do not the Gospels laud a faith that will move mountains and walk on water? It is the individual's faith that is a key catalyst in his or her being healed by Christ. How then can I contend that a fractured faith is better aligned with the Christian ethos?

Exemplary faith never remains free of some doubt, as embodied by the tax collector whom Jesus praises at the expense of certain

[26] While ultimately supporting the value and beliefs inherent in the preferential option for the poor, Stephen Pope shows how there may be multiple 'privileged locations' where aspects of God's goodness, mercy, and justice can be acknowledged and experienced. Poverty, or another form of marginalisation, is not the only privileged location. He gives as examples 'the obstetrician who experiences each new birth as a precious gift from God, or an astrophysicist's (or microbiologist's) appreciation of the majesty of creation' [Stephen Pope, 'Proper and Improper Partiality and the Preferential Option for the Poor', *Theological Studies* 54 (1993), p. 250].

[27] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Revelation in the Jewish Tradition' in *Beyond the Verse,* trans. Gary D. Mole (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 134.

[28] Ibid., 138–9.

[29] Anson Laytner, *Arguing With God: A Jewish Tradition* (Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc., 1990), p. 238.



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scribes and Pharisees. We may also think of Jesus' agony in the garden (Mk 14:33–6) or Mother Teresa's private spiritual struggles[30] – and all of our dark nights of the soul. Such a faith is humble and other-focused. Most doubt is in regards to oneself; not Christ. This doubt and humility are essential aspects of approaching and living out the certitudes of one's faith in openness and meekness.

It must, however, be asked: Is not a Christian's faith whole because of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, so that it is inappropriate to speak of a fractured faith within Christian teaching? As Benedict writes in *Spe Salvi*: 'Redemption is offered to is in the sense that we have been given hope, trustworthy hope, by virtue of which we can face our present'.[31] While Christians claim that the hope for healing has been revealed in an intimate and particular way through Jesus, is it more theologically rich and spiritually honest – in light of the ongoing horrors of our world – to speak of the hope for healing but to highlight how we remain in a world that is essentially unredeemed? As Didier Pollefeyt writes: 'Christians need to learn to live with the Jewish belief in the 'No' to Jesus for the sake of their own Christology. The way Jesus will come as the Christ and the Redeemer of the World will depend on the way Christians represent him in the present'.[32] Following Christ should make us attune to the sick who need to be comforted and the lost who need to be found. It is the love of Christ that leads one to reconsider the notion that Christ has already healed us in this life so that we need not doubt or gripe any longer. Christ's call to heal the Other necessarily calls us to listen to the Other and witness how healing and liberation remain flawed or illusive for so many. The reign of God may be among us, but so, too, are the silent and desperate cries of the marginalised. Such awareness tempers any triumphalist religious language.

## The Presence of the Suffering Victim

After much refining, theological and philosophical formulations must always be re-addressed in the presence of the suffering victim. While this is not the occasion to critique Greenberg's well-known working principle regarding theological statements amidst the burning children[33], it is crucially within this context that one must reflect upon

[30] Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light: The Revealing Private Writings of the Noble Prize Winner,* ed. Brian Kolodiejchuk (New York: Doubleday, 2007), p. 223.

[31] Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, Para. 1.

[32] Didier Pollefeyt, 'Christology After Auschwitz: A Catholic Perspective' in *Jesus Then & Now: Images of Jesus in History and Christology*, eds. Marvin Meyer and Charles Hughes (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), p. 246.

[33] See, for example, Steven T. Katz, 'The Issue of Confirmation and Disconfirmation in Jewish Thought After the Shoah', in Steven T. Katz, ed., *The Impact of the Holocaust on Jewish Theology* (New York: New York University Press 2005), pp. 51–2.



