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Philosophy and Theology: New Boundaries¹

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Trans. Sarah Horton

With Leibniz’s question, the era of monadology certainly opens, but so does a new way of conceiving of adventure and even of crossing boundaries: “why he [Caesar] crossed the Rubicon rather than stopped at it and why he won rather than lost at Pharsalus.”² Crossing the waterway, or rather the small river (*flumen*), that separates Emilie-Romagna from Cisalpine Gaul, Caesar has no less changed the face of the earth, for all the risk was great when he thus committed himself. *Alea iacta est* – “the die has been cast” – the future emperor allegedly exclaimed; this is a way not of imitating him or following in his footsteps, but of hereby admitting that no advance can be made without exposing oneself, in that “thinking is deciding” (Heidegger).

We should therefore recognize this, at least with regard to the field (of battle?) that separates philosophy and theology in France. Under the repeated blows of hermeneutics and phenomenology, the boundaries between the disciplines have already moved, and we must, at a minimum, take note of this if we are to not continue to deceive ourselves. Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur on the one hand (hermeneutics), Emmanuel Levinas, Michel Henry, Jean-Louis Chrétien, Jean-Luc Marion or Jean-Yves Lacoste on the other (phenomenology), mark so many respective, even also progressive, stages through which boundaries are no longer set up as barriers, nor disputes as oratorical jousts. Whether or not there has been a “theological turn in French phenomenology” (D. Janicaud), this fact cannot be contested: phenomenology has made a real, abundant contribution to theology since the publication of *Totality and Infinity* (1961), such that today theologians themselves gain by referring to it. Moreover, what was said *ad intra* in the questioning of Judaism (Levinas) or of Christianity (Marion, Lacoste, Henry, Chrétien, etc.), is now also formulated *ad extra* outside of any confessional sphere, as if the “religious,” and even theological content as such, could not leave indifferent even those who profess to not adhere to it – Nietzsche and resurrection (D. Franck), denegation and negative theology (J. Derrida), contemporary art and the Crucifixion (G. Deleuze), deconstruction and Christianity (J.-L. Nancy), universalism and Saint Paul (A. Badiou), etc.

¹ Talk given at Boston College, September 9, 2016, as the Gadamer Visiting Professor. Here one will find a synthesis of *Crossing the Rubicon*, recently published by Fordham University Press, June 2016.

[My translation of key terms and phrases follows Emmanuel Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon*, trans. Reuben Shank (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016) in order to preserve terminological consistency between that work and this text. – Trans.]

² “Discourse on Metaphysics,” in *Philosophical Essays*, trans. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), 45.

A question nevertheless remains, and not one of the least. If phenomenology's contribution to theology has certainly born fruit, such that the Saying of God (Levinas), the relation to writing (Ricœur), the Incarnation (Henry), the Eucharist (Marion), prayer (Chrétien) or liturgy (Lacoste) have found in the vein of the "descriptive" the wherewithal for renewing a previously expositive interpretation, phenomenology itself, for its part, has not, or has scarcely, questioned itself about the transformations that theology would this time impose on it. Everything has indeed happened as if the "phenomenologization of theology" were not at the same time accompanied by a "theologization of phenomenology." Let me be clear here. It is not at all a question of calling for a crypto-theology within philosophy, and even less of confounding the disciplines by wanting too much to gather them together. A "counterblow" should rather be thought from the one to the other, but following a two-way street this time: certainly from phenomenology *to* theology, but also from theology *to* phenomenology. Tertullian's taking into account of the "carnal" and "corporeal" Christ, for example, could well compel a return to the hypertrophy of the flesh or of the "lived experience of the body" in phenomenology (*The Wedding Feast of the Lamb*), the consideration of the Resurrection could well release the true stake of the horizontality of our existence (*The Metamorphosis of Finitude*), or also the hypothesis of a divine inter-Trinitarian pathos could well transform the unilateral sense of suffering (*The Guide to Gethsemane*).³ If phenomenology has therefore practiced for some time a "one-way trip" – certainly from phenomenology *to* theology – we will therefore take, just for once, a "return ticket": from theology *to* phenomenology this time. By thinking "in one direction," be it out of interest for what it discovers, philosophy risks not letting itself be transformed by what it precisely has just encountered. One will agree, therefore, to here practice the double trajectory, at the risk, inversely, of either losing oneself or of never having traveled.

Pathei mathos – or "self-apprenticeship by suffering": such is the great lesson of Aeschylus, and the sense of the *great crossing* or the "passage," here in the double sense of "*pâtir*," that is, "suffering," as also of "*passer*," that is, "crossing." In the act of interpreting (hermeneutics), as also of deciding (belief and faith) and of crossing (philosophy and theology), the "round trip" will therefore constantly play out, or this Iliad that is never without an Odyssey, such that one will never be satisfied to cross without returning changed by that which one visited.

³ Cf. *The Metamorphosis of Finitude*, trans. George Hughes (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb*, trans. Hughes (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), and *The Guide of Gethsemane*, trans. Hugues (New York: Fordham University Press, forthcoming).

I. The hermeneutical question

1. Towards which hermeneutic?

“Scripture grows with its readings” (*Scriptura cum legentibus crescit*).⁴ The memorable formula of Gregory the Great does not indicate first or only that *I* grow with Scripture or that *I* am its principal destinary. On the contrary, and according to an inversion that is, to say the least, surprising, it is Scripture that grows through my own reading, the text living from my life rather than me nourishing myself from its life: “[the Bible] is a living being that grows and develops before our eyes,” as we must say, following Paul Claudel.⁵ If there is thus a hermeneutical relief, certainly in theology (by the senses of Scripture) but also in philosophy (by interpretation), this relief will, I contend, play out less in the text than in the body, in the self than in the world. “Is hermeneutics fundamental?” The interrogation will here take the baton from the famous question of Emmanuel Levinas: “Is ontology fundamental?”⁶ On the one hand, phenomenology (Husserl and Heidegger in particular) will play the game of the “short route,” that is to say, that of the “ontology of understanding,” or of the lived experience of the intentional subject, in that it is projected and transformed in the text itself. On the other hand, hermeneutics (Hans-Georg Gadamer, certainly, but Paul Ricœur even more), will explicitly refer to the “long route,” that is to say to analyses of language, to history, and to the detour by various mediations, such that the human subject is never directly apprehended but is always mediated by “cultural works.” Such is the debate that we must question again today, and the decision of Paul Ricœur, followed by the whole of hermeneutical theology, which we must think again: “substituting for the short route of the Analytic of Dasein, the long route that begins by analyses of language.”⁷

Let us be clear here. It is not in the least a question – this goes without saying – of not first highlighting the great merit of Ricœurian hermeneutics, and in particular its boundless fecundity for theology. We will question only – but at the same time decisively – its being anchored in textuality alone rather than in corporeality, in the “book of Scripture” (*liber Scripturae*) rather than in the “book of the world” (*liber mundi*). Without reducing an inspiration to a confession, it is necessary to recognize that no existence could be said without an experience, and that nothing in philosophy, particularly when it acknowledges its spiritual debt, could so easily strip off its traditional heritage. Paul Ricœur’s Protestantism roots his art of interpreting in *sola Scriptura*, which of course corresponds to his tradition, as also to his confession. Likewise, Emmanuel Levinas’s Judaism finds a refuge in the “body of the letter,” with the Torah signing the act of “a contraction of the Infinite in Scripture” or “God’s precarious dwelling place in the letters.”⁸ What hermeneutics here has of “confessional” (the Protestant hermeneutic of the meaning of the text and the Jewish hermeneutic of the body of the letter) in no way harms its conceptual character, and still less its universal vocation. There

⁴ “Homily VII,” in Book I of *The Homilies of Saint Gregory the Great on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, trans. Theodosia Tomkinson and Juliana Cownie (Etna, Calif.: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1990.)

