

Corpus Mysticum and Religious Experience: Henry, Lacoste and Marion

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Abstract: While usually denoting the church and/or the sacrament of the Eucharist, the ‘mystical body of Christ’ has become a theological grammar for Catholic phenomenologists Michel Henry, Jean-Yves Lacoste and Jean-Luc Marion to think through the possibility of religious experience. This article traces out some of the richly detailed accounts of religious experience proffered by Henry, Lacoste and Marion, paying heed to how they narrate the non-worldly, invisible disclosure of that religious experiencing. The final section outlines a deeper integration of the three by highlighting the need for an encounter with Christ to be both non-worldly and worldly, between presence and absence, and thus an experience that is concrete, lived, but also mediated by the visible church.

Introduction: phenomenological bodies

The Pauline language of the ‘mystical body of Christ’ has become a theological grammar for understanding both the limits and possibilities of religious experience in recent continental philosophy of religion. Unlike Kant, who compares the *corpus mysticum* to a ‘moral world’ in which all citizens practice being rational agents who pursue moral principles of reason,¹ Jean-Yves Lacoste, Michel Henry and Jean-Luc Marion take the term beyond the rational and moral sphere of existence. They denounce the modern construct of the self as an autonomous, productive, disengaged and temporally finite/bound being.² Each in their own way advances a theological self, and, in such a context, explores and probes the self’s properly ‘mystical’ relation

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- 1 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Alan Wood (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 679, A808/B836.
- 2 For more on the autonomous and disengaged structure of the modern self, see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), especially ch. 17.

to the mystical body of Christ. They do so in concretely experiential, even visceral terms. As such, these three French Catholic phenomenologists thematize religious experience by taking recourse to the mystical body of Christ; yet, as we shall see, they do so in ways unique to their respective projects, thereby reflecting their contrastive appropriations of the term.

Henry develops a theory of religious experience which emphatically affirms the divine presence of Christ's incarnation 'within' my interior feeling and suffering/enjoying of myself, a sphere of pure experience he calls 'flesh'.³ On this ground, the mystical body of Christ appears as a moment of interiority absolutely heterogeneous to the exterior manifestation of the physical body on visible display. Lacoste adopts a style of mystical non-experience that brackets one's being-in-the-world, if only momentarily, as if it were an obstacle between myself and the mystical body. The body of Christ is the non-place located at the symbolic edge of the world whereby the frail and fatigued human body can find shelter from the hostility of the visible world. Meanwhile, Marion identifies the liturgical event of the Eucharist (distinct from the reduction of Christ to the *res* of bread and wine typically linked to transubstantiation) as the condition for the possibility of religious experience. It is the eucharistic site of the mystical body of Christ in all its incomprehensible excess that appears, not in the world, but in my participation in the spiritual body. All three propose non-worldly or invisible modalities of the mystical body which call for a deeper integration with the mystical body's visible disclosure in the world. After tracing out their respective positions in greater detail, I sketch a few suggestive remarks that point toward a deeper integration of these three thinkers whereby the human flesh is truly bodily in Christ's mystical body whose domain is at once in the world (visible) and not in the world (invisible).

As a prefatory remark, we note that the language of 'mystical body of Christ' draws on a long theological lineage going back to Pauline texts that refer to the church as the body of Christ. In his now classic book, *Corpus Mysticum* (1944), Henri de Lubac traces the historical evolution of the term 'mystical body of Christ' from many of the early Fathers to Augustine and onward to the High Medieval era. He finds that the mystical body referred not only to the physical, historical body of Christ but, pre-eminently, to the twin concepts of the Eucharist and the public, visible church itself. Eventually, de Lubac argues, by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the mystical body denoted simply the public, temporal sphere of the church (which leaves the Eucharist by itself as one of many sacraments of the ministry of the church).⁴ De Lubac wrote the book, in part, as a response to the 1943 papal encyclical

3 For more on the 'moods' of suffering and enjoyment in Henry, see Jeffrey Hanson, 'Michel Henry's Theory of Disclosive Moods', in Bruce Ellis Benson and Norman Wirzba, eds., *Words of Life: New Theological Turns in French Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), pp. 135–47.

4 Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, trans. Gemma Simmonds (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2006), especially chs. 4–5.

entitled *Mystici Corporis Christi*. One can observe in this papal document the categorical connection Pope Pius XII makes between the mystical body of Christ and the public, visible reign of the church. This connection strategically integrates the authentic display of the mystical body with the exterior institution of the church itself (and with the Pope's headship as symbolic of Christ's headship).

Consequently, in this encyclical Pope Pius XII seeks to challenge the double-error that he perceives to be operative in some modern Catholic theology – the movement toward the invisible, spiritual meaning on the one hand, and the movement away from the visible, public and thus political signification of the mystical body of Christ on the other. According to the Pope, to disengage the mystical body of Christ from the church's concrete social, historical, cultural and political dimensions amounts to the radical delimitation of the church's task 'to perpetuate on earth the saving work of Redemption'.⁵ To exorcise what he perceives to be Docetic elements⁶ present in modern theology, the Pope renders the mystical body of Christ in objective, practical terms which are thoroughly purged of 'mystical' elements.⁷ Thus the church's juridical laws, liturgical rights and ritual practices, as well as its hierarchical governance with a singular head at the top, form the visible manifestation of the mystical body of Christ and thus illuminate its true nature. According to the encyclical, papal authority thus not only shapes the life of the mystical body but is also the condition for the possibility of any mystical body whatsoever. It is necessary therefore that the Pope 'be visible to the eyes of all, since it is He who gives effective direction to the work which all do in common in a mutually helpful way towards the attainment of the proposed end'.⁸ Without duly attending to the juridical and papal components of the church's activity on earth, argues Pius XII, Christians may fall victim to an 'unhealthy quietism' that distorts the mystical body of Christ.⁹ De Lubac's book clearly adds historical context to this mid-twentieth-century papal discussion, and, perhaps, corrects an imbalance implicit in the papal encyclical's privileging of the visible, public dimension of the mystical body; as we shall presently see, Henry, Lacoste and Marion offer philosophical and theological context. They deploy the term in highly mystical, even existential terms that perhaps add properly mystical¹⁰ and spiritual texture to Pope Pius XII's privileging of the social and cultural components of the visible church.

5 Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, 29 June 1943. Papal Archive, The Holy See, § 65. Available at: www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_29061943_mystici-corporis-christi_en.html (accessed 31 October 2011)

6 Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, § 64.

7 Although the Pope does admit of an 'interior' spiritual working of the Holy Spirit whereby the Head influences the members of the body. See Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, § 55.

8 Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, § 69.

9 Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, § 87.

10 We note the word 'mystical' or 'mystic' has a historical contingency of its own. See, for example, Louis Bouyer, 'Mystique: Essai sur l'histoire d'un mot', *Supplément de la Vie spirituelle* 9 (1949), pp. 2–23.

