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Crossing the Rubicon
The Borderlands of Philosophy and Theology

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Is Hermeneutics Fundamental?

In this crossing of the Rubicon, the trumpets first sound in homage to Ricoeur. Yet I will conclude with an accepted and even affirmed gap between his hermeneutics and the approach advanced here. Any tribute to a master must reflect his greatness as well as his limitations, at least in the context of a legacy to be both received and transformed. Of course, one could proceed with pure and simple repetition. Ricoeur's concept of distanciation, however, may be productive at this juncture, prompting the declaration that the times have changed and that one must orient oneself anew. After all, the “long way” of linguistics, philology, or semiotics is no longer so significant today. I will inquire whether a Catholic-inspired hermeneutic may continue to refer theologically and philosophically to textuality alone, or whether it must not also address the body and the voice as the source of its renewal (see Chapter 2). Further, even if they are irreducible, confessional ties—Protestant Christianity for Ricoeur or Judaism for Levinas—create conceptual distances. A critical approach, in the sense of judgment or of bringing under scrutiny (krinein), is thus essential. It must be equal to the task of discerning what remains to be preserved at the heart of the tradition, yet cannot be repeated. To honor the thought of an author, however famous and prolific, is not to reiterate it, but to extend it or even reconsider it from another vantage point. A hermeneutic is fundamental only insofar as it is grounded in a mode of existence adequate to its object. In this way, it would have the merit of teaching us at the very least
to better differentiate ourselves—but most importantly, to identify ourselves more precisely.

This chapter will question the validity of the grounds of textual hermeneutics for our thinking today as well as its contemporary retrieval, nearly word for word, in theology and even in philosophy. I will respond to the breakthrough of a hermeneutics that might be called fundamental. This latter predicate as well as the chapter title is obviously inherited from Levinas’s contributions in his confrontation with Heidegger. Chapter 1, “Is Hermeneutics Fundamental?” will first probe Ricoeur’s Protestant hermeneutic, centered on the meaning of the text. Second, it will investigate Levinas’s Jewish hermeneutic, shaped by the body of the text. This initial study will thus create a space in Chapter 2, “For a Hermeneutic of the Body and the Voice,” for the possibility of a Catholic hermeneutic, anchored this time in corporeality as the center and heart of the activity of interpretation. This argument is patently not a matter of a quarrel between confessions, even less between religions. In reality, what matters is the kind of relation that grounds the interpretation of the message—mediation of the text or exposition of the body. This initial, fundamental orientation is usually not interrogated, or at least tends to be accepted without question.

Gregory the Great’s phrase at the beginning of his Homilies on Ezekiel is widely known: “Scripture grows with its readings” (Scriptura cum legentibus crescit). This claim may offer hermeneutes and even contemporary phenomenologists a way to breathe new life into biblical interpretation as it struggles to renew itself. The profound purport of the phrase calls neither for the proliferation of readers nor for their transformation in order to bring the text’s fecundity to fruition. Readers do not grow in reading scripture. The opposite is true: scripture grows as it is read. In other words, the biblical text frames a unique and exemplary relation between reader and text. Whether understood as an ego or appropriation that ultimately always maintains its primacy, I am not the one transformed by reading the text. Rather the text itself grows by virtue of my reading; it lives from my life, rather than exclusively my living from it. Certainly, to make of the text a “Living [Being],” even a body capable of growing and experiencing with us a sort of intercorporeality, is astonishing. Paul Claudel, however, does not hesitate to affirm, “[the Bible] is a living being that grows and develops before our eyes.” Henri de Lubac also, reflecting on Origen, asserts:

In this way, Scripture seems like a first incorporation of the Logos. He who is by nature invisible can be seen and touched in it, as if in

the flesh that he was then to assume; and reciprocally, this flesh is a letter that makes him readable to us.

It could not be clearer. Writing [l’écriture], at least when it is biblical (but perhaps not exclusively so), is a life that addresses itself to a life. It is a Living Being that turns toward a living being or, in my perspective, a body that speaks to a body. If there is a hermeneutic in a Catholic mode (I will explain later what I mean by “Catholic”), it will be not only of the text but also of the body, and not of speech alone but also of the voice.