⁵ *The Essence of the Bible*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), 33.

⁶ “Is Ontology Fundamental?” in *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith (London: Continuum, 2006), 1-10.

⁷ “Existence and Hermeneutics,” in *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 10.

⁸ *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, trans. Gary D. Mole (London: Athlone Press, 1994), x and 121 respectively).

remains a question, and an aim, that we cannot not interrogate. If Ricœurian hermeneutics takes root in Protestantism (the meaning of the text), and Levinasian hermeneutics in Judaism (the body of the letter) – for which one could not reproach them, according to an ecumenism that is necessary and in good taste – what, then, would a properly “Catholic” hermeneutic be like? In other words, with the “meaning of the text” and the “body of the letter,” is it not also suitable to deploy the program of a so-called “Catholic” hermeneutic of the “body and the voice,” such that to the *table of Scripture* the *Eucharistic table* would always be linked: “the faithful are nourished in the word of God at the double table of the Sacred Scripture and the Eucharist.”⁹

2. Hermeneutics and the sense of Scripture

Tracking the four senses of Scripture, one indeed follows the deployment of hermeneutics, for today and tomorrow: “the letter teaches ‘that which took place,’” emphasizes the Dominican Augustine of Dacia, an heir in this of Origen and a contemporary of Thomas Aquinas, “allegory ‘that which you are to believe,’ the moral sense (tropological) ‘that which you are to do,’ the anagogical sense ‘that towards which you must tend.’”¹⁰ We know this, many having more or less recognized it. The advent of historical-critical exegesis in France, following the Second Vatican Council and continuing up to the 1970s, permitted a real renewal of the reading of texts, certainly for the reading of the Bible, but also for theology and even philosophy. What the “*letter*” of the text teaches here, since it is a matter of referring to the first sense of Scripture, amounts less to restricting oneself to its literality (what the text says), but rather to its historicity (that to which the text refers). The historical-critical method, by way of the first sense of Scripture, refers precisely to “what took place” (*littera gesta docet*) by its taking account of the context, the referent, the traditions in which the text was written, the true history to which it refers, etc. So many exegetical proceedings that finally permitted us to make of Genesis a “myth,” of the historical accounts a composite of different traditions (Yahwists, Elohist and priestly), and of Paul’s epistles an aggregate sometimes of several authors or of another author (the epistle to the Hebrews, for example). The historical-critical method refers not to the letter of the text as it is written but to its literality in history and the referent where the letter of the text was given.

A sort of exhaustion of the historical-critical method, like that which is probably also occurring in textual hermeneutics today, leads one to wait and hope for a relief, in particular in Catholic theology, and that Protestant hermeneutics paradoxically managed to procure. With “The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation” (1975), Paul Ricœur finally, or anew this time, proposed a type of interpretation that “may abolish all reference to a given reality.”¹¹ A triple reduction or *epoché* would permit the operation of an “emancipation with respect to the one who wrote the text (the author),” “an emancipation from the one who receives the text (the reader),” and an “emancipation from that to which the text refers (the referent).”¹² One will have understood this. The advance here is considerable. A “world of the text” is born for itself, such that a “meaning of the text” is valid by itself, in its proper unity,

⁹ Pope Paul VI, *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests: Presbyterorum ordinis* (Second Vatican Council: December 7, 1965), no. 18.

¹⁰ Augustine of Dacia (around 1260). This formula is cited and translated by P. Beauchamp, “Sens de l’Ecriture,” in *Dictionnaire critique de théologie*, by Jean-Yves Lacoste (Paris: PUF, 1988), 1087. English translation from Emmanuel Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon*, trans. Reuben Shank (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 32.

¹¹ “The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation,” in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 85.

¹² See *ibid.*, 83-84: “The Relation of Speaking and Writing.”

regardless of the circumstances in which the message was composed and the intention for which it was destined.¹³ The pastoralia, in particular in France, knew how to take full advantage of this, with all the deviations in projecting oneself into the text against which Paul Ricœur himself had always fought. It finally became possible to read, or reread, the Bible for itself, to no longer believe oneself to be or desire to be a “savant” in order to understand it, and to recognize that this message was first addressed to *me* in its unity and was not always derived from a history that, all in all, shatters it. The text is a “world in itself,” and no exterior knowledge is required, save my good will for reading it, and even also for understanding it, or understanding (*Verstehen*) *myself* in it.

It is, however, there that the problem lies – not yesterday when hermeneutics had come to renew everything (in the 1980s), but today when we have somewhat exhausted its possibilities (in the 2000s). The “proposed world” that the text opens, as Ricœur emphasizes, aims first and principally at “the *appropriation* (*Aneignung*) of the text, its *application* (*Anwendung*) to the present situation of the reader,” be it one’s capacity to “*understand oneself* in front of the text” or to “*expos[e oneself]* to the text and receiv[e] *from it* an enlarged self.”¹⁴ If the text is a “world in itself,” I am no less its principal destinary: “the text is the *medium* through which *we understand ourselves*.”¹⁵ Here it is indeed a matter, with Paul Ricœur’s hermeneutics, of recognizing and seeing in the text “that which you are to do” (*quid agas*), which designates, properly speaking, the “*moral*” or “*tropological sense*.” All reading aims for the “transformation of the self by the text,” such that numerous deviations and pastoral practices are drawn from it, as if one of Paul’s letters, the letter to the Ephesians for example, were directly addressed to me. Paradoxically, the mediation of the text in its language and culture that was so important for Paul Ricœur has sometimes been forgotten in favor of the mere appropriation and modification of the self by the text.