The subjective body and the incarnation: Henry

Michel Henry's phenomenology of interior auto-affection advances the possibility of concrete, lived-experience of the divine – a living, personal manifestation of religious feeling whose tonality is a powerful self-suffering and self-enjoying that cannot escape the pull of divine paths. Here religious feeling finds full expression in the unique sphere of the religious, a sphere which finds its own style of givenness radically distinct from the horizon of the world, intentionality and consciousness. Its unique phenomenality renders objective evidence, temporal display and visible or physical embodiment superfluous and irrelevant. Perhaps better than any phenomenologist involved in the 'theological turn', Henry takes seriously the Christian doctrine of the incarnation. While there has been an emphasis in the contemporary scene on God's divine transcendence and difference (*tout autre*),¹¹ or the absence of God in the cross (*theologia crucis*),¹² Henry reasserts the immanence of God rendered possible by God's taking flesh in the incarnation. To put it another way, for Henry, the incarnation sets into operation the transcendental conditions for the possibility of concrete, subjective religious experience in a way that the cross cannot do.

Henry's monumental work *Incarnation: une philosophie de la chair* (2000) highlights the mystical implications of the incarnation. The structure of religious experience so premised in this book reflects a dynamic and embodied experience inextricably linked to the personal domain of interior feeling. While understanding phenomenology as a fertile philosophical tradition, Henry's work is also born of a refusal of its most basic presuppositions. The essence of appearance does not designate conscious apprehension of an object by the mind's eye, nor does it communicate the fundamental disclosure of the self in a visible, public world – as phenomenology usually declares. Rather, phenomenology's purpose is to uncover what Henry calls the invisible sphere of 'Life', or that carnal substance which gives to each human self its sense of concrete selfhood. As constitutive of the essence of authentic human experience, Life gives a name to that inescapable feeling one has of suffering to be oneself as a particular living-being. This essence is similar to that individuated sense of self we feel from a first-person perspective that Heidegger

11 One here thinks of Emmanuel Levinas, 'God and Philosophy', in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 55–8; also see Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), p. 149; Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), ch. 4 'Tout autre est tout autre'; Paul Ricoeur, 'Experience and Language in Religious Discourse', in *Phenomenology and the 'Theological Turn': The French Debate*, trans. Bernard Prusak (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), pp. 127–46.

12 One thinks here of John Caputo's recent work, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006).

called 'mine-ness' (*Jemeinigkeit*)¹³ and that Husserl labeled my 'primordial sphere of ownness' (*Eigenheitsphäre*).¹⁴ Yet Henry radicalizes these German semantic structures of disclosure. For Henry, lived-experience (*la vécu*), as it is generated by Life itself, reflects the unique feeling of myself in radical immediacy and immanence. As such, the essence of lived-experience is truly experiential, tonal and couched in terms of pathos. Cognitive and intentional acts cannot account for the immediacy and affective power of a lived-experience that emerges from within and without mediation. The essence of lived-experience is thus an invisible feeling. It is a feeling unrepresentable and incommunicable to anything outside of this self-experience of being 'me'. Language, consciousness and temporality fail to display the Life of my lived-experience because they throw 'me' outside of myself as a representation or image of me in the world. Life has a mode of givenness and a form of evidence all its own, for Henry insists that Life incarnates itself within itself and provides its own structure of manifestation in an entirely self-regulative mode.

It therefore goes without saying that Henry's work is supremely focused on 'ipseity' or pure feeling of myself whereby I individuate myself. To explain ipseity, Henry rejects all manner of empirical, psychological and biological reductionism characteristic of the late modern world.¹⁵ The religious feeling of life is not to be found in anything exterior to the self (brain synapses, motor movements, consciousness, organic molecules and so on), but rather in the immanent feeling of myself within my primitive interior presence to myself – Life appears in the deep structures of feeling as a form of self-feeling. It is no surprise that Henry applauds Husserl more than any other philosophical figure, for he follows Husserl's lead toward the depths of interior subjective states.¹⁶ Yet against Husserl's emphasis on 'consciousness of . . .' and the cognitive faculties, Henry's own work is consistent with a quasi-romantic tendency to privilege feeling, concrete life and the immediacy of religious affections. Consequently, the lived-experience of my own life displays a style of evidence all its own: the immediate, irreducible and ongoing feeling of being overwhelmed by myself as my feeling of myself crushes up against myself without recourse to anything outside myself. Henry calls this self-affection or *auto-affection*.

Henry also devotes considerable attention to Christian mystical experience as the primary mode of experiencing auto-affection. Because Henry equates Life (or the feeling of myself within the sphere of pure immediacy) with God, he describes two modes of embodiment and identifies one type with religious experience and divine

13 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), § 9.

14 Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), §§ 44–6.

15 Henry calls this kind of scientific reductionism 'Barbarism'. See Michel Henry, *La barbarie*, second edn (Paris: Quadrige/PUF, 2008), especially chs. 1–2.

16 See Michel Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, trans. Scott Davidson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), ch. 1; Michel Henry, *Incarnation: une philosophie de la chair* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), part I.

incarnation and the other with mundane, ordinary existence in the world. Splitting my ego between two bodies, he distinguishes between *flesh* and *body*, e.g. the ‘living, subjective body’ of interior lived-experience (i.e. flesh) and the ‘objective, physical body’ characteristic of the body on display in the world (i.e. body).¹⁷ Positioning religious experience within the framework of the subjective lived-body, or flesh, Henry describes human flesh as the concrete material or ‘stuff’ out of which the subject feels itself. In so doing, Henry emphatically directs us to what he calls the subterranean layer of self-affection prior to the reflective activity of consciousness or the exteriority of physical sensation. Auto-affection represents a kind of pre-reflective self-awareness which the ego cannot represent or thematize by way of consciousness, and which cannot be seen or felt by movements of the visible body. My flesh is that originary sense of Life that resides in my primal self-experience in which I feel myself given to myself: ‘This is what “to experience oneself” means: to experience what is, in its flesh, nothing other than that which experiences it. This identity between experiencing and what is experienced is the original essence of Ipseity’.¹⁸ But I am radically passive, feeling myself given to me by divine Life as it incarnates itself in Christ’s ipseity, his flesh: ‘This flesh that is its own has itself a Flesh that is not its own, the Flesh of the giving to self of absolute phenomenological Life in the Arch-Son – the Flesh of Christ. We said it was impossible to touch any flesh without first touching that Flesh [i.e. Christ].’¹⁹ But how does this individuated sense of lived-flesh connect with the doctrine of the incarnation and religious experience? And more importantly, what does this have to do with the ‘mystical body of Christ’?

In his book, *Incarnation: une philosophie de la chair*, Henry appeals to the tradition of the ‘mystical body of Christ’ to serve as the conceptual paradigm for how one might understand the structure of human ‘flesh’. My flesh is an incarnate experience of interiority in which I touch myself at every point of my being. It is radically cut off from the field of visible display of the world.²⁰ In other words, my flesh assumes a spiritual body, invisible and non-worldly. Drawing on Augustine, Henry suggests that my flesh is a relative moment of the dynamic living power of the ‘mystical body of Christ’. This mystical body indicates, therefore, not the social ecclesial body of the communion of saints nor the Eucharist,²¹ but the individual

17 Henry extracts this distinction from Husserl’s own division of the body into flesh (*Leib*) and body (*Körper*) in Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: Second Book*, trans. Richard Rojcesicz and Andre Schuwer (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1989). For an excellent explication of flesh and body in Husserl, see Didier Franck, *Chair et corps: sur le phénoménologie de Husserl* (Paris: Minuit, 1981).