I will thus investigate the possibility of arriving at the body without remaining attached to textuality and of finding our life in the Bible rather than making the Bible live in us. This inquiry is most urgent today. Having rightfully deployed its conceptual treasures, textual hermeneutics seems to be gasping for air—not for lack of fresh elaborations, but because it waits for its release from the stranglehold of the text. Phenomenological description has, at least de jure, the capacity to set it free. As I already noted, one of the premises of the present treatise is that:

The excessive attention to the support or mediation sometimes kills that which it supports or conveys: the often-unsayable meaning of experience, which it still seeks to describe.

Let us be on our guard, however. This is not the opening to a trial of intentions; quite to the contrary. Philosophical hermeneutics—Ricoeur’s certainly, but also Gadamer’s—rendered and still renders service to theology in ways that we cannot not deny or even denounce. Indeed, the syntax of hermeneutical theology has become the vestibule through which one must necessarily pass. Historical reasons suffice to justify the close collaboration between hermeneutics and philosophy as well as theology, corroborating its function of “transversality.” Furthermore, the hermeneutical relief in theology as in philosophy had perfectly legitimate motives, at least in its day.

§4. The Hermeneutical Relief

The Hermeneutical Relief in Theology

The hermeneutical relief follows the pattern of the “four senses of scripture.” Hermeneutics returns afresh to an examination of the plurality of interpretations. Moreover, it too consists in a historical resappropriation of various models of philosophy by theology.
The letter teaches “that which took place” (littera gesta docet), allegory “that which you are to believe” (quid credas allegoria), the moral sense (tropological) “that which you are to do” (moralis quid agas), the anagogical sense “that towards which you must tend [or extend?]” (quod tendas anagogia). 8

The Dominican Augustine of Dacia, a contemporary of Aquinas, wrote this celebrated summary of the four senses of scripture around 1260. His statement can serve as a guide to trace the context and signification of the hermeneutical renewal when it arose and was in full swing at the beginning of the 1970s in France, now over forty years ago.

In 1975, when Ricoeur published his famous text “Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Hermeneutics” (later included in From Text to Action under the heading “For a Hermeneutical Phenomenology”), textual exegesis in its theological articulation appeared in some ways to have run out of steam. 9 It had already exhausted all the resources of the historical-critical method, which after all had been entirely justified on its own grounds. Attention to the referents and to the sources introduced an increasingly diverse set of traditions (Yahwist, Elohist, priestly) and of events (Exodus, Exile, David’s Court) to the reading of the scriptures. Consequently, what takes place in a given situation is what primarily counts—that is, the gesture at the level of the letter (littera gesta) or the literal sense. Paradoxically, the historical-critical method did not aim to reproduce what took place as it took place or as it is written. Rather, it sought to indicate what took place in terms of the means or other circumstances of the act of writing, which suffice to explain how and why it was written in this way and not otherwise. Still, a considerable step had been taken. Genesis could be understood finally as a “myth” precisely because it did not take place as it was written but because other accounts or places explain that it was written in such and such a way and not in another (for example, in comparison to the Babylonian myths). No explanation, however, was given for the function of the myth itself. With the historical-critical method, the attachment to the referent remained always essential, in fact self-evident, even if the referent itself had changed. The reader is no longer immediately facing the letter of the text in its location in the text, but the place and the context where the text was written and from which it can be explained. It is noteworthy that pastoral ministry has also carried out this exegetical approach, remarkably so in France, convinced that any faithful person who has undergone Christian and theological formation is wise enough to distinguish between the various sources, to bring to light the distinct contexts, and to rearrange the texts.