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the relationship and role of faith and reason.[34] It is the encounter with absence, void, loss, and horror that undermines and pummels any sustainable notion of the grandeur of reason. While exceptions – stories of healings and miracles – can and need to be proclaimed, theologians must continually refer to those forgotten, the anonymous poor as Sobrino again reminds us of.[35] Yes, Jesus finally healed the Syrophoenician woman's daughter, but other children that day – and many days since – were not so fortunate. As should be evident by now, any discussion of faith and reason must enter the perilous world of theodicy and anthropodicy and must sit with the women and the babies from the Book of Lamentations and with voices like Joseph Bau, who in his holocaust testimony, *Dear God, Have you ever Gone Hungry*?, writes how [Camp Kommandant Amon Goeth] caught a boy who was suffering from diarrhea and was unable to contain himself. He forced the boy to eat all of the excrement before killing him'.[36] Bau does not know the boy so he is unnamed. We know such stories, ironically, are as numerous as the stars in the sky and sands of the seashore. They speak of a different type of covenant, among or between people or forces that constantly seek to belittle and wear down the 'certitude' of our faith.

Testimonies that witness these ruptures within history challenge and undermine many of the fundamentals of a Christian's faith, like the power of prayer, the sense of God's active presence within our world, or the belief in Christ's solidarity with victims of oppression – elements that should be certitudes. However, ironically and perhaps tragically, our deep and sensitive listening to the Other calls us to challenge that certitude in the name of that same faith. This is especially the case if one's theological or ethical framework has been complicit or silent in the face of mass suffering and atrocity. A Christian who reads memoirs from the Holocaust, Argentinean Dirty War, Balkan wars, or Rwandan genocide[37] to name but four historical ruptures – will be constantly reminded of the institutional and individual failures of Christians. As a Catholic Christian, I remain dumbfounded and shamed at how we have treated those with differing views, almost as much as I rejoice and hope in the peace

[34] Referring to one of the points of the Pope's address at Regensburg, I must say I consider the perceived relationship of theology in the academy of minor importance. In some ways, a humbled theology may become an ever-greater spiritually and rationally rich one. While issues of funding and grants (and so the retaining of theological jobs), matter to the majority of us, I want to speak of a faith and reason where it ultimately matters: in the presence of the suffering Other.

[35] Jon Sobrino, 'Depth and Urgency of the Option for the Poor', p. 26.

[36] Joseph Bau, *Dear God, Have You Ever Gone Hungry?,* trans. Shlomo Yurman (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1998), p. 115.

[37] See, for example, the essays in Carol Rittner, John K. Roth, and Wendy Whitworth, eds., *Genocide in Rwanda: Complicity of the Churches?* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 2004).



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and joy we, through the workings of the Spirit, have brought, and will bring, to the world. Such a focus, which also seeks to unearth many overlooked or unknown tales of goodness and hope, will still likely lead to a merciless onslaught of doubt and silence. Writing of the massacres committed by Christian colonisers in the New World, Bartolomé de las Casas' *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* cries out: 'There is no way the written word can convey the full horror of the atrocities committed throughout the region; nor, even if it were to, would the reader credit the excesses that such an account would reveal'.[38]

While it may be easy (and convenient) for those of us who are Christian today to separate ourselves from the cruelty other Christians have unleashed – and are unleashing on others – we must ask ourselves: Are there fundamentals of our faith from Sacred Scripture, Church Pronouncements (or silences), and the writings of some key theologians that have contributed to dehumanising and unjust portrayals of non-Christians? Have such fundamentals implied or fostered the license to mock or destroy a non-Christian's honour, life, and values? The belief of supersessionism, mined by many Christians from biblical and theological texts, would be one example.[39] Because of a Christian's love and zeal for a faith that nurtures and gives life; because of the outrage one feels at a faith that has been manipulated; because of the acceptance, if not kernel of doubt, that one's faith has contributed to (or failed as an adequate response toward) these atrocities; we are called to a greater examination of our beliefs and practices. We must turn to the Other to listen to her experiences and interpretations of our doctrines and praxis. We must be open to conversion – not to another faith (though this may be valid for some), but to the conversion of our interpretation and practice of that religion. Note, too, that this is not a once-off act, but is part of our continual need for purification. As John Paul II writes in regards to the Catholic Church in *Ut Unum Sint*: 'Because she feels herself constantly called to be renewed in the spirit of the Gospel, she does not cease to do penance'.[40]

[38] Bartolomé de las Casas' *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, trans. Nigel Griffin (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 73.