18 Michel Henry, *I am the Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 54.

19 Henry, *I am the Truth*, p. 252.

20 Henry, *Incarnation*, especially pp. 350–6.

21 Henry does discuss, if briefly, the sacrament of the Eucharist as an important modality of Life’s revelation to the saints, however, he never indicates how the sacrament, as a form

subjective experience of 'I myself', anchored along with every other ipseity in a common third point: Christ's flesh itself as it is eternally generated within the Trinity.²² The mystical body of Christ assumes a form of givenness that appears in a sphere all its own, whereby the experience and what is experienced are one and the same, a pure self-revelation of interior auto-affection without interference from the luminous display of the world.

My flesh literally embodies the mystical body of Christ inwardly. Henry also calls this sphere of pure feeling the 'heart'.²³ The revelation of Life and of divine presence, Henry writes, 'can only appear in the secret of the heart',²⁴ that is, apart from the world. The sacred is precisely enfleshed within the inner depths of human feeling, which then opens onto the religious experience of one's passive embrace within God's own inner-trinitarian self-feeling. Any exterior manifestation of religious experiencing which appears in the sphere outside immediate feeling (i.e. the world, temporality, the objective body) is immediately suspect, if not simply false. But again, we ask, how does this deeply interior sense of religious feeling form a component of the mystical body of Christ?

Henry proffers that God's crushing up against Godself in the birth of Christ is a forceful movement that produces the living, vibrant and creative pathos of divine entelechy and plenitude. This birthing process is an eternal generation of Christ that gives rise to the flesh of God in Christ.²⁵ God is eternally self-aware by way of this non-reflexive, non-reflective auto-affection in which the interior reciprocity of Father and Son constitutes the essence of Life. Understood in this way, Christ's incarnation forms the well-spring of life, quite literally. Biology and modern science do not study life: 'In the field opened by Galilean science, there are material bodies,

of conscious apprehension that takes place in the visible disclosure of the world, can open onto or meaningfully participate in the invisible revelation of life in the depths of my own living self-experience of myself. The utility of the sacraments seems to be a basic aporia in Henry's thinking. For his brief application of the Eucharist, see Michel Henry, *Paroles du Christ* (Paris: Seuil, 2002), pp. 154–5.

- 22 Henry draws from Augustine's tractate 108 on the Gospel of John which links the mystical body of Christ to the possibility of inter-personal sanctification and union:

But since, through the fact that the Mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus, was made the Head of the Church and they are his members, therefore he says what follows: 'And for them do I sanctify myself.' For what is 'and for them do I sanctify myself' except 'I sanctify them in myself' since they themselves, too, are myself? For those about whom he says this, as I said, are his members, and the Head and the body is the one Christ, as the Apostle teaches and says about the seed of Abraham . . .

See Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John 55–111*, trans. John Rettig (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1994), tractate 108, 5, 1. For Henry's appropriation of this tractate see *Incarnation*, p. 337 and p. 359.

23 Henry, *Paroles du Christ*, p. 118.

24 Henry, *Paroles du Christ*, p. 146.

25 For an explication of what Henry means by the term 'generation' as a distinct act from 'creation', see Joseph Rivera, 'Interiority, Generation and the Phenomenology of Christianity in Michel Henry', *Continental Philosophy Review* 44 (2011), pp. 205–35.

microphysical particles, molecules, amino acid chains, neurons, and so on, but no Self. In the field opened by modern science, there is no person.²⁶ Only Christianity offers 'a radically new definition of reality as life'.²⁷ This radically new definition reconstitutes embodiment in mystical and spiritual terms in which 'my flesh' is a lived-experience inaccessible to scientific verification or cognitive perception. It is a theological flesh – it is my interior soul. In this way, Henry's radical first-person perspective of individual self-experience within the mystical body of Christ reflects a mystical style of religious experience whereby the human subjective lived-flesh participates quite literally in the eternal, acosmic flesh of Christ. The 'essence' of religious experience appears fully within the sphere of life itself apart from the field of visible display. Hence the subject's lived-experience of God designates a feeling of being birthed within the invisible and timeless inner-trinitarian life of God as God gives 'me' to myself. Religious experience irrupts within me as a primitive pathos of lightness of burden. It emerges as a feeling of pure union and solidarity with Christ himself. This primordial joy/suffering of finding my unity with divine flesh is expressive of the deeply secured (because it is felt as an original affective impression) truth that I am a Son of God (and not a mere transcendental ego).²⁸ I am taking my flesh within God by way of an interior, affective entry-way. By turning inward, by setting myself deeply within myself, I open my heart to the very living-Present, the timeless presence of God. I am not taken beyond myself, as if lifted by a vector of transcendence or a vertical ascension toward God.²⁹ Rather I experience the body of Christ within my own primordial flesh of interior self-affection.

This living-Present (which is acosmic and timeless) forms the basic ontological structure of the living presence of the mystical body of Christ in each one of us. In Henry's phenomenological project, it is the phenomenological interiority between absolute Life (i.e. God the Father) and the First-Living (i.e. Christ) that generates the very incarnate presence of Christ in each of us. If I strike another human being I am striking Christ himself, according to Henry.³⁰ Thus, before our ejection on the world and before any possible intentional activity or 'outside', each of us is bound by an original and profound unity in Christ:

This is the immediate phenomenological presupposition of the doctrine of the mystical body of Christ . . . The members are those who, sanctified and deified in him and by him, belong to Christ henceforth to the point of becoming part of the body itself, becoming precisely a member of it. In the measure in which the

26 Henry, *I am the Truth*, p. 262.

27 Henry, *I am the Truth*, p. 258.

28 Henry, *Incarnation*, §§ 9–10.

29 For a phenomenological argument in favour of the verticality of religious experience, see Anthony Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism: the Verticality of Religious Experience* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007).

30 Michel Henry, 'Phénoménologie de la chair: philosophie, théologie, exégèse – Réponses', in *Phénoménologie et christianisme chez Michel Henry* (Paris: Cerf, 2004), p. 174.

real Incarnation of the Word takes place, Christ edifies first each living transcendental Self in its originary Ipseity, which is that of absolute Life, so that he joins each self to himself.³¹

The mystical body of Christ, for Henry, is nothing less than the primordial being-in-common or primal community from which 'each transcendental self is with the other in the place where it is given to itself, a place in which I am with the other before any possible posterior determination – even before the male/female distinction'.³² Thus the incarnation of Christ and the mystical body as Henry conceives it is not an external or visible manifestation like we see in the Synoptic Gospels. Henry privileges instead the scenes of mystical union in the Gospel of John. As an eternal form of mystical union, the incarnate mystical body of Christ reveals itself or appears in radically invisible and non-worldly terms. This invisibility is what Henry labels a Johannine 'lived' community of inter-personal flesh.³³

To render Henry's notion of mystical flesh more concrete we reproduce a description of what many phenomenologists (usually following Merleau-Ponty and, ultimately, Husserl) describe as the lived-body, which is active and self-aware prior to consciousness or reflective representation. Below is one excellent description of the kind of pre-reflective, intimate sense of our own body most of us have on a daily basis:

While seated at a computer or operating machinery on our job, we are aware of the position of our legs and hands without looking at them. Making our way through a crowd or through the narrow turns of a cave, we sense the volume our body is occupying. This awareness is not the result of observation; it is produced by taking up positions and enacting movements. In the measure that we relax completely and let our arms and legs settle by gravity, our sense of their positions and contours fades out.³⁴

Henry appreciates the pre-reflective type of lived, embodied experience sketched in this excerpt.³⁵ Henry certainly accounts for the deeply personal sense of 'I am my body' and thus my own singularity as this me who is moving yet who is not always represented in conscious thought. Yet, Henry *radicalizes* this sense of 'I am my body.' He pursues the location of an even more primordial, more present body – a sublayer of non-physical flesh sharply sealed off from the exterior body on visible display in the world. In other words, Henry is pointing toward a more primitive

31 Henry, *Incarnation*, p. 357.

32 Henry, *Incarnation*, p. 356.

33 The incarnation ontologically bridges the abyss between subject and God, rehabilitating the first-person sense of selfhood in radically passive terms. For Henry, the human subject inescapably draws its energy and life-source immediately from the living-flesh of God. This contact occurs in the site of pure, passive interiority, where the sense of absolute dependence is lodged. See Henry, *Incarnation*, § 10.

