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Philosophy and Theology.
Again.
Two Attempts at a Response.

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Thank you to Nicolae, Jared, and Jack for the careful and generous readings of my book. I do not think there are any misunderstandings or inaccuracies and I have no quibbles with the thorough and fair presentations of many of the aspects of my description or argument, which I will not repeat here, given that they are nicely laid out in the reviews themselves. All three reviews highlight somewhat different, but largely overlapping elements of the text. I appreciated Nicolae's comprehensive overview of the book by going through each chapter, Jack's close attention to the organizing principles and philosophical presuppositions, and Jared's careful and generous reading of the first two chapters. The critique, which comes dispersed throughout in Nicolae's treatment and grouped together after the respective explications in Jared's and Jack's response, is very similar in all three. Considering this significant agreement in questions and critiques, I will respond to them together.¹

All three of the reviews to a larger or lesser extent focus on the intersection of phenomenology and theology, either in this book or even more broadly. This is put in slightly different ways—Nicolae argues for a theo-phenomenology, Jared asks for a stronger consideration of historical faith, Jack pleads for a theological context that always already determines the phenomenon—but they essentially come down to this question about the potential or actual interaction between philosophy and theology.

¹ All in-text pagination will refer to the reviews also contained in this issue of *Crossing*.

Of course, this is the fundamental question that is raised at every conference in this little subfield—at least I have yet to attend one at which it is not asked by one or several attendees—and in pretty much every discussion of any of the works that have generated it, whether those of Marion, of Henry, of Lacoste, of Chrétien, and of many others.² I will try to get at this question in two ways, first in a broader methodological manner—on which I will spend far more time, as it responds more directly to the questions or critiques raised—and then (much more briefly) in a way that tries to respond to it through the lens of what I take to be the most crucial claim in my book that no reviewer—either here or elsewhere—seems to have picked up on so far (and which thus must not have been stated very clearly).

A. A Matter of Audience

Nicolae reminds us (130) of what I stated as my three audiences in the beginning of the book: philosophers (especially those engaged in phenomenology of religion), liturgical theologians, and people who are practicing Orthodox or scholars of Orthodoxy. The book tries to give something different to each of them: a rigorous phenomenology to the phenomenologists, a way of drawing insights from such phenomenology to the theologians, and a language for articulating experience to the Orthodox. Maybe these are too many audiences and maybe not all of this can be accomplished in one book. I want too much. But let me say a word about each.

1. First, the theologians and Nicolae's desire for a theo-phenomenology. Yes, absolutely, phenomenology can be used for theological purposes (129). In fact, I think liturgical theologians would profit immensely from paying more attention to phenomenology and I hope that I have given them something here that would allow them to do so. But that's theology (maybe a phenomenological theology), no longer phenomenology. So, in response to Nicolae, I actually hope very much that I distinguish *more* carefully than Marion (130), more along the lines of how Ricœur kept the two disciplines apart in his work. I do not think there is an area "between" them in this particular sense (130). I think the moment you go to things that can *only* be seen by faith (not ones that can *also* be seen by faith or that are maybe colored differently or more strongly by faith—those surely can be examined), you are no longer doing philosophy but theology. If it is only accessible by faith, then it is not

² I am beginning to understand why Ricœur was so frustrated at being asked this question over and over again: "I am not a Christian philosopher, as rumor would have it... I am... a philosopher, nothing more, even a philosopher without an absolute, concerned about, devoted to, immersed in philosophical anthropology... To say 'Christian philosopher' is to state a syntagma, a conceptual block." Paul Ricoeur, *Living Up to Death*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 69.

accessible to philosophy, except in the indirect way of saying that this faith structures the experience of the people who believe it in some way. I do think there are different degrees—experience is not all or nothing, either completely “poor” or overwhelmingly “saturated”—but I do not think the experience of the transfigured saint (131) is accessible to phenomenological analysis, unless there are a number of them and they talk or write about their experience in such consistent fashion that structures become visible. But those must still be human, still embodied, still be within time and space. Surely a “saint” could have a richer or different experience of space and time (131), but I do not know what it would mean to have an experience of “non-space” or “non-time,” as Lacoste claims. That involves theological presuppositions to which the philosopher has no access, as far as I can tell. Yes (Nicolae), there may well be “more” “from a theological perspective” (131), but that is precisely a theological perspective, not a philosophical one. If “phenomenology become[s] theo-phenomenology” (132) then it becomes theology. That may well be more “adequate” for the Eucharist, but it is not going to be terribly convincing to the philosopher seeking to understand the human condition.