The textual hermeneutic that Ricoeur brought to life offered the relief that exegesis and theology in the late 1960s did not anticipate or no longer expected. The text itself—and the text by itself—is a world. This is the claim underlined by “The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation” (also first published in 1975) where writing or more specifically literature “may abolish all reference to a given reality.” 10 Distanciation consists in a triple reduction or epoché: emancipation from the one who wrote the text (the author), emancipation of the one who receives the text (the reader), and emancipation of that to which the text refers (the referent). All that remains then is what Ricoeur calls “the autonomy of the text”:

[Distanciation is not the product of methodology and hence something superfluous and parasitical: rather it is constitutive of the phenomenon of the text as writing. At the same time, it is the condition of interpretation. 11

This is another huge step forward. The great virtue of theological hermeneutics is to have drawn out its implications. The notion of the world of the text bestows autonomy upon the text and thus produces its semantic unity: in this way, the text is self-sufficient in its referential function.

My thesis here is that the abolition of a first-order reference, an abolition effected by fiction and poetry, is the condition of possibility for the freeing of a second-order reference, which reaches the world not only at the level of manipulable objects but at the level that Husserl indicated by the expression Lebenswelt [life-world] and Heidegger by being-in-the-world. . . . For what must be interpreted in a text is a proposed world. 12

The world of the text means that in effect the text is world-forming; as such, one could say that it “worldifies.” I have maintained that the concept of “life-world” is Husserl’s great legacy to Ricoeur’s hermeneutics. Yet I will show that this gain comes with a loss particular to a so-called “Protestant” hermeneutics. It results in the detachment and absolute autonomization of writing relative to speech and also to the body and the voice, which support all writing.

To this concept of world and as a consequence of distanciation, Ricoeur then adds, not as an appendix but as a defining moment, “the appearance of the subjectivity of the reader” and “the appropriation (Aneignung) of the text, its application (Anwendung) to the present situation of the reader”: in short, he propounds the capacity “to understand oneself in front of the
Text and of "exposing ourselves to the text and receiving from it an enlarged self." The text takes me for an object or, more accurately, for its principal subject. I am its addressee, although I will never reduce it to my singular personality as its recipient. Indeed, as a reader, "I find myself only by losing myself." But the purpose of the loss is first and foremost that I find myself or that I am found by the text, such that in the end, I remain still the addressee, even the object, of this writing addressed to me. "The text is the medium through which we understand ourselves. [The] appearance of the subjectivity of the reader . . . extends the fundamental characteristic of all discourse, that of being addressed to someone." In appropriating the text, I am appropriated, albeit first by disappropriating myself of myself. In order always and minimally to constitute "me as myself," the other of the text constitutes me as "another myself." We see, or at least should sense it now. Textual hermeneutics frees us from the methodological fetters of historical-critical exegesis. It finally becomes possible to read or to reread the text for itself, independently of its sources. The text necessarily says something to me by its saying the very same thing or perhaps even saying something else—only as long as its correct understanding gives rise to my appropriation. In this instance, pastoral practice also confirms the developments of hermeneutical theology, and vice-versa. The Word [Parole], or rather the text, is no longer studied in the objectivity of a given history. Consciousnesses in their intersubjectivity, struggling to tell each other their stories, share the text—to risk the presently, altogether overused verb "share." The text's world-forming effect for me can also be a world-forming effect for others. As a result, we face the numerous deviations known to arise in the incessant projections of oneself into the text, against which Ricoeur constantly struggled.

Returning to the four senses of scripture, textual hermeneutics no longer aims at grasping a literal meaning relative to what the letter teaches (littera gesta docet), as did the historical-critical method. Its aim is the moral or tropological meaning—that is, what one has to do (quid agis): it seeks primarily what the text has to say to me, rather than what it says in itself. The doing here is not only poiesis—even if Ricoeur's movement from text to action unfolds logically—but praxis: the world of the text "forms and transforms the reader's being-a-self in accordance with his or her intention." A tropological approach turns the text into the place of my own transformation: my own world will inhabit the text's world only insofar as I become capable of finding myself there in the end.

As scripture becomes autonomous in its separation from speech and from the body, the text is understood to transform me as it modifies my egoity, but it never truly makes me destitute. Two shifts are needed: a hermeneutics of the body must succeed to a hermeneutics of the text, and an incorporation of the self in scripture must substitute itself for a transformation of the self through scripture. These two newly highlighted traits belong to a hermeneutic inherited more from a so-called "Catholic" ritual of the body—namely, the Eucharist—and of the world—that is, the Gospel of All Creatures—than from the "Protestant" ritual of the text, or sola scriptura, and of grace, or sola gratia. Indeed, the historical-critical method's focus on the literal sense and the textual hermeneutics' quest for the tropological sense have dominated, at first and rightly so, our reading in the modern era.