34 The excerpt is taken from Alphonso Lingis' excellent book, *The First Person Singular* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), p. 92.

35 Especially see Henry's early work on the body: Michel Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, trans. Girard Etzkorn (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1975).

invisibility, prior even to my embodied self-presence manifest in the simple gait or the kinesthetic, pre-reflective act of dance. Henry discloses a timeless inner essence that is acosmic and in communion with all the saints in the common body, the mystical body of Christ. Yet my timeless essence is deeply within my particular singularity as this me.

Henry's doctrine of flesh therefore unveils an ongoing 'cosmic' religious experiencing of divine life, one that drives me, that pulses within me, that constitutes my deepest needs, hungers and joys – the very self-suffering of being alive that is not subject to the change, movement and flux of my kinesthetic body, and yet is paradoxically related to it. My flesh is the divine flesh of Christ that generates each and every life and thus determines the movements of my body as well as the community of bodies without also being subject to movement itself. The timeless and temporal interrelate by way of paradox. And thus it is all the more paradoxical that I should feel God without also rendering God a conscious object of my feeling.³⁶ Perhaps we do not even know, in Henry's estimation, that we are feeling God, but by virtue of the body of Christ I cannot help but be grafted into that invisible community of 'flesh' as if I were a branch connected to a cosmic tree.

The eschatological body and non-experience: Lacoste

Jean-Yves Lacoste similarly deploys the philosophical techniques of phenomenology to investigate the human experience of the sacred. For Lacoste, phenomenology aims to study how things appear to us, measuring the concrete, lived-experience of the 'things in themselves'. Consequently, to encounter an object of any kind is to experience it in its own way, as it gives itself. For Lacoste, manifestation within the horizon of the world is not uniform: a piece of art does not appear in the same way a hammer does or another human being does. But what of a religious phenomenon whose form of givenness transcends the world? Does it provide its own evidence and sphere of experiencing irreducible to any objective or intersubjective event?

Lacoste articulates how phenomena that occupy a mode of appearing which eclipse the field of Husserlian or Heideggerian (or even Levinasian) phenomenology (i.e., the correlational regard of Husserlian intentionality but especially the boundary of Heidegger's horizontal world) signal the limit of the horizon of the world and evoke the density and mystery of religious phenomena.³⁷ What transgresses this world thus obtains a uniquely transcendent, sacramental character and gives itself

36 Henry insists that the feeling of auto-affection is an ongoing, irrepressible *non-intentional* feeling. While feelings may generally have an intentional object, e.g., I love that particular person over there, Henry's notion of auto-affection is a pure feeling without recourse to the intentional, conscious activity of the mind/intentional regard.

37 For a richly detailed account of how God exceeds the various modes of phenomenality, especially those described by Husserl, see Jean-Yves Lacoste, 'Appearing and the Irreducible', trans. Christina Gschwandtner, in Benson and Wirzba, *Words of Life*, pp. 42–67.

as a promise of sacred presence amid a profane, homogeneous world – Heidegger’s being-in-the-world. To explore the phenomenological limits of religious experience, Lacoste therefore sketches an ecclesiological concept of non-experience in critical conversation with Heidegger, a project most evident in Lacoste’s early work, *Note sur le temps: Essai sur la raison de la mémoire et de l’espérance* (1990) and in his most well-known work, *Experience and the Absolute* (1994, ET 2004).³⁸ As a tribute to Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, Lacoste’s phenomenology of non-experience designates the temporal horizon of being-in-the-world as the fundamental horizon of all manifestation. Yet as a subversion of *Being and Time*, Lacoste confronts Heidegger’s impoverished and atheistic conception of the world by offering a theological-existential corrective, or what he calls the ‘theological reduction’ (what he later calls the ‘liturgical reduction’).³⁹ We shall discuss this theological reduction in greater detail below. For now it is important to note that Heidegger’s being-in-the-world represents, for Lacoste, the initial experience of human topography. But being-in-the-world does not thereby represent, for Lacoste, the last word on how one is to ‘exist’ in the world. What is at issue is not that the world designates the sphere of all human experience – for Lacoste it certainly shapes all experience. Rather, the central corrective he maintains is against Heidegger’s prohibition of a theological existence within the world that takes up a uniquely christological (vocational) way of being-in-the-world.⁴⁰

For Lacoste, the ‘mystical body of Christ’ thus forms the collective, public space distinct from, but not entirely cut off from, the world. The mystical body of Christ is where one anticipates, and only anticipates, the full presence of the parousia. Lacoste’s eschatological interpretation of religious experience does not allow for mystical parousaic presence but rather demands just the opposite: a mystical or apophatic absence which gives way to a parched spiritual consciousness, namely faith. The ecclesial mystical body designates the site of a purified faith, where one is nourished ‘between the times’ by liturgical praxis and eschatological hope. Influenced by Balthasar’s clearly stated preference for faith over experience,⁴¹ Lacoste suggests that faith’s joy of knowledge corresponds to the bare fact of faith,

38 Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Note sur le temps: Essai sur la raison de la mémoire et de l’espérance* (Paris: PUF, 1990); Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man*, trans. Mark Raftery-Skehan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004).

39 The ‘theological reduction’ was the antecedent to the ‘liturgical reduction’ found in *Experience and the Absolute*. For more on the theological reduction, see Lacoste, *Note sur le temps*, p. 122. For more on the liturgical/theological reduction as it relates to the work of Louis-Marie Chauvet and Jean-Luc Marion, see Kevin Hart’s excellent comparative exposition in ‘The Liturgical Reduction’, *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 15 (2008), pp. 43–66.

40 Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Existence et amour de Dieu’, in *La phénoménalité de Dieu: neuf études* (Paris: Cerf, 2008), pp. 119–20.

41 See Hans Urs von Balthasar, ‘Experience God?’, in *New Elucidations*, trans. Mary Thereslide Skerry (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), pp. 20–45.

a pure faith with no recourse to fulfilling content.⁴² Moreover, the mystical body of Christ is precisely 'mystical' in that it describes a form of asceticism in proposing that we identify with the monk who imitates the humility and poverty of the crucified body of Christ. To be sure, this mystical asceticism takes effect in part through the Eucharist,⁴³ but the sacraments are primarily triggers of the intentionality of faith by which one focuses on the sacred temporal ecstasies of memory and hope. The sacraments, for Lacoste, are not vehicles of real presence or mystical experience.⁴⁴ The mystical body of Christ is fully figured by the church, not by the Eucharist. And the church, for Lacoste (and this is important), is not a political or social body visible within the world nor the place of ethics and justice but, rather, a place of contemplative security. It reflects a site of mystical existence where one can exist before God and find rest from the luminosity of the public world. It is a place of vigil, anticipation and sacramental symbolism where one faithfully waits (sometimes frustratingly) for the full presence of God. For Lacoste, then, faithful obedience unverified by experiential content constitutes the locus of authentic religious affections, not sensible, ecstatic subjective feelings or even ethical-prophetic praxis worked out in the name of Christ.