Jack also questions “the extent to which it is possible ultimately to give an account of a religious phenomenon that excludes the constitutive role that theological interpretation might play in determining the quality of phenomenality” (126). So I do not think “an explicitly *theological* interpretation” (129, emphasis his) is “inaccessible” to phenomenology; it certainly should take it into consideration. But if it presupposes it or posits it as *the* meaning of the experience, it is a theology making use of phenomenology, rather than a phenomenology making use of theology. That does not mean, of course, that the theologian as theologian would not be allowed to go there or could not use the phenomenology for those purposes. So I would not dispute in the least that phenomenology can be employed for theological purposes. Quite to the contrary, I strongly encourage theologians to make greater use of it, as I think it is considerably more conducive to substantive theological engagement than some of the analytic strains with which theologians recently seem such cozy bedfellows. But that theological use of phenomenology is the job of the theologians, not mine. I hope there are sufficient points of contact in the book that would allow the theologians to “appropriate” anything they find useful for their own purposes.

2. Both Jack and Jared focus in different ways on the people of faith who experience the liturgy. Again, I hope that something is here that would allow those participants to think about their convictions in regard to and experience of liturgy in a deeper and richer sense, would give them terminology for understanding how their personal experience is enhanced, made possible, expressed, instantiated in the structures of liturgy. I do not seek to depict their empirical experience or their specific theological

convictions (that would be either sociology or theology, depending on whether it is depiction of or reflection about its meaning) but I hope they do not find their experience invalidated by what I describe about the structures, instead discovering ways of expressing how their experience is embodied, spatialized, temporalized, and so forth. (Indeed, one of the things I would really like to know is whether this actually represents people's experiences, whether the analysis of the *structure* is sufficiently sensitive and faithful to the *concrete experience* of particular participants of Orthodox liturgy. Is liturgy, in fact, experienced as an exposure of finitude within the tension of repentance and celebration?)

So more specifically in response to Jared who asks: "What is the relationship between the horizon of liturgical time, which we enter from within our own contemporary horizon, that is, the historical horizon of its own tradition?" (119). He explicates these as "repetition" versus "Incarnation of Christ" respectively. But I would say that "repetition" is the "horizon" of *liturgy*, not our contemporary horizon, which is focused on linearity, competition, progress, and accomplishment. The cyclical nature of liturgy to some extent disrupts our own ("secular," "Western," "post-Enlightenment," "capitalist?") horizons. There can be clash here, although I do not think it is as disruptive as Marion or Lacoste often suggest. The dogma or theological affirmation of the incarnation of Christ, on the other hand, is not part of the "structure" of liturgy, but part of its specific or particular content. It is a theological affirmation that shapes how people who subscribe to it and who participate within the community that posits it, will experience liturgy. So, one might say that it functions as a theological "horizon" that crosses and influences their experience. Their experience may well be structured by the expectation of such encounter or transformation. But I do not think one could say that only the theological is the horizon of liturgy. There are broader ritual structures here that are the structures of liturgy itself, not just the experiences we bring to it. Faith does indeed "fuse" horizons, but I am not sure that is still open to phenomenological analysis.³ That being said, I do think it would be possible and profitable to conduct more specific analyses of how particular people or communities appropriate the biblical stories in their worship experiences.

In response to Jack on the same issue: I do not think bracketing the question of the "existence" of God in phenomenological analysis means that theological discourse is

³ Incidentally, I do think Jared is right that I only allude to the way in which the community of worship may relate to the *content* of what is proclaimed in words (120), although I do discuss the importance of remembering. I pay much more attention to this in my recent book on Ricoeur (*Reading Religious Ritual with Ricoeur: Between Fragility and Hope*, Lexington, 2021), where I do try to grapple with historicity and the way in which the memory of saving events of the "past" are "true" within the present experience of the liturgical world.