[39] As Didier Pollefeyt writes: 'A consequence of this theology of substitution is a moralistic, apologetic, and intolerant Christian attitude toward the Jewish people…' ['Christology after Auschwitz: A Catholic Perspective,', 230]. See also Erich Zenger, 'The Covenant that was Never Revoked: The Foundations of a Christian Theology of Judaism,' in Philip A. Cunningham, Norbert J. Hofman, and Joseph Sievers, eds., *The Catholic Church and the Jewish People*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), pp. 92–112.

[40] Pope John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, Para. 3. http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0221/_INDEX.HTM. Accessed 10 June 2009.



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## Spiritual Kenosis and Our Response to the Other

In the Regensburg Address, Benedict XVI's called for a rehellenisation of faith and reason. In speaking of a rehellenisation, I cannot help wonder why in this address there is not a concomitant (and ultimately more spiritually and theologically purifying) urging for Christians to immerse themselves in a deeper knowledge of Judaism; and, in our present, globalised Church, to sit at the feet of the churches of Latin America, Asia, and Africa.[41] Thus, the calling for a rehellenisation that does not account for why theological positions of complicity or silence in the past have contributed to injustice is futile.

The so-called postmodern challenge of universal truth, identity, and ethics should be both critiqued and embraced – critiqued because they may seem erroneously to attack crucial components of one's Christian identity – and embraced because they can serve as purifiers in better embodying that identity. A Christian should welcome the questioning of any truth claims and listen to arguments that encompass – or flirt with – a radical relativism. Why? Because one's faith, in an act of spiritual kenosis, may even have to empty of itself its professed love and passion for God. Many of us have wounded or killed precisely in a supposed zeal for God. As Levinas writes: 'Loving the Torah even more than God means precisely having access to a personal God against whom one may rebel – that is to say, for Whom one may die'.[42] It is in the name of our love for the Other and our response to the Other, which for Levinas is characterised by a movement unto God – *à-Dieu* '– that may lead us to this spiritual and theological rebellion against God but in the name of our love of God. In reflecting on how a false zeal for God has often led to ungodly acts, one does not have to think of the burning of heretics or the Crusades. Our everyday words and actions of religious pride and hypocrisy often hurt the ones we most love. This emptying, then, is to ensure, precisely, that in one's defense and search for Truth, one's commitment to God is manifest in our responsibility and interaction with the Other. It is an emptying that never loses sight of one's responsibility for the Other.

In the context of kenosis and the cross, we must not only highlight how Jesus was made vulnerable and susceptible to the abuse of others,

[41] Referring to the rich and deep history of Christianity outside of Europe, Philip Jenkins observes: 'Yet an awareness of the Christian past reminds us that through much of history, leading churches have framed the message in the context of non-Greek and non-European intellectual traditions…' [*The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia – and How it Died* (Oxford: Lion Book, 2008), p. 39].

[42] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Loving the Torah More than God,' in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism,* trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 145.