Nevertheless, today the time has come to deploy an allegorical sense—that is, what you are to believe—and even an anagogical sense, or that for which you must aim. Moreover, in this endeavor one must truly accept, in a quasi-monastic way, to be a displaced-self as well as to be displaced from oneself and totally incorporated in the body of another who is not oneself and never will be. "The beginning is the pure, and, so to speak, still mute, experience that now has to be brought to pure expression in its proper sense," to restate the famous phrase from Husserl's Cartesian Meditations. But this road toward meaning will not, or will no longer, be made by virtue of hermeneutics—a graft that has taken too well and has in some way detached itself from its trunk, that is, from phenomenology. Instead, it will come to fruition rising from the same bedrock or under the impulsion of the same seedling, by virtue of which any first word or utterance remains silent or of the order of the infant, even if subsequently it were to say something or express itself. As Romano asserts, "Indeed, there exists an autonomy of the prelinguistic order, of pre-predicative experience with regard to superior forms of thought and language." He continues:

Authentic hermeneutics is phenomenology and phenomenology is accomplished only as hermeneutics . . . which would render superfluous the "graft" of the one on the other, to pick back up Ricoeur's famous image. Hermeneutics and phenomenology would be the flowering of a same "essence," of a same bud.

The Hermeneutical Relief in Philosophy

The hermeneutical relief in theology, by way of biblical hermeneutics, depends on its relief in philosophy, as it took place in the relation between phenomenology and hermeneutics. For Ricoeur, hermeneutical phenomenology depends on "the graft of the hermeneutic problem onto the phenomenological method." The historical situation of philosophy,
along with the exhaustion of the historical-critical method in theology, could not but give textual hermeneutics every right and privilege of position; and at least at that time, it was fully justified to do so.

During the resurgence of the human sciences in the 1970s, sociology, linguistics, and psychoanalysis were the most powerful forces of renewal. In that context, there was no question nor was it even conceivable to deploy a hermeneutic and even a philosophy that did not proceed by way of those mediations. Indeed, it is surprising that today they have totally disappeared, or nearly so, in many arenas of contemporary philosophy, in particular in phenomenology. Four decades ago, the choice one faced was straightforward, and the alternative was clear-cut. In “Existence and Hermeneutics,” the opening essay to *The Conflict of Interpretations*, Ricoeur indicates emphatically that “There are two ways to ground hermeneutics in phenomenology. There is the short route, which I will consider first, and the long route, the one I propose to travel.”22 I will later nuance this opposition in light of its presupposition (see Chapter 3, §11). The well-known gap between these two ways requires no lengthy explanation at this point. In sum, the short way is the ontology of comprehension, inherited from Husserl with his notion of *Lebenswelt* and from Heidegger with *Dasein*. The long way consists in analyses of language, inserting and imposing the mediation of history, as in Gadamer’s work, or the mediation of the text, as in Ricoeur’s. Whether via history or textuality, the long way becomes the indispensable detour to ground the act of interpretation. All that truly counts is the deliberate, contextually responsive decision “[to substitute] for the short route of the Analytic of Dasein, the long route that begins by analyses of language.”23 In Ricoeur’s eyes, this choice has an unavoidable result that is perpetually recovered and subsequently reiterated.

The “short” intersubjective relation is intertwined, in the interior of the historical connection, with various “long” intersubjective relations, mediated by diverse social institutions, by social roles, by collectivities (groups, classes, nations, cultural traditions, etc.).24

[We] understand ourselves only by the long detour of the signs of humanity deposited in cultural works.25

While feigning to adopt the short way in “The Hermeneutical Task,” Ricoeur asks himself, “Why not stop here and simply proclaim ourselves Heideggerian?" The hermeneutist responds, “a philosophy that breaks the dialogue with the sciences is no longer addressed to anything but itself.”26 In other words, only a return to the sciences justifies the strategy of the detour by the long way and condemns the direct access of the short way in an autarky of thought that the philosopher is unable to justify, at least historically.