“inherently discontinuous with lived religion” (127), because the way in which participants in worship are oriented toward the God they believe and assume to exist can certainly be considered, as can the ways in which this theological presupposition structures the experience of liturgy more broadly. “Eucharistic theology or Christology” certainly impacts “liturgical intentionality”⁴ (127) in the sense that those beliefs and convictions structure experience and expectation, but a full-blown theological account of these matters would cease to be philosophical. In short, in response to all three interlocutors on this point, I think some distinction has to be drawn between the ways and *modes* in which certain expectations structure the community’s experience and the specific theological *content* of those expectations.

Yet—in some sense in response to all three—I do think a deeper and fuller phenomenological examination of “faith” (including its content) than I give in the book is both possible and necessary. I consciously stayed away from “faith” (or doctrine) and focused on actions and practices, because previous philosophical engagement, both analytic and continental, has been almost exclusively concerned with doctrinal questions and ignored practices, especially liturgical ones. There probably could be a phenomenology of faith, as Nicolae suggests (132) and Jared implies (120), if it is an endeavor to depict and understand the structures of the manifestation of faith as a *human* experience. And of course there could be a *theology* of faith that draws on phenomenological insights. No problem there at all. Yet I do not think there could be a strictly philosophical phenomenology of faith in the sense of taking on the doctrinal pronouncements or creedal convictions of a particular tradition. Jared is presumably right that our “relation” to the tradition and its “historical” events (132) can be examined phenomenologically, but not as a proof of their historicity in a “scientific” sense of verification. That becomes apologetics.

3. Probably the most important audience (to me) to whom I want to speak is the philosopher or phenomenologist of religion. Surely phenomenology can give us access to phenomena that go beyond physical perception, as presumably we can all agree. If it “shows up” in experience in some form, even if it cannot be visually observed, it is open to phenomenological analysis. Yet, I would submit that “body and blood of Christ” (133) does not show up in experience in this way. Bread and wine do. The affective, sensory, and corporeal dimensions of eating and drinking in community do. The “intentional” predispositions of the participants as directed toward Christ for communal healing do. “Redemption” in the proper theological sense does not. So, to Nicolae, I think that the “belief of the Church that Christ’s body and blood are *real*” (131; emphasis his) is not open to the phenomenological

⁴ Yet, for how many people? The average person at worship is pretty clueless about the details of such theological matters.

gaze. “Belief” can be described and analyzed. Strong feelings can be described and analyzed. Hope for redemption can be described and analyzed. Being directed *toward* the divine can be described and analyzed. *God’s* experience in turning toward us *cannot* be described and analyzed, at least not phenomenologically. Similarly, I would agree that *our* prayer can be described and analyzed. *God’s* “hearing” or fulfillment of prayer cannot. Thus, what we do and feel in liturgy is indeed open to phenomenological analysis. Similarly, the (often non-visual) impact liturgy has on us can be depicted. What *God does to us* in liturgy or whether the impact we might feel *comes from God* is *not* open to phenomenological investigation. Phenomenology does not investigate causality and it sets aside the question whether our experience corresponds to “something out there”; that (false) dichotomy between “in here” and “out there” was precisely one of the problems that got phenomenology started in the first place.

In either case, I want us to be able to talk about religion *philosophically*, in such a way that it will be taken seriously philosophically as a valid human experience. This is just not happening in philosophy at the moment. The larger philosophical community—analytic or continental—simply ignores or dismisses religion as a topic. No other discipline has so little to say about religion or treats it with such negligence and disdain. Even natural scientists pay more attention to it (and ecologists sometimes actively call on religion to provide motivation for protection of the environment). Psychology, sociology, and anthropology of religion are all regarded as valid endeavors even by psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists who themselves do not engage in such research. Philosophy of religion, on the other hand, is usually treated with mild disdain or outright rejection by most philosophers who do not engage in it. They certainly do not consider it a valuable part of the discipline, examining an important dimension of the human condition. Almost all of it is confessional in orientation, predominantly Reformed Protestant in the analytic and predominantly (French) Roman Catholic in the continental tradition (though the analytical folk tend to be more adept at hiding their confessional affiliations). This means that a crucial aspect of human experience is simply set aside by philosophy as untouchable. The current accounts are so heavily confessional that they are regarded by most philosophers in the broader discipline as theology rather than philosophy and are therefore not taken to be worthy of serious philosophical consideration.