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but need to show how his emptying reveals a calling to follow his redemptive example – even if such a choice leads to the cross. In the essay 'Judaism and Kenosis', Levinas writes that 'kenosis also has its full meaning in the sensibility of Judaism'.[43] Referring to a God who is the protector of widows and orphans, he writes: 'Most remarkably, here, that humility means mainly the proximity of God to human suffering'.[44] Such, of course, has its resonance with the preferential option for the poor referred to above. However, in the essay 'Judaism and Christianity', which transcribes Levinas' discussion with Bishop Klaus Hemmerle, Levinas has less laudatory remarks about Jesus' kenotic emptiness on the cross. In the discussion, Bishop Hemmerle explains that all that God asks from us is to love and follow him. Referring to the defenselessness of Jesus in the face of evil and suffering, Hemmerle speaks of the 'no defense of Jesus, which he took upon himself, so that in the innermost depths of his mission he could encounter me without defense'.[45] Free from the acts of injustice and atrocity that characterise his oppressors, Jesus' non-violent path towards God seems to lead us to the higher and more valuable way. And yet, in the context of the Shoah, Levinas responds: '. . .[K]enosis of powerlessness costs man too much! Christ without defense on the cross eventually found himself leading the armies of the Crusades! And he did not come down from the cross to stop the murderers'.[46]

Ironically, Christ's powerlessness meant the cross – and the life of Christ – could be abused and manipulated to commit and even inspire acts of horror and misery. Where is the God of justice? Levinas seems to be asking. More provocatively, he seems to be questioning the moral and spiritual value of Christ as a fellow sufferer with humanity. In the context of theodicy, and the fear that God remains unjustly and immorally detached from the extreme horrors of this world, Jesus' murder and rejection testify to a God who so loved the world to make himself vulnerable and susceptible to the misplaced and unjust actions of others. Because of a commitment to continue to reveal the most meaningful path for humanity, God would not be silent or impotent when confronting such horrors. Jesus' life testifies that to God, humanity is worth any sacrifice and suffering. And yet, doubts and theological gaps proliferate.

While Levinas' challenge (echoing one of the criminals who was crucified with Jesus [Lk 23:32]) is acute, Christians often counter that justice will be served in a postmortem setting. In fact, it is because of my commitment to remember the many victims of mass atrocity

[43] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Judaism and Kenosis' in *In the Time of Nations*, trans. Michael B. Smith (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 101.

[44] Ibid., 102.

[45] Quoted in Levinas, 'Judaism and Christianity,' p. 148.

[46] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Judaism and Christianity,' p. 150.



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and injustice that I refute those who make universal salvation a necessary end to establish an omnibenevolent God.[47] On the contrary, while we must always stress the humanity of every individual (even those who have committed the grossest of crimes against life), we must remember that for Christians, every one will be judged and the memory and suffering of so many will never be forgotten. As Jürgen Moltmann writes (in response to Masao Abe's karmic interpretation of Auschwitz), '...I must see [the events of Auschwitz] from the point of view of God's justice. Then, on the one hand, I see a burden of guilt which cannot be carried; and on the other hand, I see the God who will not allow the murderers to triumph over their victims'.[48] For Christians, then, judgement will come; but Levinas' questioning of the kenosis of Christ also makes us wonder: in the light of the Shoah, will such justice come too late?

In short, all of us are only replete with questions when we contemplate the complex interactions of human choices, acts, responsibility, free will, external and internal restrictions to that responsibility and free will, and the role of justice and a post-mortem existence. Will all the victims be healed? Will this healing 'justify' the horrific ordeals many were forced to endure in this life? Will it 'justify' the 1.5 million Jewish children murdered in the Shoah? One certainly hopes and prays that healing can be possible for even the worst of those who were left broken and dehumanised in this world. While answers remain fractured, on Cavalry Jesus has shown a non-violent path as a way to face and ultimately defeat evil and injustice. The Shoah has rightly made Levinas skeptical of the value of such a path, and all Christians must reexamine such a profoundly disturbing but viable interpretation.

Such acts of spiritual kenosis noted above are no doubt dangerous and risky. And yet, if we believe the Spirit is leading us closer to living a life that mirrors the Love of God; we must be open to such challenges. We must remain humbled by a faith and reason that are best described as much by their grandeur as their fragility.