Lacoste tells us that we may recall here John of the Cross' cautionary tale about the spiritual dangers of sensible ecstasies, religious feelings or spiritual visions. John of the Cross argues that those subjective or sensible moments are vulnerable to deception and self-conceit. It is better to embody a purged 'dark night of faith' in the liturgical context of the social body of the ecclesia than to undergo an emotional experience of the divine that may be of our own making.⁴⁵ Not only is divine presence suspect, but so is the self-present Cartesian or Kantian subject. By affirming the passive, contemplative spiritual life of the monk over the self-positing, self-confident modern subject, Lacoste articulates a radically de-centered subject rooted in the temporality of faith. He avoids anchoring the sense of self in essentialist terms which philosophers (like Henry above) call one's ipseity (Latin, *ipse*, for in itself or within itself). Rather, Lacoste defers the self's presence by the delayed action of what he calls 'adseity'⁴⁶ (a self directed towards something different than or beyond itself). The *adseity* of the self therefore highlights the believer's present temporal posture of 'becoming' (Heidegger) in anticipation toward the future parousia. Lacoste later names this sense of being toward that which is different from me co-affection or *Mit-Befindlichkeit*, inspired by Heidegger's insistence that *Dasein*

42 Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute*, § 72.

43 For a more explicit though brief treatment of the Eucharist, see Jean-Yves Lacoste, 'L'apparaître du révélé', in *Présence et Parousie* (Geneva: Ad Solem, 2006), p. 336.

44 Lacoste, *Note sur le temps*, p. 198. According to Lacoste, the temporal logic of the sacraments is pre-eschatological. And thus the sacraments conceal the eschatological reserve of the coming parousia, which fosters an anticipation of the consummation but does not enable us to experience the divine.

45 Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute*, §§ 54–5.

46 Lacoste, *Note sur le temps*, pp. 83, 133 and 180.

cannot help but find itself leaning toward others in a world already populated with others.⁴⁷

Moreover, Lacoste maintains, the affirmation of *adseity* or *Mit-Befindlichkeit* is not an affirmation of Levinasian ethical life but rather an affirmation of a sphere of givenness that is distinct from inter-subjective relations and desire for the 'other'. And yet Lacoste's notion of *Mit-Befindlichkeit* designates a type of human existence always already 'with' other subjects in bodily form. But this bodily form is a social body of peace in the church sheltered from the world. It is those who purposively come together to form the ecclesial body of Christ and who together wait for the experience of divine presence in the coming eschaton. Lacoste's adoption of this non-experiential style of spirituality gives way to a symbolic subversion of Heidegger's *topological* logic of being-in-the-world. In short, Lacoste's theological reduction subverts the *temporality* of being-in-the-world.

Lacoste observes that the one who prays in the mystical body of Christ is symbolically nowhere, which means that there are not two regions of being, or two worlds, but merely two experiences of the selfsame world.⁴⁸ Here the mystical body of Christ is mystical in that it reflects an emphatically non-worldly, contemplative (prayerful) experience of the world; in other words, when we pray we do not conform to the world's existential code, but to the church's. Lacoste writes that while we cannot leave the world nor forget the world, we can re-narrate the world according to an ecclesiological-mystical form. But this is so especially with respect to our experience and capacity for temporality. Similar to the New Testament precept to 'be in the world but not of the world' (for example, Jn 17), Lacoste designates liturgical moments such as prayer as those moments whereby the believer lives in the world but simultaneously is sheltered from its evils, idolatry and godlessness, and especially, its temporal finitude. To be in the mystical body of the church is therefore to live in the shadow of the temporality of the cross and resurrection, a form of life that Lacoste calls being-in-church (*l'être-en-Eglise*) or the 'existential sense of ecclesiality',⁴⁹ – an apophatic 'unsaying' or negation of the world, objective disclosure and intersubjective relations. Yet it is an unsaying that never takes leave of those modes of disclosure altogether. As such, the non-experience of the theological reduction can invoke visceral frustration, fatigue and the tiresome activity of the vigil.⁵⁰

As one becomes grafted into the mystical body of church through *belonging* to (and Lacoste stresses belonging) and participating in the liturgical life of the church, a necessary phenomenological step ensues.⁵¹ It is the theological reduction, or the

47 Jean-Yves Lacoste, 'Liturgy and Coaffection', in Kevin Hart and Barbara Wall, eds., *The Experience of God: A Postmodern Response* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), pp. 93–103.

48 Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute*, pp. 44, 54.

49 '*l'être-en-Eglise*' is Lacoste's phrase. See Lacoste, *Note sur le temps*, p. 190.

50 Jean-Yves Lacoste, 'Petite phénoménologie de la fatigue', in *Présence and Parousie* (Geneva: Ad Solem, 2006), pp. 309–22.

51 Lacoste, *Note sur le temps*, p. 211.

theological bracketing of the world. For Lacoste, though a philosophical, reflective act, the reduction is also a practical move that makes possible mystical non-experience in the first place. He insists, in other words, that the theological reduction is the transcendental condition for the possibility of existential ecclesiality.⁵² In accord with Husserl's ambitions to bracket the world and uncover the constituting power of pure consciousness (which eventually led to transcendental idealism),⁵³ Lacoste symbolically brackets the *topos* of the world so as to unveil the pure sacredness of the temporality of the church. And this mystical non-experience opened up by the theological reduction cannot occur in one's living room, on a nature walk or in a prison cell but only in the church. The bracketing of the world is hard work (even violent) and it takes effect through the eschatological reorganization of one's temporal plane which the church is uniquely equipped to accomplish. This is why Lacoste writes that the church is 'the primordial place of the theological reduction' and the present moment of non-experience; it is the site in which the 'play between memory and absolute hope' happens.⁵⁴ The totality of one's experience in the church constitutes, for Lacoste, the hermeneutic place of the Christian life. It is an (im)pure place insulated from the world – where no relation with the world can take hold (except an ontic or physical relation).⁵⁵ The reason is that 'the church is where God reigns'⁵⁶ and where one waits in faithful obedience sustained by a joy without experiential verification.

Of the eucharistic site of religious experience: Marion

Jean-Luc Marion achieved what many consider to be a creative, if radical, phenomenological-theological breakthrough with the systematic delineation of 'saturated phenomena'.⁵⁷ These are uniquely pure phenomena qualified by their own experiential dynamic, one internal to their self-deployment, or better, their self-giveness (*Selbstgegebenheit*). The more one reduces the saturated phenomenon to

52 It is important to bear in mind, however, that Lacoste affirms Heidegger's insight that the world constitutes a fundamental structure of the self. He is more Heideggerian than Husserlian and thus not a transcendental idealist. This means that Lacoste's bracketing is symbolic rather than a move toward idealism.

53 See Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book*, trans. Fred Kersten (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1983), especially Part 2, chs. 3 and 4.