But there must be a way of examining *philosophically* the religious aspects of the human condition—which have been such a crucial element of human experience across all times and cultures—and to do so in such a way that they are taken seriously by philosophy and by philosophers. My sense is that this is only possible if theology is kept out of it. In that regard, I find Ricœur a useful model in “cantankerously”

respecting the distinction between them.⁵ Theology and phenomenology can be merged and can cross-pollinate for *theological* purposes, but I think for *philosophical* purposes the boundary has to remain demarcated more clearly and observed more scrupulously.⁶ That does not mean, of course, that a philosophical examination of a particular phenomenon, especially when it is in a specific tradition, should ignore what is being said about it theologically. To use Heidegger's language, the account of the "*existential*" should not contradict or invalidate the "*existentiell*" experience, but must undergird and enable it, be responsible to it in some fashion.⁷ If the phenomenological account of a given structure of religious experience were not to "fit" the theological convictions about the phenomenon or the particular experience of it by adherents of that tradition at all, clearly something has gone wrong. But I think the moment phenomenology takes the theological or doctrinal account on board itself, it ceases to be a philosophical examination and becomes theological. And that is why it is no longer taken seriously by non-religious, agnostic, and especially atheist philosophers. It becomes a little ghetto-conversation among fellow enthusiasts, rather than a contribution to philosophy more broadly. If philosophy is the love of wisdom that investigates most deeply and most fundamentally the meaning and structures of the cosmos and the human being (though it has largely abandoned the former to the natural scientists), it must be possible to have the religious dimension of that condition taken seriously as part of that endeavor of understanding.

And I think this also means that we—at least the philosophers among us—have to get beyond taking the Christian as the paradigm for everything religious, if we are truly doing phenomenology of *religion* and not just phenomenology of (French Roman Catholic) Christianity. Ritual is a broader human experience, characteristic of almost all religious traditions and, in fact, of all cultures, in some form or other, many dimensions of which go beyond the traditionally religious. Sports, politics, the law, academia, and many other aspects of human experience are structured by ritual. A rigorous philosophical examination of religious ritual (or even specifically of liturgy) may help us illuminate similar patterns and structures in these

⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Critique and Conviction: Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launey*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 159. In a different interview he says: "I find that there is much more violence in this integration of religion with philosophy than in the recognition of their specificity and the specificity of their intersections." Yvanka B. Raynova, "All that Gives Us to Think: Conversations with Paul Ricoeur," in *Between Suspicion and Sympathy: Paul Ricoeur's Unstable Equilibrium*, ed. Andrzej Wierciński (Toronto: The Hermeneutic Press, 2003), 688.

⁶ Daniel Frey argues that "the philosopher works in a kind of unsurpassable discomfort of which the theologian knows nothing" in his "Lecture philosophique et lecture théologique de la Bible chez Paul Ricoeur," *Études Ricœuriennes/Ricoeur Studies* 3.2 (2012): 85.

⁷ He articulates this most clearly in regard to time (*Being and Time*, §61, §67, §71).

other crucial human endeavors and experiences. I think, for example, that the “deepening” and “widening” Jared highlights (119) is true for ritual more broadly. In all of these other rituals, times and spaces, bodies and senses, affect and emotion, play crucial roles in how they manifest—and they all shape the identities of groups and the individuals within them in important ways. Indeed, an examination of the significance and modes of manifestation of religious ritual may well help us recover some of these crucial communal aspects of the human condition that we have lost (not only from view but sometimes even from experience) in our individual-focusing, autonomy-celebrating, narcissism-inducing West. (Maybe the one thing COVID has taught us above all over the past year and a half is the importance of community and ritual, of being able to eat and gather and study and learn and play and celebrate and mourn together, and the crucial loss that occurs when that is no longer possible.) All these broader ritual dimensions of human experience are worth examining philosophically and I do think that philosophy of religion can contribute to it, if it maintains the rigorous standards of the discipline and sticks to the human condition.