The movement from the short way to the long way is actually more than a simple choice: it is a turning point for phenomenology, perhaps even for philosophy itself. Phenomenology, especially with Husserl and Heidegger, was forced to bracket the human sciences—even the positive sciences—by classifying them as “ontic” in contradistinction to “ontological.” Precisely here, the Ricoeur of the hermeneutics (rather than of *The Fallible Man or The Wounded Cogito*) turns his back on all that was exclusively existential, or better existential, in Husserl and Heidegger. The hermeneutical philosopher rededicated understanding (Verstehen) as necessarily bound to the explanation of the text and not only to the explication of the self. He mediates all experience through language and culture, which do not obstruct experience but actually make it fully accessible as well as give it meaning: “It cannot, therefore, be said that the passage by way of explanation destroys intersubjective understanding. This mediation is required by discourse itself.”27

A twofold context is now evident: a theological context, shaped by the exhaustion of the historical-critical method, and a philosophical one, where thought reengages the human sciences. These two factors led to the insistence, on the one hand, on the tropological meaning of the text, which first of all and exclusively addresses me, its reader, and on the other hand, on the acknowledgment that only the passage through mediations or via the long way could justify the detour required to return to the sciences. Theology benefited from its consideration of mediations, institutions, historicity, textuality. Philosophy did so in its engagements with linguistics, semiology, sociology, and even psychoanalysis. One question, however, remained unresolved in the eyes of the hermeneut who was reading Heidegger and perhaps even devoting his entire life to seeking its resolution: “how can a question of critique in general be accounted for within the framework of a fundamental hermeneutics?”28

**A Fundamental Hermeneutics?**

Levinas raised the decisive question, “Is Ontology Fundamental?”29 I now ask, “Is Hermeneutics Fundamental?” The terms of the debate are the same, but the intentions are different—even opposed. I will first consider Levinas’s thought and then turn to Ricoeur’s. For Levinas, the fundamental character of ontology is picked up or rather deflected by the yet-more fundamental character of ethics or of the figure of the other. Any relation to a...
being is indeed nothing but its comprehension as being in light of our being. Following Heidegger, he asserts that we can “let it be as being,” but adds emphatically—“except for the other.” The other in his ethical relation does not let me be, and I do not let him be within the basic ontological horizon of comprehension, even in terms of some simple mode of being of Dasein. In Levinas’s words:

Is our relation with the other a letting be? . . . Not at all. The other is not first an object of understanding and then an interlocutor. The two relations merge. In other words, addressing the other is inseparable from understanding the other.²⁰

In Ricoeur’s work, what is fundamental takes a detour, or more precisely turns back explicitly to the general or the regional. Ricoeur fully assumes Gadamer’s gesture. Gadamer initiated the “movement of return from ontology toward epistemological problems” over against Heidegger.³¹

This is a movement, on the one hand, toward a general hermeneutics, addressing epistemic problems of method, and, on the other, toward regional hermeneutics, which accounts for specific objects of the historical sciences, including semiology and sociology.

For Levinas, then, ontology is not fundamental enough, since the “other” furnishes another and new foundation. For Ricoeur, hermeneutics is too fundamental, since it excludes all modes of explanation other than the understanding—that is, from the exclusive mode of Dasein. The fields of ontology and hermeneutics diverge. But the crucial question arises precisely at this divergence: is it appropriate to radicalize the foundational or the existential as Levinas does or to externalize it and even to regionalize and mediate it along with Ricoeur? In essence, it is not a matter of “truth or method” (aletheia or episteme) but truth and method—ontological unveiling and ontic sciences. Such is the indissoluble tie that Ricoeur defends, to the point of accusing Gadamer sometimes to fall back into the disjointive on account of his proximity to Heidegger.³²