54 Lacoste, *Note sur le temps*, p. 190.

55 Lacoste, *Note sur le temps*, p. 210.

56 Lacoste, *Note sur le temps*, pp. 120, 192.

57 Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 199–220. For an excellent review of Marion's notion of saturated phenomena from a contemporary theological perspective, see Brian Robinette, 'A Gift to Theology? Jean-Luc Marion's "Saturated Phenomenon" in Christological Perspective', *Heythrop Journal* 48 (2007), pp. 86–108.

the conditions for the possibility of its appearing, the more one uncovers the depths of self-giveness: 'so much reduction, so much givenness'.⁵⁸ Phenomenology reaches its limit, insists Marion, in the theological possibility of divine revelation:

If the Revelation of God as showing himself starting from himself alone can in fact ever take place, phenomenology must redefine its own limits and learn to pass beyond them following clear-cut and rigorous procedures. That is to say, it must design one of its possible figures as a paradox of paradoxes . . . in order to admit the mere possibility of a phenomenon of revelation.⁵⁹

Structured as gift, all phenomena give themselves to appearance, but it is only in revelation's saturating impact that one encounters the very limits of phenomenology itself. What then are the basic contours of saturated phenomena and what kind of 'experience' do they evoke in the one who bears their weight?⁶⁰

Saturated phenomena arise with an uncontestable power. Their impact happens with such visceral force that they flood the ego to excess, reversing and contradicting the intentional gaze. The human 'I' is transformed into a receptive 'me'. I receive myself from what gives itself (nominative elides to dative). As a screen or prism through which saturated phenomena burst forth, the 'me' becomes integral to their appearing. The self as 'gifted' is the medium of expression through which saturation is realized. As a passive agent, I do not provoke saturated phenomena. Rather they come upon me without causality, without 'why'. Their donation is self-enacted, and thus they are truly given according to the logic of gift and not exchange or transaction logic. A saturated phenomenon shows 'itself in itself and by itself because it gives itself'⁶¹ and for no other reason.⁶²

Saturation can occur by way of each sense and is thus accomplished even by way of mundane, objective phenomena. Take the phenomenon of sound. Marion observes that hearing can range from the simple sound, to the sound as a signal, to the sound as voice and even as song. What differences arise? How does one sound, say

58 Marion, *Being Given*, p. 14.

59 Marion, *Being Given*, p. 242.

60 The excessive donation of divine love in Christ occupies a central topic of study in many of Marion's works, both early and late. Even though the concept of 'saturation' was developed by way of a systematic interrogation in *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* (French original 1997), Marion's early work on divine love in *God without Being*, trans. Thomas Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991, French original 1982) attests to the saturating impact of the presence of Christ in the mystical body. This early book therefore represents his most sustained theological engagement with saturation as a eucharistic/sacramental phenomenon.

61 Marion, *Being Given*, p. 32.

62 For more on the mechanics of the non-causal deployment of the gift, see Jean-Luc Marion, 'The Reason of the Gift', trans. Shane Mackinlay and Nicholas de Warren, *Bijdragen* 65 (2004), pp. 53–7.

an announcement in an airport which I reduce to its basic signification, differ from another, say one of Mozart's sonatas which I cannot reduce?⁶³

First of all, in the former case, I listen to the announcement to learn information, that is, for comprehension alone – of gate numbers, boarding times, flight delays and the like. In the latter, in Mozart's sonata, I cannot comprehend it or fit its acoustic impact on my ears within an adequate conceptual frame, meaning-scheme or signification. Mozart's musical score is such 'not that it pleases without concept – but rather because it calls for all, and calls from them because it saturates them all. Then, we listen to a saturated phenomenon.'⁶⁴ While saturated phenomena can occur at every level of sensation by radicalizing mundane objects (hearing, seeing, touching, and so on), saturation also welcomes that which is beyond the mundane/empirical world altogether. In fact, for Marion, the saturated phenomenon par excellence is divine revelation. Christ's appearing saturates every possible modality of human experience.⁶⁵ The appearing of Christ, in turn, takes human experience to its very limit, to the level of 'paradox of paradoxes'.⁶⁶ While the concept of experience is equivocal insofar as it cannot be inscribed within the field of objects alone,

the conditions of experience (of objects) themselves thus become all the more visible and clear as they are more evidently contradicted. For their contradiction does not annul phenomenality as such; it simply testifies that this phenomenality runs up against the finitude of the gifted (of the "subject") who undergoes it without possessing the power to objectify it.⁶⁷

The 'experience' of saturated phenomena is therefore what Marion calls a 'counter-experience', or an experience which liberates the possibility of experiencing anything that gives itself, especially that which contradicts objects or worldly phenomena. The gifted (i.e. the self) can thus experience anything that gives itself, even those phenomena that contradict the conditions for objective experience. And what is divine revelation but the ultimate contradiction of objective experience in which God gives Godself?

For Marion, Christ achieves the rank of phenomenon precisely by contradicting the conditions for the possibility of objective phenomena. Christ reveals himself without restraint, without conditions and without objectification. Christ's flesh gives itself by way of radical auto-revelation. Originating entirely within himself, Christ is deployed toward 'me', giving me to myself. Christ's flesh

63 For more on how music can saturate the self, see Sander Van Mass, 'On Preferring Mozart', *Bijdragen* 65 (2004), pp. 97–110.

64 Jean-Luc Marion, 'The Banality of Saturation', trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky in Kevin Hart, ed., *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2007), p. 394.

65 Marion, *Being Given*, pp. 241–7.

66 Marion, *Being Given*, p. 242.

67 Marion, 'The Banality of Saturation', p. 400.

appears as an irregardable phenomenon precisely because as icon he regards me in such a way that He constitutes me as His witness rather than some transcendental I constituting Him to its own liking . . . Thus the saturated phenomenon comes from the counter-gaze of the Other (Christ) such that it constitutes me as its witness.⁶⁸

As witness, I receive my flesh as this 'me' from the saturating impact of Christ's mystical flesh. Christ's love, however, deploys itself pre-eminently in Christ's flesh. And Christ's flesh is accomplished in the *eucharistic* site of theology.⁶⁹

Marion suggests that the mystical body of Christ in its eucharistic form takes on, as it did for Henry and Lacoste above, a radically non-worldly form of manifestation. But unlike Henry and Lacoste, the mystical body of Christ is an intense ecstatic religious experience. My spiritual élan indicative of a '*mysterium tremendum*' is drawn out as I am taken outside myself, vertically. I receive that which is given to me in a moment of pure excess. Stunned, shocked and amazed, Christ's flesh saturates my intentional gaze to its maximal degree. I do not constitute God but, in a moment of saturation, I am constituted by God within the mystical body itself. Yet, without necessarily appearing in the visible sphere of the world, the appearance of the mystical body of Christ touches off a sacramental encounter with the exorbitant love of God. Take the road to Emmaus narrative in Luke 24, for example. Marion here notes that while faith is a fundamental component of receiving the Eucharist, it is there on the road to Emmaus that the disciples were stunned by the invisible excess of Christ's body in the breaking of bread prior to the hermeneutics of faith. Marion writes

faith does not manage the deficit of evidence – it alone renders the gaze apt to see the excess of the pre-eminent saturated phenomenon, Revelation. Thus we must not oppose the episode of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus to that of Christ's manifestation to the Apostles, which immediately follows it.⁷⁰

So while in Marion's estimation the public 'social body' of the church is a visible signifier of the mystical body, the real mystical body is sacramental, in the breaking of bread and consuming of wine.