This is in some ways also a response to Jack’s second question (127). No, I do not want to sever the religious experience completely from other sorts of human experiences, though presumably *some* distinctions are necessary if we want to give a meaningful account of a particular type of phenomenon. When it comes to an analysis of religion more broadly, I am far more interested in the continuities. Religious Studies in particular—maybe to justify its own existence as a discipline—has strongly insisted on the *uniqueness* and singularity of the religious experience.⁸ I think this often disregards the many ways in which religion is actually *like* many cultural and personal aspects of experience in ways that don’t allow for neat separation or fundamental disentanglement. (But I am not sure you can have it both ways: if you want a more substantive theological account, then these continuities tend to disappear from view rather quickly...)

I certainly would not want to say (and hope I have not said) that there is some supposedly “universal, religiously neutral lifeworld” (127-28). (That is precisely why I think the liturgical theologians are wrong when they describe liturgy as a play that happens within a closed world without continuity to the rest of our lives.)⁹ We always live in particular lifeworlds that are hermeneutically contextualized, although it is also possible to some extent to move between such worlds. But I would not want to conflate religious and theological here. We must be able to speak about a variety of religious traditions that cannot be comprised under “theological.” And while it is certainly true that religion as a category has been weighed down by Christian and

⁸ See James Cox, Lawrence Cunningham, Gavin Flood, and other thinkers.

⁹ See my “Is Liturgy Ludic? Distinguishing Between the Phenomena of Play and Ritual,” *Religions* 12.4 (2021): 1-26.

even specifically Protestant presuppositions, neither the largely “secular”/Western disciplines of psychology, sociology, and anthropology of religion nor that of Religious Studies has really been able to divest themselves of that term.¹⁰ It still serves an important function of talking about a dimension of human experience that—while entangled in all kinds of complicated ways with other sorts of experiences and often expressed by many cultural, geographical, social, and political aspects of broader human experience—do show up in most human cultures in ways that deserve depiction and analysis. Ignoring them or simply conflating them with culture or history per se (whatever that would even mean) does these complex phenomena a profound disservice. We need much greater awareness and explication of the continuities and complicated enmeshments of many of these aspects of human experience, but simply conflating the religious into the cultural does not seem a particularly useful (or even viable) solution. It just serves to hide it.

No, I do not think this becomes sociology, as Jack worries (128), because sociology is an empirical discipline; it is not concerned with the underlying structures of human experience. It tries to make sense of concrete data drawn from particular experiences (thus it is *ontic*, in Heidegger’s sense), while phenomenology tries to analyze the *structures* of human experiencing as they underlie and make possible those concrete or particular experiences. Sociology also tends to focus on specific groups or individuals, while phenomenology tries to be far broader in its investigation: nothing less than “the human as such” is at stake for phenomenology. Of course, one could deny that there is any human “as such” and yet there are many aspects that humans share across times and cultures and that seem constitutive of our experience more broadly. Religious or ritual forms of expression are one aspect of those common structures, although they manifest in different ways in different traditions. Those differences are the concern of sociology; the shared structures are the interest of phenomenology.

B. Much more briefly

It has been curious to me that the chapters on temporality and spatiality have received by far the most attention in reviews, even far beyond the three included here. (Maybe some readers are tired by that point and do not read any further?) But to me these seemed in some way the *least* original and interesting chapters, because significant work has already been done on those topics. In some ways they feel preparatory to the more substantive work that comes later, especially in the chapter

¹⁰ For a substantive defense of the term while taking seriously the objections, see Martin Riesebrodt, *The Promise of Salvation: A Theory of Religion*, trans. Steven Rendall (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

on corporeality that, ironically, has received the least attention in reviews (although Jack rightly points out that “it serves as a nexus” between the two earlier and the latter chapters and does mention “the mode of receptivity and self-offering” at stake in it [126]). Maybe the most crucial argument I was trying to make is that liturgy functions as an *exposure* of our finitude in a context in which such fragility and failure is welcomed hospitably. The chapters on time and space set the context for that and the later chapters try to unfold the account of exposure, but the “apex,” so to say, is its articulation in the chapter on corporeality. Yet no review—here or elsewhere—has yet said anything about the account of exposure, which suggests that it is not very well developed or not sufficiently clear. So I would like to say another word about this issue, which to me, at least when I was writing, felt like the crux of the entire argument.