We will, then, and for today, call for a “phenomenality of the text” by way of a relief of the “historicity of the text” (literal sense) and the “hermeneutics of the text” (tropological sense). No longer only attentive to “that which took place” (literal sense) or to “that which you are to do” (moral sense), we will aim this time for “that which you are to believe” (*quid credas*, “*allegorical*” sense) and “that towards which you must tend” (*quo tendas*, “*anagogical*” sense). Rather than finding ourselves in the text, we will lose ourselves in it. And more than “understanding ourselves before it,” we will be taken (*pris*) into and understood (*com-pris*) in it – incorporating myself into the body of the Bible in the liturgy of the word as I incorporate myself into the body of the resurrected one and of the Church in the Eucharistic liturgy: “But to say that we question the Scriptures is incorrect,” as Paul Claudel wonderfully emphasizes. “It is better to admit that *the Scriptures question us* [...]”¹⁶ “[The Bible] is a drama, I would say, not enacted by us so much as through him, just as the actors of the Old Testament lived through him.”¹⁷ The phenomenality of the text will be centered less on my lived experiences as its destinary than on the lived experiences that are *internal to the text itself*, by way of its only proprietor. As with Flaubert’s M^{me}. Bovary or Stendhal’s Julien Sorel, an intersubjectivity plays out also and first in the play of the characters amongst themselves, of which I am not the principal beneficiary – if not losing myself, or at the very least not finding myself. “Have this mind in yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,” proclaims the hymn to

¹³ Ibid., 84-86: “The World of the Text.”

¹⁴ Ibid., 87-88: (emphasis added): “Self-Understanding in Front of the Work.”

¹⁵ Ibid., 87.

¹⁶ P. Claudel, *Essence of the Bible*, op. cit., 34.

¹⁷ Ibid., 10.

the Philippians¹⁸ (Phil. 2:5), and not the reverse. It is not he who understands himself *in me*, as if my interpretation could contain him, but I who understand myself in him – “allowing [my]self to be read authoritatively by the Holy Scripture,” to take up here the formula of Jean-Louis Chrétien¹⁹.

In short – and one will have understood this – the text contains a “world,” as Paul Ricœur has emphasized well while, however, orienting it towards appropriation, but also in that it says something of the world that precedes it and that incorporates itself in it. Hermeneutics understood as the “meaning of the text” (Ricœur) or as the “dwelling of the letter” (Levinas) indeed first honors a text or a writing, but not the world or creation as such. Yet such is probably the originality of the hermeneutical aim that is “Catholic,” and no longer “Protestant” or “Jewish.” The first to be given, emphasizes Bonaventure commenting on the *Canticle of Creation* and followed in this by Thomas Aquinas with the five cosmological ways, was the “book of the world” (*liber mundi*), and it therefore suffices to decipher it to see God present there. It is only because, by sin, “this book (*iste liber*), that is, the world (*scilicet mundus*), was then as it were dead and defaced, that another book (*alius liber*) – the book of Scripture (*liber Scripturae*) – was necessary, by which humans would be illumined in order to be able to interpret the metaphors of things.”²⁰ The text does not come *before* but *after*, and that is probably the great originality of a so-called “Catholic” hermeneutic. Ceasing to bring its attention to bear on the mediation of the text and its structures, in the manner of the examination of the finger that indicates the moon without ever aiming for the moon itself, the “phenomenality of the text” causes one to enter into a veritable *intentional intercorporeality* of the reader and the actors of the text itself, such that it is the Christ that I encounter there (allegorical sense) or the union to God himself (anagogical sense) and not, or no longer, a history that has just unfolded for me (literal sense) or an interpretation that is destined for me (moral or tropological sense). Thus one will give oneself the means to encounter it anew, or rather for it to show itself otherwise. The Catholic hermeneutic of “the body and the voice” (our own perspective) will here take over, insofar as that is possible, from the Protestant hermeneutic of the “meaning of the text” (Ricœur) and from the Jewish hermeneutic of the “body of the letter” (Levinas).

3. Of the body and the voice

The “voice” has this property: it requires a body, which may be hidden but not absent or suppressed. One can, and sometimes even must, read a text in forgetfulness of its author, and likewise also celebrate a word in commemoration of an actor. The so-called “Catholic” hermeneutic is not, however, that of reading (the Protestant aim) or of hearing (the Jewish intention). It celebrates and waits for visibility more than invisibility, the body more than the word: “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father,” Jesus answers Philip. “How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (Jn. 14:9). How, then, to see him whom we no longer see, and hear him whom we no longer hear, at the very least, no longer in the same way as the disciples who were his contemporaries? Here the formula of Hugh of Saint-Victor takes its place, a sort of leitmotif of a so-called “Catholic” hermeneutic of the body and the voice: *hic intelligenda*

¹⁸ [All Scriptural quotations are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted. – Trans.]

¹⁹ J.-L. Chrétien, “Allowing Oneself to Be Read Authoritatively by the Holy Scripture,” in *Under the Gaze of the Bible*, trans. John Marson Dunaway (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 6-22).

²⁰ Bonaventure, *Collations on the Six Days*, trans. Jose de Vinck, Works of Bonaventure 5 (Quincy, Mass.: Franciscan Press, 1995) bk. XIII, §12, v. 390.

est vox Verbi quod ibi caro Dei – “the voice of the Word must be understood at present as the flesh of God was understood then.”²¹

Let me be clear here. It is not at all a question of “hearing voices or his voice,” nor of hearing the Word with our “ears of flesh,” even though Francis of Assisi mentioned this in order to insist on the conversion of our corporeality. The analogy counts here, more than the resonance of the sound: “now, *each day*, this same Word comes himself to us under the cover of a human voice,” the Victorine clarifies. “Certainly its manner by which it makes itself known to humans is different according to whether it’s *by his flesh* or *by the human voice*.”²² The hermeneutics of the voice compels us to recognize that there exists in the vocal an absence become presence of a rare intensity, and of which the mode of the tele-phoned (or of that which is heard from afar), today allows us to apprehend its originality. At the end of a line that is more than ever virtualized, the voice of my Beloved resonates. *It is he, it is I*. There is no need to speak to each other to recognize each other. The other is always already there in the timbre of his sending, and his breath or his vibration suffices to identify him. There exists a “singularity of the voice” that no other phenomenon could equal, such that God himself makes exemplary use of the voice, including in the Bible, to express himself today: “Everyone who is of the truth *listens to my voice*” (*akouei mou tês phones*), Jesus answers in court before Pilate (Jn 18:37); and one will name “good shepherd” he who opens the door to the sheep who “listen to his voice” (*tês phônes autou akouei*) because they “know his voice” (*oti oidasin tên phonen autou*) [Jn 10:3-4].

Present in His *body* on the Eucharistic table, God is therefore also present by His *voice* in the Holy Scripture. The word is no longer only “text” (Ricoeur) or “trace” (Levinas), but also profferation, even voci-feration, of a “this is my body” come in bread to give itself, and in its word to vibrate. No longer seeing his body of flesh, like the disciples formerly, we now *hear his voice*, we recognize him from his manner more than from his matter, from His tonality more than from his visibility. Moreover, he keeps himself by his voice hidden in his flesh – not absent, since there will never be a voice without a body, but present otherwise. There where the body keeps itself hidden “under the veil of nature” in his Incarnation and “under the species of bread and wine” in the Eucharist, according to Pascal’s words in his letter to Charlotte Roanez (1656), his voice resonates *for us* in the depths of this body that is totally present and nonetheless concealed, such that we are this time the destinaries not only of an articulated text, but of a mode of being of God expressed by his body: “This *voice (phône)* has come *for your sake (alla di umas), not mine (ou di me)*” (Jn 12:30).