## Conclusion: Healing and Wholeness Amidst Fragility

A fractured faith seeks healing. It is a journey and a process with the Spirit for wholeness, forever an illusive goal in this world. It is illusive because in the name of one's faith there is a vocation

[47] See, in particular the three essays of Thomas Talbott in Robin A. Parry and Christopher H. Partridge, eds., *Universal Salvation: The Current Debate* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), pp. 1–52.

[48] Jürgen Moltmann, 'God is Unselfish Love' in John B. Cobb, Jr. and Christopher Ives, eds., *The Emptying God*: *A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation*, (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1990), p. 123.



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to reach out, heal, and remember the victims of this world. Amidst the horror and silence of so many marginalised and victimised, it is our fragility, temporality, and failures that overshadow any hope in the grandeur of reason. We, perhaps, can still sing of a 'world charged with the grandeur of God'[49] as Hopkins did, but be wary of transferring that notion too facilely to humanity. Recall the quotation from John Paul II which opened this essay: 'Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth'.[50] It is a beautiful image, especially as he adds how 'God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth – in a word, to know himself – so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves'. Does speaking of the grandeur of reason sully such an image, perhaps making one think of Icarus in his hubris? Reason remains a gift from God and is inextricably tied to our search with and for God (the *Logos*). Like Benedict and John Paul II, I also support the notion that all of us are called by God in a search for Truth, which for a Christian, is only to echo with Augustine that 'our heart is restless until it rests in you'.[51] Speaking of the fragility of faith does not mean it is not beautiful, arresting, or powerful. We know that Leonardo Di Vinci's Last Supper is fragile, but it still mesmerises, and so one can certainly speak of its grandeur.

What, therefore, is the relationship between admitting a fractured faith and recognising the fragility of reason? If reason is informed by faith, and such a faith, ironically remains whole by acknowledging its potential to be fractured, then embracing the fragility of reason calls for a greater reliance on the need for faith. Such a stand knows the human potential to distort God's word and covenant and so calls for a greater solidarity among all of us in our search and quest for justice and truth. Such admissions ultimately strengthen one's religious identity and provide fertile grounds for ecumenism and interfaith dialogue which courageously and candidly seek to hone one's faith through listening, interacting, and learning from the Other, while also perhaps, rethinking or even condemning some of our theological language and acts that have been the cause of division, distrust, or injustice. We need to attune ourselves to outside, external voices who utter what some of us on the inside are often afraid or too 'pious' to say.

In Pan Chieh-Yü's poem, 'Fan-Piece for Her Imperial Lord', we read: 'O fan of white silk / clear as frost on the grass-blade, / You also

[49] Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'God's Grandeur,' in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 6th Edition, Vol. 2, ed. M.H. Abrams (New York: W.W. Norton & Company), p. 1546.

[50] John Paul II, 'Faith and Reason', p. 415.

[51] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 3.



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are laid aside'.[52] Speaking of the fragility of reason and a fractured faith must be contexualised with the dignity of the human person[53], for it is the belief in this dignity that ultimately lies at the heart of why I hesitate to use the phrase the grandeur of reason and instead emphasise our fragility and sense of being fractured. No human being is to be 'laid aside'. Such an awareness is meant to lead to a greater reliance on our need for the Other and to respond to the needs of the Other. As my criteria emphasise, in solidarity with the poor and marginalised and reaching out to the Other as emphasised in the approach of Vatican II, the interweaving of faith and reason can lead us ever onward to find if not persevere in our ongoing search for meaning. Reason and faith viewed in this way, to borrow again John Paul's imagery, can no doubt begin, if not to soar, then to struggle closer towards that Ultimate truth. In such a struggle, and in our recognition of the fragility of reason, one may even begin to perceive its grandeur.

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[52] Pan Chieh-Yü, 'Fan-Piece for Her Imperial Lord,' trans. Ezra Pound in *The New Directions Anthology of Classical Chinese Poetry,* ed. Eliot Weinberger (New York: New Directions, 2003), p. 20.

[53] John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, Para. 10. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem_en.html. Accesed 10 June 2009.



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