Philosophically speaking, I think one can analyze how our bodies (and not just our bodies, but our whole selves) are exposed in liturgy, how temporal and spatial arrangements, posture, gesture, motion, sensory dimensions, affect, and the communal context structure such exposure. Most fundamentally I want to say that we bring ourselves to liturgy, expose ourselves (maybe most profoundly in practices of confession, but also simply by showing up, by being there, by participating, by being committed, by doing it over and over again, here in this specific place and time), and thus allow ourselves to be impacted by what liturgy does to us. If we do not open or expose ourselves, if we do not show up, this cannot happen and liturgy has no effect on us. As I said in that chapter, that is not “exhibition” or display; exposure is different, more humble and less ostentatious, more willing to be touched and healed, more directed to each other and to what is structured by expectation and hermeneutic context as the divine. Exposure is our response to hospitality, to the welcome liturgy extends. Only when there is such hospitality, can exposure be anything but a threatening and scary experience. Even so, it is risky. Liturgy asks such risk of us, such presenting of ourselves. Liturgy requires that we open up, that we become exposed in our essential finitude, that we show our weaknesses, our frailties, and our failures and allow ourselves to be strengthened, healed, and forgiven. This is a response *to* liturgy’s hospitality and generosity, but is *itself* also a hospitable and generous response, because it offers the self (albeit not in the sense of a gift to be transmitted to someone). Without such exposure of the self there can be no comfort, forgiveness, healing, or transformation of the self. All of them require the vulnerability involved in showing up, in confessing, in committing, in celebrating, and even in allowing ourselves to be comforted. I think this is the central task of ritual in the human experience and ritual does it in a way that few other human experiences do. And I think that is worth exploring on its own terms, without immediately moving to theology.

If we do move to theology, however (and here speaking of theology “Christianly”), such exposure is before the Triune God and the ecclesial body of Christ—and probably before the Triune God precisely through the ecclesial and eucharistic body of Christ. *Theologically* speaking, Orthodox liturgy (and indeed most Christian liturgy) invites us to encounter with God, encourages us to confess our sins and shortcomings, and to come to be touched and healed by this God, to become continually more transformed into the divine image, to become “partakers of the divine nature.” Liturgy provides the temporal, spatial, corporeal, sensory, affective structures to do so within the community that gathers in this time and place for this purpose. It shapes an intentionality that seeks and expects this encounter and transformation—and does so partly through continually repeating it, thus insisting on it over and over again, shaping intentionality more fully and more profoundly. Liturgy employs texts and hymns that chant this, symbols and images that show it, reinforced by scents, taste, and touch that are all fundamentally affectively colored to produce such an encounter with an incarnate God who breathes the Spirit to redeem all of God’s creatures. Orthodox theology, through Orthodox liturgical texts and images, speaks of all this—and surely it thereby structures hermeneutically in very specific and particular ways how Orthodox participants in liturgy experience these acts of worship.

Yet at that point we have left phenomenology behind—except maybe as an enriching tool or interesting insight—and entered a theological or sociological account. We can go there and all these disciplines (and the scholars who work in them) surely can and should talk to each other far more frequently and more fully than they currently do, but I think it is still worth recognizing more clearly when we are crossing over into another discipline or when we are deliberately engaging in a dialogue between them (in Nicolae’s “in between” space [130]), rather than just speaking to those in our own discipline. Such dialogues are enriching and sorely necessary, but one should not forget that they are dialogues, not mergers, partly for methodological reasons. And they are not going to convince the philosopher who is skeptical about the theological presuppositions, but instead might turn him or her away and dismiss the phenomenon altogether. And that would be a real shame. And a profound loss to both theology and philosophy.