Far from keeping itself in the snare of writing or of the “*gramme*” (Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon*), the voice therefore waits to be proffered. There is a forgetting of the voice, more even than of being. The voiceless thought of philosophy would probably gain, as if by a “counterblow,” from learning that there is a “great voice,” or a *megalê phôné*, in theology: “And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a great voice (*phôné megalê*), ‘*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*’ which means ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” (Mk 15:34).²³ The voice here is not only “*nue*,” that is, “naked,” by virtue of a “call” that always covers it or

²¹ Hugh of Saint-Victor, « La parole de Dieu », dans *Six opuscules spirituels*, Sources Chrétiennes, no. 155, trans. Roger Baron (Paris: Cerf, 1969), 63. English translation from Emmanuel Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon*, trans. Reuben Shank (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 54.

²² Ibid. English translation from Emmanuel Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon*, trans. Reuben Shank (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 54.

²³ [I here diverge slightly from the ESV, writing “great voice” rather than “loud voice” to better accord with the original French text. – Trans.]

confers signification on it (Heidegger); it is first *crue*, that is, “raw” or “believed,” in the double sense of the rawness of what is given without having been prepared and of the apprenticeship by which we give it our faith without, however, ever becoming used to it. The “*voix crue*,” that is, the “raw voice,” the “believed voice” (my perspective) rather than the “*voix nue*,” that is, the “naked voice” (J.-L. Chrétien) – that is what makes the vociferation of the voice, by which Christ himself in his great cry on Golgotha gives himself in his passions more than in his articulations, in his pathemes more than in his phonemes: “spoken sounds are symbols of affectations in the soul (*pathemata*),” Aristotle famously emphasizes, “and written marks symbols of spoken sounds.”²⁴ The “Word on the cross” thus gives itself as a “Word in the voice,” keeping the voice in the body (Eucharistic) and giving a body to the voice (liturgical): “let us hear *our voice in him (in illo voces nostras)* and *his voice in us (voces eius in nobis)*,” we must emphasize following Saint Augustine in his *Enarationes in Psalmos*²⁵.

II. Deciding to believe

Having thus interpreted (1st part), it now remains to “decide” (2nd part). The Catholic hermeneutic of the body and the voice certainly opens onto a new, and other, mode of expressivity, but nothing ensures that it will not make us leave our common humanity. The great crossing, or the crossing of the Rubicon, would risk much, and even too much, by abandoning a bank in forgetfulness of what was left. “Yes, but you must wager. It is not optional; you are embarked,” famously proclaims Pascal at the heart of his *Pensées*.²⁶ Since man is embarked, nothing will be forgotten of what makes him, in particular for navigating. “The human per se,” or the horizon of finitude, constitutive of the figure of man in his modernity, could not be forgotten by God. Belief in this sense does not spring from the confessant alone. We still believe “in the world” or “in others” before believing (or not) “in God.” An originary belief or confidence (*Urdoxa*) precedes and founds all disbelief or all mistrust. *Nothing is harder to believe than the absence of belief* – not that it is first a question of religion, but of philosophy or of the human as such. Philosophy or the human per se will therefore first endeavor to suspend the abstractions of doubt or of the *epoché*, even if it means leaving to the theologian the charge of “transforming the concept of decision at the moment of decision,” in that the Christian is no longer in this case “one,” or even “two,” but “three” deciding (the Trinity).

1. The irreducible belief

At any rate, therefore, one believes. “Perceptual faith,” to say it with Maurice Merleau-Ponty and according to a homology of “faith” that shows to what extent philosophical belief precedes “religious faith,” testifies to an “irreducible belief in the world”: “Notion of faith to be specified,” emphasizes a note in *The Visible and the Invisible*. “It is *not faith in the sense of*

²⁴ Aristotle, *De interpretatione* 1.16a3-5, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Bollingen Series (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1:25.

²⁵ Saint Augustine, *Discours sur les Psaumes*, vol. 2, (Paris: Cerf, 2007), Ps. 85, 62 (translation modified). [I have translated this quotation following Falque’s French wording; the quotation can be found in English, with a different wording, in St. Augustine, “Psalm LXXXVI,” in *On the Psalms*, trans. J. E. Tweed in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, First Series (Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature, 1888), 410. – Trans.]

²⁶ B. Pascal, *Pensées*, Ed. and trans. Roger Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), 212 (B233/S680/L418). [I have modified this translation, rendering *embarqué* as “embarked” rather than as “committed” for consistency with the navel metaphor in Falque’s next sentence. – Trans.]

decision, but in the sense of what is *before any position*, animal faith.”²⁷ Modern philosophy was certainly able to return to consciousness by distrusting the world, and the power of hyperbolic doubt, like the discovery of the cogito, certainly makes Descartes “that French horseman who took off at such a good pace,” to say it with Péguy²⁸. Moreover, the *epoché* or “bracketing” marks the true birth certificate of phenomenology in Husserl, such that it does not suffice to describe situations to call oneself a phenomenologist (in the frequent manner of the use of the word phenomenology within the framework of theology). It is, rather, proper in phenomenology to return to the “acts of consciousness” that constitute our “lived experiences of things” as the things themselves, rather than to their empiricity or their objectivity. In short, doubting or bracketing indeed constitutes the birth certificate of a reflective philosophy the soundness of which we cannot here deny.

There remains, however, paradoxically, a “universal ground of belief in the world” that I will never be able to reduce: “Everything, which, as an existing object, is a goal of cognition is an existent *on the ground of the world*, which is *taken* as existing as *a matter of course*,” acknowledged Husserl at the end of his life. “*Consciousness of the world*,” the philosopher adds, “is consciousness in the mode of *certainty of belief*.”²⁹ One will not find, therefore, any greater prejudice than that of the absence of prejudice. *Sum credendus* – “I am believable (or ought to believe)” – precedes in its certainty, I contend, the *cogito ergo sum* (“I think, therefore I am,” Descartes), and even the *sum moribundus* (“I am dying,” Heidegger). That I can believe “in” Santa Claus does not require “that” Santa Claus is. “I believe with certainty,” and that is the highest certainty: “If I wanted to doubt the existence of the earth long before my birth,” we must conclude with Ludwig Wittgenstein, “I should have to doubt all sorts of things that stand fast for me” – namely, “belief itself.”³⁰

An irreducible “there is” therefore remains on the threshold and at the foundation of all belief, and even before all mistrust and all distrust. To Leibniz’s question, “Why is there something rather than nothing?” we indeed must first recognize that “there is” something. Not that the thing “is,” but that I cannot not “believe” that it is, and that this precisely is indubitable and irreducible, namely my belief itself. It matters little what it is. Only the idea, or the belief, counts, according to which “I cannot believe” that it is not. “Philosophical faith” (in the world and in others) precedes and founds “religious faith” (in a transcendence) and likewise “confessing faith” (in a God acting and present in me). Just for once, belief in God no longer strays from the ensemble and from the rest of humanity – the “small remnant” (Israel) never remaining less than when it ignores the “large remnant” (of humanity).” The *Es gibt* or the *Il y a*, “There is,” no longer say only the givenness of what gives itself, but this *philosophical foundation of our common belief* that we should find again, if we do not want, *qua* confessing believer, to be separated from “our human brothers” (Bernanos), borrowed like us from that unsayableness of chaos that we should acknowledge: “The *brute or savage being* that has not yet been converted into an object of vision or choice is what we want to rediscover,” as

²⁷ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 35 and 3, editor note 1 respectively. [Translation of the footnote modified to follow Falque’s wording. – Trans.]