A “but . . . !” of opposition, or a “save for . . .!” marking the exception is at the heart of Levinas’s “Is Ontology Fundamental?” as he responds to Heidegger with the protest “except for the other.” In the same way, my question “Is Hermeneutics Fundamental?” bears a but or an except for, at least in the context of the interpretation of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics. Despite the putatively straightforward fact that hermeneutics, theology, and even phenomenology are intimately interwoven, it is necessary first to assess phenomenology’s capacity to resist its marriage or simply its flirtation with hermeneutics. Today French philosophy, or philosophy in general, comprises so many turning points that we no longer know where we are or where we are going. We have encountered Ricoeur’s “hermeneutical turn of phenomenology,” Janicaud’s much debated “theological turn in French phenomenology,” Gadamer’s “phenomenological turn of hermeneutics” as articulated by Jean Grondin, or now the “phenomenological turn in theology,” as seen in certain contemporary attempts at phenomenological Christologies, for example.³³ Of greater significance than these turning points, certain ruptures have been experienced—without being expressed. Naming them entails at least displaying them, if not also analyzing them.

The weak echoes of hermeneutical phenomenology among the French phenomenologists (Henry, Chrétién, Derrida, Marion, Lacoste) are surprising—all the more so in light of their resounding impact among theologians, particularly in centers of Catholic training but even more so outside France. Contextual factors alone insufficiently account for this unexpected result; conceptual articulations probably illuminate it better. Janicaud asserts in Chapter 4, “Articulations/Disarticulations,” of a noteworthy work entitled Phenomenology “Wide-Open”:

Phenomenology and hermeneutics remain, as much in their origin as in their relatively recent autonomisation, more disjointed than jointed, without being foreign to one another. . . . Ultimately, what differentiates and reciprocally situates phenomenology and hermeneutics (without articulating them properly speaking) is the differentiation of the former within a horizon of elucidation or a horizon of upgradation (mise à jour) (a stabilization of a horizon of realization of presence/absence) and the limitation of the latter in the twists and turns of the reading and of the interpretation of reference texts (for which the link to the sacred is perhaps never totally inexistent).³⁴

The standpoint advanced here should now be clear. Without attacking the distinction or relation between phenomenology and hermeneutics, the exact character of their relation can be made explicit such that one may even decide between the two. In its apophatic function as a clarifying or bringing to light, the phenomenality of the logos is not and never was “understanding,” even less so “explanation” in the sense of textual interpretation as mediation.³⁵ Heidegger’s thought is centered on the simple ontological mode of being of Dasein. Ricoeur’s work revolves around its relation to the ontic realm of the sciences of interpretation. In the first case, the heart of the matter is the simple art of living without apprenticeship. In the second, it is the art of reading with its discipline and its methodological requirements.
We will therefore turn to the following two questions: (1) Is not the detour through the text, in fact exclusively through the mediation of the written text, what finally makes Ricoeur's graft of hermeneutics onto phenomenology autonomous? (2) Should not the hermeneutical relief, as understood in its Catholicity, move in the direction of corporeality rather than textuality? All the while, we would leave the nobility of Ricoeur's Protestantism untouched, which Catholicism may indeed have expropriated by fully assimilating the basic return to textuality; and we would preserve the greatness of Levinas's Judaism, which Christianity, even Catholicism, may also have recuperated in misappropriated interpretations, for instance, of the figure of the other—by confusing the trace of the face and the sacrament of the brother. These are the questions that, particularly in the context of Catholicity, contemporary philosophy is entitled to raise nor in order to accuse others—far from that—but to learn from the differences, including the confessional ones, about the present state of its proper identity.