The sacramental encounter, for Marion, is an experience or an undergoing of Christ's presence by way of an invisible donation of love beneath the visible appearance of the consecrated bread and wine. Taking the sacrament is akin to listening to Mozart. According to Marion, we know Mozart's musical score not by having it explained to us but by experiencing it. We experience the sacraments, in like

68 Marion, *Being Given*, p. 240.

69 For an excellent review of Marion's eucharistic phenomenology set against the backdrop of Derrida's theory of signs, see Michael Purcell, 'Sacramental Signification and Ecclesial Exteriority: Derrida and Marion on Sign', in Cristian Ciocan, ed., *Philosophical Concepts and Religious Metaphors: New Perspectives on Phenomenology and Theology* (Bucharest: Zeta Books, 2009), pp. 115–34.

70 Jean-Luc Marion, '“They Recognized Him and He Became Invisible to Them”', *Modern Theology* 18 (2002), p. 150.

manner, not by objective categories and discursive knowledge but by the spiritual impact of God's saturating presence in the Eucharist.⁷¹ The mystical body of Christ is exemplarily represented by the Eucharist. Yet this presencing of Christ's body in the Eucharist, while given to me in excessive form, and thus lived, is not an immediate presence without distance or distinction.

This experiencing of Christ's mystical body presupposes a distinction, or more precisely, a distance between Christ's self-presence and my encounter with Christ as gift. For Marion, the signifier and signified of the Word is held together in Christ's absolute integration of signifier and signified. Christ is both signifier and signified at once, as the ultimate Word, purely self-present and without mediation or distance between signifier and signified.⁷² Yet, the finitude of the mystical body of Christ, constituted as a sacrament, is at a distance from the Word. This is the distance required for the Word to give himself in excess, without conforming to an a priori scheme outlined in advance by human logic/language/reason. The distance between the gifted and Christ's flesh in the Eucharist harbors the condition for the possibility of religious experience.

In 'Of the Eucharist Site of Theology',⁷³ Marion suggests that religious experience is an event made possible, most of all, by the distance or gap between the creature who receives the Eucharist and the spiritual body of Christ mystically present in the sacrament. It is this distance between the two that opens up the possibility of experiencing God as saturation. Unlike Henry's conceptualization of auto-affectation, Marion's variant of the mystical body of Christ requires distance to traverse in the first place. Religious experience for Marion happens in the sphere of exteriority/hetero-affectation. Christ is transcendent not immanent. God in Christ transgresses human language as well as the horizon of finitude in which human experience is anchored. To explain the phenomenon of religious experience in its eucharistic form is to resist the desire to render God so close that I domesticate God. God is transcendent, which means God is different, distinct and at a distance from me. Marion's condition for the possibility of Christ's excessive arrival understood here is that there is no condition outlined in advance. I cannot, therefore, predict God's appearing or render God an object adequately present to consciousness as though God were an object purposed to fulfill my intentional aim. Rather, the distance intrinsic in the self-God relation requires humility, patience and resistance to the human desire to domesticate God in the horizon of concepts: 'To do theology

71 Marion, *God without Being*, p. 155.

72 Marion, *God without Being*, p. 140.

73 Marion, *God without Being*, pp. 139–58. Marion's most recent publication on the sacrament of the Eucharist, while more explicitly engaging Husserl and Thomas Aquinas, does not add anything new phenomenologically or theologically to that which he already proposed in either *Being Given* or *God without Being*. His discussion of the Eucharist in *God without Being* is his most comprehensive to date. For the most recent essay, see Jean-Luc Marion, 'The Phenomenality of the Sacrament – Being and Givenness', in Benson and Wirba, *Words of Life*, pp. 89–101.

is not to speak the language of gods or of “God” but to let the Word speak us or make us speak in the way that it speaks of and to God.⁷⁴

Yet, for Marion, this radical ontological distinction between the gifted as one who speaks the name of Christ and Christ’s self-present Word is bridged in the sacrament of the mystical body itself. The spiritual union of believers and Christ in the mystical body sets into operation the possibility of excess, of an encounter with the saturating impact of divine love that comes from elsewhere, from ‘on high’, beyond being and beyond finitude, as it irrupts into the field of display as a counter-experience. This mystical body of Christ is eucharistic, and as such, eucharistic theology opens up access to the referent, the Word, and ‘this referent consists in the past death and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ’.⁷⁵ Decisively sacramental, the mystical body of Christ is a repetition of the Word’s event par excellence, the Paschal. Marion’s meditation on the road to Emmaus, to return to this exemplar, invokes this very site of religious (counter)experience, the excess of Christ’s self-donation:

The Eucharist accomplishes, as its central moment, the hermeneutic. It alone allows the text to pass to its reference, recognized as the nontextual Word of the words . . . If the Word intervenes in person only at the Eucharistic moment, *the hermeneutic (hence fundamental theology) will take place, will have its place, only in the Eucharist*. The first principle (the theologian must pass through the text as far as the Word, by interpreting it from the point of view of the Word) here finds its support and the norm that spares it delirium: the theologian secures the place of his hermeneutic – the one that passes through the text toward the Word-reference on the basis of the Word-interpreter – only in the Eucharist, where the Word in person, silently, speaks and blesses, speaks to the extent that he blesses.⁷⁶

To put it another way, it is the body of Christ that arrives ‘in person’ in the Eucharist in order to bind the community of saints together. Being affected by that which is other, and ultimately by the divine Other, is a mystical intersubjectivity that founds Marion’s mystical community. But it is a communal body in that the sacrament is spiritual and thus invisible.⁷⁷ As such, Marion disassociates it from two well-known interpretations of the Eucharist. It is not (1) the presence of Christ enclosed within the bread and the wine (transubstantiation). Nor (2) is the mystical body of Christ

74 Marion, *God without Being*, p. 143.

75 Marion, *God without Being*, p. 146.

76 Marion, *God without Being*, pp. 150–1, emphasis original.

77 Marion, *God without Being*, p. 180, writes:

For our naturally blind gaze, the bread and wine are real, the consecrated bread and wine are real as bread and wine, sacramental (mystical in the ordinary sense) as Body and Blood of Christ, whereas the ecclesiastical body remains purely sacramental. But only the inverse has a correct theological meaning. The real is exclusively ‘that which the eye has not seen, that which the ear has not heard, that which has not risen to the heart of man . . .’

present in the Eucharist by way of a 'collective consciousness' in which the saints together render present Christ in their communal awareness of the Paschal.⁷⁸ Rather, the mystical body of Christ highlights a spiritual body, invisible because it is spiritual. It is also, because it is a spiritual body, a community that participates in the singular body of Christ through the Spirit in 'Eucharistic contemplation'.⁷⁹ The mystical body of Christ is a spiritual body but not one reified by a collective consciousness or by the bread and wine. Rather, the mystical body appears as a counter-experience, a saturated phenomenon whereby the saints together encounter God in excess, beyond consciousness, beyond objectification and beyond the presence of being itself. Christ's appearing accords with the plenitude of a hyperbole, the hyper-ousia of mystical presence 'where the excess of intuition over signification censures the constitution of an object and, more radically, the visibility of a unified and defined spectacle'.⁸⁰ As icon, the mystical body of Christ is not constituted by me as if it were my idol, but in its arrival it imposes itself on me, constituting me as witness to its excess.