²⁸ Ch. Péguy, “Note conjointe sur M. Descartes,” in *Œuvres en prose complètes* (Paris: Pléiade, Gallimard, 1992), 1280. English translation from Emmanuel Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon*, trans. Reuben Shank (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 80.

²⁹ E. Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, trans. James Spencer Churchill and Karl Ameriks (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 30).

³⁰ L. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and Georg Henrik von Wright, trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 60.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty acknowledges in a quasi-testamentary way.³¹ One will no longer wait, following Husserl, for “pure experience and one might say, mute still” to be “brought to express its own meaning.”³² The “prereflective,” in its very formulation, still expects “everything” and “too much” from the reflective, as it is entirely and uniquely oriented toward it – in the manner of the “unconscious” in Freud’s first topography (unconscious, preconscious, conscious), for this reason replaced by the “Id” in the second topography (Id, Ego, Superego): “Rather than to a God,” as Emmanuel Levinas acknowledged at the end of the war, “the notion of the *there is* leads us to the *absence of God, the absence of any being*. Primitive men live *before* all revelation, *before* the light comes.”³³

2. Philosophy of religious experience

There is, therefore, a philosophy before theology, and a foundation of “common belief” (at least in the world and in others) that structures them both. By carrying out the *Great Crossing*, or by *crossing the Rubicon*, we will thus first sound the depths of the river, and we will acknowledge that it is evident that a “common water,” murky though it be, constitutes us – *all* of us – first and primarily. We are “woven from the same flesh” (Merleau-Ponty), and admitting this avoids ruptures and leaps from which phenomenology and theology, as I will show, do not remain exempt. If there is indeed a “philosophy of religion,” at least in the sense of a disengagement of the philosophical concept at the very heart of the theological representation (the dialectic at the heart of the Trinity in Hegel, for example) there is yet a “philosophy of religious experience” in which the decision of faith is also important, no longer uniquely in the community of an originary belief (*Urdoxa*), but in the specificity of a confessing and experiential adhesion: We cannot but recognize the benefit of *the personal practice of religious experience*,” admits Henry Duméry. “*Without being eligible*, it is often a *great help* in the critique of the religious object.”³⁴

“Philosophy of religious experience,” rather than “religious philosophy” (with its overly psychological tones), will thus designate a discipline that is to be found again today and of which Pascal, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche were, for us, the pioneers. Such a philosophy will take its root in the “life” that Martin Heidegger, moreover, names “factical” – not simply the “fact of living as such” but enduring its ordeal and fully engaging oneself in this dimension of existing. We will call “factual life,” precisely in the framework of a “phenomenology of religious life” rather than of a “philosophy of religion,” “the fact that the *experiencing self* and

³¹ M. Merleau-Ponty, “La nature ou le monde du silence,” (end of 1957), in E. de Saint-Aubert, *Maurice Merleau-Ponty, La nature ou le monde du silence* (Paris: Hemann, 2008), 53 (emphasis added). [English translation from Emmanuel Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon*, trans. Reuben Shank (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 96.]

³² E. Husserl, *Méditations cartésiennes* (1929) (Paris: Vrin, 1980), § 16, 33. [English translation from Emmanuel Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon*, trans. Reuben Shank (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 96. Found with an alternate wording in *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. Dorian Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950), § 16, 38-39.]

³³ E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 1978), 55-56 (emphasis added).

³⁴ H. Duméry, *Critique et religion, Problèmes et méthodes en philosophie de la religion* (Paris: SEDES, 1957), 18 (emphasis added). [English translation from Emmanuel Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon*, trans. Reuben Shank (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 104.]

what is experienced are not torn apart like [two] things,” to follow anew here the young Martin Heidegger.³⁵

One can certainly wonder if one must have had, or shared, the “religious experience” to be able to speak about religious matters. In other words, if the crossing of the Rubicon demands not only that one accept abandoning, be it only for a time, the bank of philosophy to reach that of theology, but if the “lived experience” of which it is a question in theology itself (Christ) must possess its own content that is sensible for everyone, then one would risk, conversely, understanding nothing of what the philosopher or the theologian could indeed enunciate: “only a *religious man* can understand *religious life*,” adds Heidegger, “because, if it were not so, he would not dispose of an authentic givenness.”³⁶

Let me be clear here. It is not at all a question, either for myself or for the philosopher from Freiburg, of proclaiming an exclusivism of experience whereby the lived experience of the thing itself would be the only way to honor it. There is a sort of *terrorism of experience* in religious matters (the effusive encounter with God) and likewise in psychoanalysis (being put on the couch) that causes us to wrongly forbid one who has not shared it from being able to speak about it. We will rather maintain, and entirely to the contrary, that the “non-experience of the experience” can just as well orient it otherwise, or at the very least cause it to be seen in a light that one would not have suspected. Moreover, the experience of the experience itself is not necessarily required for one who wants to apprehend it all the same – and this is what makes the particularity of the “philosophy of religious experience” – we recognize that the author or the artist to whom we refer could not say it independently of a “(factual) life” on the basis of which his discourse was fertilized. The adherence to the Christ of the Gospel is not the condition *sine qua non* of the reading of a Pascal or a Kierkegaard, for example, any more than of the contemplation of a Rouault or a Caravaggio. It remains, however, that these thinkers and artists themselves have never thought, written, or painted “*outside*” of such an adherence to the object of belief, marking at least *for them* their first (but not their only) aim. The “philosophy of religious experience” does not defer to the idols of “lived experience alone” or of “every experiential,” in the manner of many sentimentalist drifts today. It refers, uniquely but fully, to the “*coefficient of experience*” at the source of all discourse, sure that what is “for oneself” is also “for others,” in a singularity that we should recognize instead of rejecting.

3. Deciding in common

At the moment of decision, one will therefore not be *all alone* – be it a matter of philosophical, religious, or confessing experience, at least in that the “phenomenology of experience” is also an “experience of phenomenology,” and that it belongs to the one as to the other – to experience as to phenomenology – to be unable to give itself independently of a certain alterity. It remains that the “confessing believer,” saying, “I believe” by way of a *credo*, opens onto a dimension of existing that only the Christian is capable of sharing. There where “philosophical faith” or “perceptive faith” would serve as a common pedestal for an “originary belief” (*Urdoxa*) in others or in oneself, belief in God, by his Resurrection in the framework of Christianity, attests to an alterity living in oneself that modifies through and through the art and the manner of deciding: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in

³⁵ M. Heidegger, § 3, “Factual Life Experience as the Point of Departure,” in *Phenomenology of Religious Life*, trans. Matthias Frisch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 7 (emphasis added).