§5. Confessional Hermeneutics

The Protestant Hermeneutic or the Meaning of the Text

It appears at least incongruous, if not also inappropriate, to speak of a Protestant hermeneutic, or a Jewish hermeneutic, or yet a Catholic hermeneutic, since the question of interpretation is not first of all a matter of religion or of confession, but of philosophy and its mode of conceptualization. Ricoeur always made this claim; Levinas did so all the more fervently. Each of their philosophical projects can and should be understood independently of any belief or faith conviction. Their arguments should be accessible to all, and possibly shared unanimously, and not be fossilized in some idiocy to which only those who share the confession would be capable of acceding. Yet, of course, something of the domain of conviction remains. We never think outside of a "primordial ground" (Urgrund) in Husserl’s terms. Our departure points followed by thought's first germinations depend on this ground, even if our subsequent clarifications do not. If there is a Protestant hermeneutic in Ricoeur’s work, it is not because his hermeneutic emerged, developed, and was then further elaborated in a Protestant context (in fact, it seems paradoxically to have had a greater impact in Catholicism). Rather, it deploys one of the basic principles of Protestantism, perhaps even its principal axiom: the so-called notion of sola scriptura or the return to scripture as text. As a result, neither the body—as really present in the bread in the Eucharist—not the tradition and the magisterium handing on and interpreting the biblical message, the very pillars of Catholicism, can rival scripture or detach themselves from the text. But Fides et Ratio insists that "For the church, the holy Scripture is not the only reference point." Moreover, Benedict XVI, in his apostolic exhortation Verbum Domini, asserts emphatically, "the Magisterium of the Church, which is not above the Word of God, has the responsibility to authentically interpret the Word of God, whether written or handed down." A hermeneutic of the body and the voice that one may call Catholic stands in sharp contradistinction to a hermeneutic of the text and scripture that one may call Protestant. This Catholic hermeneutic cannot accept the double detachment of the text from the word [parole] and the body, end of the word from the Eucharist as incorporation in the church as a body. At this point it becomes clear that Ricoeur's philosophical choice guides his theological decision.

Ricoeur's Philosophical Choice

In “Phenomenology and Hermeneutics,” Ricoeur argues that “the Husserlian demand for the return to intuition is countered by the necessity for all understanding to be mediated by an interpretation,” such that “mediation by the text, that is, by expressions fixed in writing but also by all the documents and monuments that have a fundamental feature in common with writing,” account for the elucidation of the chains of “transmission of historical tradition.” More precisely, because it is text and not speech, as clarified by “the hermeneutical function of distanciation,” “writing renders the text autonomous with respect to the intention of the author.” Indeed the text, insofar as it is written and not spoken, takes absence from its author as well as from its referent, and even from its recipient, at least with respect to the particularity of a single reader. The medium of the text is not, or no longer, strictly the means of interpretation but also its proper, exemplary, and nearly exclusive—or at least paradigmatic—place.

Ricoeur's Theological Decision

As indicated, the consummation of the "world of the text" in "understanding oneself before the work"—namely, the function of distanciation—could lead and, in fact, did lead hermeneutics to tropology or a notion of appropriation as the process that "forms and transforms the reader's being-a-self"—but at the cost of the lived experience of the text itself. In addition, the systematic reduction of the spoken word to scripture, as suggested in "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Hermeneutics," is not
self-evident. As a hermeneut and as a confessing Protestant, Ricoeur emphasizes that a Catholic approach must understand that

biblical hermeneutics receives an important warning from philosophical hermeneutics: it must not be too quick to construct a theology of the Word [Parole] that does not include, from the outset and as its very principle, the passage from speech [parole] to writing [écriture].

This warning is highly relevant, since theology so frequently elevates the Word [Parole] over scripture. Nevertheless, these two imperatives—the choice of the medium of the “text” or of language in philosophy and, in theology, the surplus of scripture over the Word or over the world—are neither philosophically nor theologically self-evident.

The Philosophical Imperative

In conversation with recent philosophical discourses, I first pick up the thread of Romano’s questions in Au coeur de la raison, where he cites Ricoeur and Gadamer and also denounces the inversion of the relation of language to the world:

It is then no longer (according to these authors) because we are in the world that we have language; it is because we have language that we are in the world. . . . On this point, Ricoeur expressly follows Gadamer. He even takes one step further toward a linguistic idealism. By virtue of the primacy that he grants to writing and to the text in general in his definition of hermeneutics, he tends to substitute for language in its widest extension, a textual model that is meant to mediate all understanding of the self and the world. . . . In short, the text is here clothed with the power to transform a simple environment into a world.