Conclusion: between invisible and visible

We are now in a position to draw out some of the crucial points of continuity and discontinuity among the three accounts above. What each of the sketches above have in common is the insistence that religious experience is without 'world'. It is at this juncture we recall Pope Pius XII's designation of the mystical body of Christ as the visible, social structure in the world – a claim at odds with how Henry, Lacoste and Marion envisage the richly experiential though non-worldly, invisible disclosure of the mystical body. Henry is the most radical in this respect, so we begin with him.

Henry's notion of a 'pure flesh' as a sphere of self-experience absolutely cut off from the exterior body in the world trades on a strict dualism between interior and exterior.⁸¹ Here the world is an 'optical illusion' because the world cannot render visible Life's invisibility.⁸² The appearing of the world is not simply at odds with Life's pure impressional invisible appearance. The world is, in other words, not neutral. Henry's conceptuality of the world maintains that the world reflects a corrosive field of display because it separates 'me' from my living presence with

78 Marion, *God without Being*, pp. 166–72.

79 Marion, *God without Being*, p. 182.

80 Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Barraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), p. 119.

81 See, for example, those who suggest Henry tends toward a Gnostic dualism: Jad Hatem, *Le sauveur et les viscères de l'être: sur le gnosticisme et Michel Henry* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004); Paul Clavier, 'Un tournant gnostique de la phénoménologie française? À propos des *Paroles du Christ* de Michel Henry', *Revue thomiste* 105 (2005), pp. 307–15.

82 Henry, *I am the Truth*, p. 124, writes: 'The man of the world is merely an optical illusion. "Man" [in the world] does not exist.'

Life. The world throws me outside myself so that I am nothing more than a system of neurons, a physical body-object causing me to forget that I am, in reality, this singular me as a 'Son of God' who experiences and feels myself in divine Life interiorly without intrusion of the world.

Lacoste designates the world as the horizon of all appearing, yet it is its secular order that one must resist by putting into play, if violently, the theological reduction by participating in the ascetic life which includes, in part, participation in the church. For Lacoste, the world is that sphere of existence that one cannot escape but must symbolically bracket nonetheless. There are not two separate spheres of appearing (the invisible and visible as in Henry), but rather one sphere, the world and nothing more. Yet it is how one chooses to dwell in this world that Lacoste interrogates with great acuity. Preferring the ascetic who dwells *coram Deo* at the margins of the world, Lacoste's theological reduction brackets being-in-the-world (including the social, political and cultural appearance of the church) in order to open up the divine temporal destiny of the saints that transcends the limits of the world's horizon.

Marion's project is also critical of the visible disclosure of the world. The invisibility of the sacrament's spiritual power leads the Christian to enjoy God's excessive love among the body of saints. The world, on the other hand, is where only visible phenomena appear. The world opens up the dimension where only objects and constituting ego's exist, where the mundane, profane sphere of adequate and poor-in-intuition phenomena appear – and where a mere social church exists without spiritual content. In contrast, Marion's proffering of the mystical body of Christ therefore highlights a dynamic invisible body informed not by the visible bread and wine or by the collective consciousness of bodies gathered in a church tied to the visible display of the world. Rather, it is a body constituted by the plenitude of love, the exorbitant gift of that which gives itself as a counter-experience that cannot be seen or made visible. The saturated phenomenon is invisible and without world precisely because it is distinct from the objective horizon of things in the world or the intentional gaze of consciousness.

Henry, Lacoste and Marion invalidate, to a lesser or greater degree, the horizon of the world on the part of the Christian believer who desires to encounter the divine. Yet, in respect of 'how' one encounters God, each of the three accounts diverge from one another – the tensions between them are sharply drawn. With respect to experiencing God, Henry affirms the pure, immediate encounter with the divine within the interior life. As such, Henry focuses on the immanence of God in the *incarnation*, the 'Word made flesh'. Lacoste critiques theories of religious experience altogether, suggesting that faith without experience is all that one can hope for while in this world; hence he tethers his project to the church as a symbol of the absence of God on the *cross*. Marion emphasizes the possibility of God's self-revelation in the Eucharist, which opens up the possibility of encountering a transcendent God beyond being to the point of stupor, saturation; yet this encounter always supposes a strict distance between God and creature. Marion thus focuses on the spiritual presence of God mediated in the *sacrament*. We have thus three points of discontinuity: incarnation, cross and sacrament.

A deeper integration of the three positions accounts for not only the incarnation, cross and liturgical dimension of the sacraments but also the kenotic aspect of Christ's taking on human flesh *in* the world.⁸³ To be sure, one may applaud the work of Henry, Lacoste and Marion for rehabilitating the mystical body of Christ as it relates to the doctrines of the incarnation, cross and sacrament. Yet, in our view, the incarnation, cross and sacrament are all modalities of Christ's appearing that take place, in part, *within the visible sphere of the world*. While not necessarily coterminous with the visible reign of the church and its social, political and cultural expressions described by Pope Pius XII in *Mystici Corporis Christi*, the mystical body of Christ is nevertheless a phenomenon displayed in the world in continuity with other phenomena in the world. And it is just this affirmation of the visible world (without losing the possibility of the invisible) that must be emphasized as a critical line of inquiry against Henry, Lacoste and Marion. A more balanced 'between' of God's self-revelation in the incarnation, cross and Eucharist is to be sought so that the visible and invisible are held in tension as in Christ's hypostatic union (the integration of transcendence and immanence).

To reorient religious experience entirely away from the world, as Henry, Lacoste and Marion tend to do, is to minimize rather than celebrate the ineluctable tie that Christ has to the world itself. We dwell before God as selves who take as their primary background and social imaginary the horizon of the world, and it is there, in the world, where the 'Word became flesh'. As James G. Hart writes, the human self finds its most human expression

in the world, i.e., lives a life that does justice to the inherent dignity and beauty as well as the true necessities of the world, foremost that dignity and unique moral necessity that accompanies the presence of Others. But one is not *of the world* with its rule of death, hatred, and violence (John 17:11, 14–16).⁸⁴

The self who professes faith is thus a porous self. The porosity of the self enables the Christian to dwell bodily between the invisible pure presence of God and the visible stage of the world, or between immediate experience of God (Henry) and the hermeneutical site of experience mediated by the church and sacraments (Lacoste and Marion). The porosity of the self takes on the double character of the mystical body of Christ, which is signified by both the church visible in the world and the

83 I do not maintain kenosis in the Hegelian sense that is most fully articulated by the 'death of God' movement whereby God self-alienates Godself into the world, emptying Godself of transcendent presence through the kenotic descent or self-externalization into immanence/historical contingency. I maintain, however, that God's free choice to create and to become flesh preserves God's transcendence and non-worldly, self-presence within the Trinity. See G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 457, 465, 478 and 492; also see Thomas J.J. Altizer and William Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (Indianapolis: Bobs-Merrill, 1966).

84 James G. Hart, *Who One Is, Book 2: Existenz and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), p. 544.

sacramental and invisible body of Christ that is experienced subjectively and objectively. The porosity of the self operates on the order of a 'between', a modality of appearing both visible and invisible. Porosity enables Christian theology to articulate more clearly the reality of religious experience whereby, as a finite creature with a finite body, I can seek after, without coming into immediate contact with, the infinite body of Christ. I am a body in the world porous to that Christic body that transcends the world. My body dwells in that space 'between' presence and absence, or between the invisible and visible.