³⁶ M. Heidegger, “The Philosophical Foundations of Medieval Mysticism,” *ibid.*, 237.

me” (Gal. 2:20). *Qua* confessing believer, one is no longer “one” or “two” but “three” deciding, supposing that the Christian considers himself as included in the second person of the Trinity and that it is in him (in the Son) that he makes the choice to love communally.

One will therefore certainly have the choice, but certainly not any choice about having the choice. And it was, paradoxically, the task of the “philosophy of religious experience” more than of the “philosophy of religion” to have shown the necessity of this. Far from choosing between “this or that” according to the imperative of free will (Descartes) or assuming “what has been chosen” according to the rule of responsibility (Kant), the believer who decides will first understand that he is not choosing *something* but that he himself first *chooses himself choosing*. There’s no choice about having the choice, for refusing to choose is already choosing. Thus embarked, we are in a horizon of choice that we cannot refuse, the true choice first amounting to keeping oneself in that dimension of existing rather than deciding for or against a motive at the very heart of that horizon: “What takes precedence in my Either/Or is, then, the ethical,” Kierkegaard emphasizes. “Therefore, the point is still not that of *choosing something*; the point is not the reality of *what is chosen* but *the reality of choosing*.”³⁷ A choice of the choice that will thus become, for Martin Heidegger, the place of “*making up for not choosing*,” that is, the possibility for the authentic *Dasein* of “deciding for a potentiality-of-being, and making this decision from one’s own self.”³⁸

That the human subject decides, and even decides *himself alone* to decide: this is, however, the quasi-Nietzschean proposition of the *authentic Dasein* that the *believing* or *confessing* subject could not accept for himself. The debate on demythologization has, for its part, largely shown this. If the “kerygma is not first of all the interpretation of a text; it is the announcement of a person,” to say it with Rudolf Bultmann, taken up and commented on concerning this point by Paul Ricœur, it is not only because it is suitable to demythologize and return to the idea of a pure faith (regarding which, Ricœur’s critique fully bears on this point), but thereby because “the word of God is, not the Bible, but Jesus Christ.”³⁹ With the confession of faith, more than anywhere else, the “decision in view of transformation” entails the “transformation of the concept of decision.”⁴⁰ Believing *in* God indeed is not believing *that* he is but believing that he is *him* by whom it is given to me to believe. “Certainly no one would believe if he maintained that he ‘had’ faith, so that nothing was lacking to him, and that he ‘could’ believe,” Karl Barth indicates, as a just witticism.⁴¹ God believes *in me* more than (and in order that) I believe *in him*. Such is the paradoxical structure of the decision of faith, which entails that I become with him what I was not, more than I accomplish only what I have always been called to be. Not, or no longer, contenting itself with Pindar’s formula duly taken up by Nietzsche or Heidegger – “Become what you are” – theology reverses its enunciation to enter into a history that involves at least two: “Be what you are becoming” or “*I will be with you*” (Ex. 3:12). Such is the in-common of the decision that at least allows it to be decided that one does not decide *all alone*, and that on the human pedestal of philosophical faith or of belief in the world and in others is grafted also the Christian specificity of a belief in God that converts, modifies, and metamorphoses the vision of the structure of the world itself.

³⁷ S. Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard’s Writings: Either/Or*, Part II, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 4:176 (emphasis added).

³⁸ M. Heidegger, § 54, “The Problem of the Attestation of an Authentic Existentiell Possibility,” in *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 248.

³⁹ P. Ricœur (summarizing Bultmann’s position in these terms), “Preface to Bultmann,” in *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 382.

⁴⁰ Cl. Romano, *Event and Time*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 188. This is a formula pronounced concerning birth but which applies even more, in my eyes, to the act of faith.

⁴¹ K. Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, trans. Grover Foley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 104.

God is for us the “cause enabling all operating agents to operate” (Thomas Aquinas), as he is, according to our own formulation this time, “the cause of the decision of all that decides.”⁴² Far from deciding *without us*, God decides “*with us*” (“Emmanuel”). But as he decides with us, we do not cease to be “with him,” his decision preceding and covering the ensemble of our decided acts, such that no anonymity of the call, of the caller or of the called remains for the confessing believer, himself keeping himself clearly, and in a fully identified way, under the shadow of He who leads him to decide: “It *not only demands* that he should make a *decision* in conformity with it,” we must conclude anew with Barth, “but *as it does so*, and as man decides in conformity or contradiction to it, it *presses a decision about man*.”⁴³

III. In passing⁴⁴

After having “interpreted” (hermeneutical status) and defined the conditions of the act of “deciding” (existential philosophy), there comes the moment of “crossing” (relation of philosophy and theology). We will cross the river, and we will learn from the other camp what we never knew, or had perhaps forgotten. Rather than thinking, as usual, that we will all the better preserve the disciplines the more we separate them, we maintain, to the contrary, and as a leitmotif, that “*the more we theologize, the better we philosophize*.” This is true here of the relation between philosophy and theology as of the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas. There is no *secunda pars* on “human acts” (philosophy) without a *prima pars* on “the Trinity” and a *tertia pars* on “the Christ” (theology). The theological frames and makes possible the philosophical. It is by knowing *when* and *where* we theologize that we know *when* and *where* we philosophize. And it is not by wanting to “cross the Rubicon” or reach the two banks that one believes that one always bathes in the same river.

1. For a recovery

We do not *first* have any experience of God other than that of man. This is the point of departure of all reflection, in this sense firstly philosophical. The paradox is there. Perhaps it could happen that one would be more a philosopher by being more a theologian. We will find no other beginning, at least in a first movement, than that of man “by himself,” the experience of finitude as such, or of the overcast horizon of our own existence. The constant illusions of many philosophers and even theologians, in blissful amazement before the supposed smiles of the newborn, still and always cannot found a theology, or even a philosophy, that would not at the same time and immediately appeal to another virtuality – that of death as such. The tragedy of the human cannot confine itself to the end (the cross) without also inheriting the beginning (birth). There is no bringing into the world without the birth of a world, as I have also shown (*The Metamorphosis of Finitude*). But by “*mettant bas*”, that is, “whelping,” according to an expression that is certainly more animal than properly human, one remains no

⁴² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles: On the Truth of the Catholic Faith*, book 3, *Providence*, Part I, trans. Vernon J. Bourke (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956), 220 (Chap. 67:1).

⁴³ K. Barth, §38, “The Command as the Decision of God,” in *Church Dogmatics* II, ed. G. W. Bromley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. T. Thompson and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1957), 2:632 (emphasis added).

⁴⁴ [The French expression is *En passant*, which could also be rendered as “While crossing.” (The titular phrase “Crossing the Rubicon” is *Passer le Rubicon*.) – Trans.]

less “*en bas*,” that is, “below” – that is to say, taken and confined in a contingency that nothing permits or authorizes one to exceed. The disciples of Emmaus certainly recognized Christ when “he vanished from their sight” (Lk. 24:31), according to the extraordinariness of his divinity (phenomenology of the unlimited), but without failing at the same time to mention their “hearts burn[ing]” (Lk. 24:32) while they walked with him without recognizing him, and *first* meeting precisely his pure and simple humanity (phenomenology of the limit). The “limited phenomenon” here is not opposed to the “saturated phenomenon,” nor the ordinary carnal to the excess of the phenomenon. The second way completes and radicalizes the first. *Nihil potest recipere ultra mensuram suam* – “nothing can be received from beyond one’s own measure,” as we must acknowledge with Thomas Aquinas. Created in *its limit* on the pattern of his status as a creature, man will in reality do nothing to exceed it, at the risk, conversely, of leaving his rank of man that God has conferred on him. Created and wanted as a “limited being,” man will respect and love *his limit*, allowing God to live there without, nevertheless, ever exceeding it.⁴⁵

Three movements thus define the genesis, and the process, of the meeting and the transformation of philosophy by theology. (a) We will first find in Duns Scotus the point of departure for a philosophy anchored in *contingency*, at the origin also of the modern act of philosophizing. If the univocity of the being (*étant*) could not act as the last word on the relation between philosophy and theology, it does, however, mark the prelude to it, or at least the initial bank: “it cannot be shown by natural reason that something supernatural exists in the wayfarer, nor that it is required necessarily for his perfection; nor can even he who possesses it know that it is present in him.”⁴⁶ (b) It remains that such a beginning could not forbid a possible *overlaying* of the disciplines, in the Christological way of theology going out to meet philosophy this time. Sacred doctrine uses the philosophical sciences “as of the lesser and as handmaidens,” as we must acknowledge with Thomas Aquinas, not as “serfs” or “slaves,” but as “servants (*ancillas suas*) whom *wisdom has called from the highest point of the city* (Pr. 9:3).”⁴⁷ Such is the moment of the “tiling,” of the crossing of the river or of the meeting where Christ himself rejoins the disciples on the road to Emmaus. (c) There finally comes the moment of *conversion*, or of the *transformation* of philosophy by theology. “If this is said with a view to the creation,” emphasizes Hans Urs von Balthasar concerning Saint Bonaventure, “nevertheless it is true first of all in the inner life of God.”⁴⁸ Trinitarian monadology will here serve as the crucible for the metamorphosis of man in God, or of

⁴⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentaire du Livre des Sentences*, Bk. I, d.8, q.1, a.2, s.c. 2 [*Supra sententiarum* I. d.8 q.1 a.2 s.c.2; English translation from Emmanuel Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon*, trans. Reuben Shank (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 146.] (with the commentary of J.-P. Torell, *Saint Thomas maître spirituel* (Paris: Cerf, 1996), 335). As for the two complementary interpretations proposed here (in particular concerning the episode of the disciples on the road to Emmaus), I refer to J.-L. Marion, “Luke: Blessing,” in *Prolegomena to Charity*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 127-36; as well as to my work, § 6, “Christian Specificity and the Ordinariness of the Flesh,” in *The Metamorphosis of Finitude*, trans. George Hughes (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 19-20.

⁴⁶ J. Duns Scot, Scotus, “Prologue of the Ordinatio,” trans. Peter L. P. Simpson (unpublished manuscript, December 2012), 9, Adobe PDF file accessed 14 June 2016, <http://www.aristotelophile.com/Books/Translations/Scotus%20Prologue.pdf>. [The English translation does not include the final clause of the French (“nor can...”), so that portion of the quotation is my own translation. – Trans.]

⁴⁷ Thomas Aquinas, “Whether Sacred Doctrine is Nobler than Other Sciences?” *Summa theologica* Ia. q.1 a.5 ad.2 and sed contra (Christian Classics Ethereal Library), Adobe PDF file, 10–11. The final citation (“servants...”) follows the phrasing of Emmanuel Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon*, trans. Reuben Shank (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 104.

⁴⁸ H.-U. von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics; Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles*, ed. John Riches, trans. Andrew Louth, Francis McDonagh, and Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), 2:290.

philosophy in theology, explicitly agreeing this time to cross the Rubicon or to cross over to the other bank. The philosopher who is also a theologian will go so far as to think the Resurrection or the “metamorphosis of finitude” of man into God in order to let himself be converted into Him without denying anything of his own weight of humanity.

Finitude, recovery and transformation, Duns Scotus, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure. Such will be the structure of a “tiling” and of a “conversion” of philosophy by theology, not to merely end philosophy in theology but to recognize that the one (philosophy) could not simply remain “on the porch” of the other (theology). Satisfying itself neither with “philosophies of the threshold” (Blondel, Ricœur, etc.) nor with “philosophies of the leap” (French phenomenology in general), the philosopher who is *at the same time* a theologian will agree to go from the one to the other (from philosophy to theology), understanding their mutual fecundity and the possibility of going to it as also of coming back from it. Crossing the river is also touching the banks, and it is by our daring to accomplish this “great crossing” that the two banks that are most often ignored, or at the very least not reciprocally shared, will be joined.

2. To each his way

Thinking such a “tiling and conversion of philosophy by theology” will not prevent philosophy and theology from each having their way, and moreover, from respecting their order; quite the contrary. “The more we theologize, the better we philosophize,” as I have said. What distinguishes philosophy and theology will be maintained, in this sense and paradoxically, less in the nature of the objects than in the mode of arriving at them. Their distance will here be given as a difference in “manners” rather than in “matter.”

(a) First, from the point of view of the *point of departure*, it is clear that the two disciplines will not go in the same direction, or even in opposite directions: “problem of facticity – most radical phenomenology, which begins ‘from below,’” as Martin Heidegger reminds us.⁴⁹ There is no other beginning, therefore, than “the human per se” or “finitude as such” for philosophy. “Nothing human is alien to me,” as Terence reminds us. Such will be the philosopher’s avowal and opinion [*aveu et avis*], first anchored in our pure and simple humanity. (b) Next, from the point of view of the *mode of proceeding*, philosophy will follow a heuristic way whereas the theologian will take the didactic way. What is said “at the beginning” regarding philosophy will not necessarily be the same “at the end.” As in Descartes’s *Meditations*, the doubt posited at the beginning (first meditation) will be lifted at the end (second and sixth meditations). Or also, and to follow my own approach, the finitude discovered *ab initio* in the effigy of man (*The Guide to Gethsemane*) will be “transformed” or “metamorphosed” *in fine* into the figure of the God-man (*The Metamorphosis of Finitude*). There where theology, most often the heir of the German method of the *expositio* (Barth, Bultmann, Moltmann, Kasper, Rahner, Balthasar, etc.), prefers the didactic exposition following the order of teaching, philosophy, in particular in the wake of the Cartesian path, will take the heuristic way of the search, even if it means accepting and even seeking transformations at the end that were not posited at the start. (c) Finally, from the point of view of the *status of the object* to be analyzed, the philosopher will take as “possible” what the theologian will recognize as “actual.” The Incarnation, the Eucharist or the Resurrection, being revealed, will not be “believed” by the philosopher, except in the framework of theology itself. (d) As for *the object itself*, it is there, paradoxically, that philosophy and

⁴⁹ M. Heidegger, *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 146.

theology differ the least. The same object can indeed be aimed at diversely starting from different disciplines. Liturgy, prayer, and even the Eucharist or the Incarnation, do not belong exclusively to theology. Phenomenology in particular will be able to *describe* what theology exposes and believes. Just as the anthropological, the aesthetic or the literary could not be excluded from the philosophical field, no more could the religious be exempted from it. No reason, except a badly understood secularity, can paralyze the theological within the only discipline that bears its name, at the risk, conversely, of holding for null and void any contribution that did not come from it – in particular for what concerns the question of God.

In short, and one will have understood this, there where, formerly, one distinguished the disciplines by their “matter,” we will now mark their diversity by their “manners.” The approach, more than the object itself, is different. Not that there is no proper content of philosophy (man), as also of theology (God), but that Christianity maintains the extremes together, in Him who is the “point of junction” and likewise also the “knot” (the God-man). Each person certainly has his way, on the sole condition of recognizing this “difference between the ways” as so many possible, and different, aims directed on the same object. A sort of eidetic or imaginative *variation* here operates on the object, such that the apprehension of the thing counts at least as much, if not more, than the thing itself. The existence of God “in himself” (*in se*) will have no, or little, importance, if it is not also existence for me, or “for us” (*pro nobis*). The famous “proofs” or, better, the “ways” of Thomas Aquinas do not have as their goal to show that *God is* (the ontological argument) but rather to show *how to access* what he is (cosmological ways) – in which they remain today entirely current: “Therefore I say that this proposition, ‘God exists,’ *of itself is self-evident*, for the predicate is the same as the subject [...]. Because we do not know the essence of God, this proposition is not *self-evident to us*, but needs to be demonstrated by things that are *more known to us*, though less known in their nature,” namely, by the *works* of God.⁵⁰

3. On metaphysics

The “link” here made between philosophy and theology will, in this sense, make the aforementioned hypothesis of onto-theology misfire. Apart from the fact that such a model does not exist (unless in the corpus of Thomas of Erfurt, pseudo Duns Scotus, to whom Martin Heidegger devoted his qualifying thesis in 1915), it has in reality no other goal than to disqualify the theological discipline itself in order to prefer to it a discourse supposedly “pure” of all contamination by tradition. French phenomenology, including that of Catholic inspiration, paradoxically shares with Protestant theology that ideal of a “pure faith” or of a “pure discourse,” free of all overlaying between the orders. Everything happens as if the *theological*, as a discourse *of* God, had nothing to do with the *theo-logical* as a discourse *about* God, as if all natural theology should be de facto disqualified in the name of an absolute of directly given relation. The rupture between the orders – order of the “flesh,” order of the “spirit,” order of “charity” – certainly has enough to fascinate. Such an interpretation of the Pascalian division does not, however, do justice to the Christological possibility of unifying the orders, in Him who however does not denigrate anything that is contrary, and even foreign, to him. Moreover, nothing, even in Pascal, ensures that what is a “rupture” cannot also be interpreted here in terms of a “figure,” leading us to believe and to think that an order can announce another order rather than simply being opposed to it: “the infinite distance

⁵⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I.a., q.2, a.1, resp. 23 (emphasis added).

between bodies and minds is a figure of the infinitely more infinite distance between minds and charity,” as we must specify with the philosopher of Port-Royal.⁵¹

The “overtaking of metaphysics” is thus somewhat overtaken; that is the least one can say. Husserl himself had foreseen its blunder, before Heidegger accomplished its aim: “Finally, lest any misunderstanding arise, I would point out that [...] phenomenology indeed *excludes every naïve metaphysics* that operates with absurd things in themselves, but *does not exclude metaphysics as such*.”⁵² It remains that we will not today return, conversely, *toward metaphysics against phenomenology*, as phenomenology in its day wanted to liberate itself from metaphysics. Rebounds are also backlashes. A co-penetration and transformation of the fields will here be required, at least if we are not to remain with the simple “vis-à-vis” that can only rigidify, and also even sterilize. Ceasing to send the matters away equal, back-to-back – and, as it happens here, “metaphysics” and “phenomenology” – we will accept, if not that they co-penetrate each other, at least that they return to each other and both look at each other, recognizing thereby that they are not so foreign to each other as we have wanted to believe, and also have thought.

Metaphysics as a “crossing of the physical or of nature (*meta-phusis*)”, such is therefore the meaning of the term that it is now suitable to claim, rather than disqualifying it from all permanence. Such a “trek” as the *crossing of nature* does not belong only to man, even though it is first his proper task to perform. God also makes himself its heir, and even its *Passeur*, that is, its Guide, Ferryman, or Crosser, by whom our burden is taken on board to be transported “with him.” *Suffering [Pâtissant]* from the world (*phusis*) to *pass [passer]* it to the Father (*meta*), the Son accomplishes in himself this same “breach,” insisting not only on accompanying us on it but also on carrying us on it, while letting us be transformed this time. The crossing of the ford, precisely in “meta-physics,” is not a *leap into a beyond* but a *transformation of our here below*, and a *recognition of our own weight*.

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“Finally theology,” the die has therefore been cast – *alea jacta est*. It is right to recognize this. We can here heave a “sigh of relief.” The “great crossing” that goes from philosophy to theology, and vice versa, ensures their mutual fecundity, as well as the possibility of their counterblow. By redefining the conditions of “interpreting,” unto calling for a so-called “Catholic” hermeneutic of the “body and the voice” (1st part), by finding the sense of the act of “deciding” unto founding the “philosophy of religious experience” in the existentiality of a “common belief” (2nd part), and by claiming the act of “crossing” as an “overlying and a conversion” of the relation between philosophy and theology unto the definition of “metaphysics” as a “crossing of the world or of the *phusis*” (3rd part), it is the entire structure of the stony stare in which the disciplines have been locked that I wished to question here. It does not suffice to look at each other, nor even to appreciate each other, nor even to offer

⁵¹ B. Pascal, *Pensées*, op. cit., 92, B373/S339/L308.

⁵² E. Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 156.

one's own expertise, to truly fertilize each other. The mutuality of the encounter is the condition of any true transformation. Thus it is for that "being in common" of man and God that causes one to advance all the more "with uncovered face" as one is freer to not, or no longer, calculate: "Philosophy is the *servant of theology* – Mary is indeed the servant of the Lord [Lk 1:38]," as we must recognize with Charles Péguy. "But may the servant *not pick a fight* with the mistress and may the mistress *not reject* the servant, for a stranger would soon come who would bring them *quickly to agreement*."⁵³

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⁵³ Ch. Péguy, "Note conjointe sur M. Descartes," in *Œuvres en prose complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade, 1992), 1458 (emphasis added). [English translation from Emmanuel Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon*, trans. Reuben Shank (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), xi.]