Yet, at the very least, these theses regarding the mediation of the text—for instance, the scriptures for Ricoeur or a cluster of traditions capable of constituting a history for Gadamer—are not beyond dispute. From a philosophical perspective, we certainly cannot ignore the prelinguistic experience of the body, nor, for that matter, can we ignore affectivity and sensibility, from which language receives—much more than determines—signs. Descartes reminds us, in the second part of the Discourse on Method, “we were all children before becoming adults, and . . . it was necessary for us to be governed for a long time by our appetites and our teachers, which were often opposed to each other.” Such is the infancy of the human that we ought not to forget, at the risk of losing the inf-ans or all that which is speech-less (in fart)—all that constitutes our flesh.

The Theological Imperative

In addressing Ricoeur’s theological claim, I argue in a Catholic mode that the text or the book of scripture (liber scripturae) does not necessarily overshadow the book of the world (liber mundi)—rather, the opposite is the case. God did not first give Adam some scripture (tablets of law or a parchment) and only later, in the Garden of Eden, give himself to Adam in speech and in nature. In fact, humanity’s loss of its ability to read or interpret nature (on account of sin) is exactly why humans needed scripture as the relay for the book of the world (in order to find the world within it). The Seraphic Doctor teaches in a famous text of the Hexameron:

When humans fell and lost their knowledge, there no longer was anyone to lead them back to God, . . . this book [iste liber], that is, the world [scilicet mundus], was then as it were dead and defaced. Therefore another book [alius liber] was necessary, by which humans would be illumined in order to be able to interpret the metaphors of things. That book is Scripture [autem liber est scripturae].

Indeed, for Bonaventure, who faithfully builds on Brother Francis’s Canticle of the Creatures, and also for a so-called Catholic hermeneutic, the “book of the world” precedes and founds the book of scripture. In its use of metaphors, scripture serves only as substitute for the book of nature in its post-lapsarian state. No scripture was needed in Eden; nature spoke fluently of itself.

The deliberate choice of the long way in Ricoeur’s hermeneutic of the text over the short way of Heidegger’s hermeneutic of being-in-the-world or facticity has been contested, in one way or another, ever since the medieval period (fully recognizing the obvious anachronism of this claim). Far from being the model of writing, reading has certainly been an aid to deciphering—not primarily to the deciphering of texts that very few monks knew or were able to read but to deciphering the presence of God directly in oneself and in the world. This latter knowledge and ability were more uniformly shared. Hugh of Saint-Victor wrote the following superb lines, which were reiterated in their entirety by St. Bonaventure:
This sensible world [mundus iste sensibilis] is as a book written by the finger of God [quasi quid am liber est scriptus digito Dei]; each creature considered in itself is as a figure [quasi figurae] that has not been discovered according to the good pleasure of the human, but instituted according to divine judgment to manifest the wisdom of that of God which is invisible [ad manifestandum invisibilium Dei sapientiam].

In following and critiquing Ricoeur, I have thus set forth both philosophical reasons—dumb and silent experience—and theological reasons—the primacy of the book of the world over the book of scripture. Both reasons taken together forbid, on the one hand, the choice of the medium of the text as the paradigm of all reading, and on the other hand, the anteriority, or at the very least the primacy, of scripture over the spoken word or even over the body. Ricoeur's tenth study, "Toward Which ontology?" in Oneself as Another sought to remind us of this very problem, inflecting this time his discourse toward corporeality. It falls to me to carry out this task. I will do so now, in a first step by offering a cross-section of what (I have called) a Jewish hermeneutic. Understanding what it could teach us will provide an opening toward a form of catholicity with a distinctive hermeneutic.

The Jewish Hermeneutic or the Body of the Letter

As we discussed Ricoeur's Protestantism, so we will both respect and interrogate Levinas's thought in relation to his Judaism. My stance is the same here as above: not defiance but rather full acknowledgment—attentive nevertheless to difference. Hermeneutics, or more precisely, the relation to the text is at issue for Levinas as it was for Ricoeur. In Levinas's work, it is transformed or rather oriented "otherwise." Where the text was a medium for Ricoeur, it becomes a trace for Levinas. Where it was scripture or writing for Ricoeur, it becomes spoken word for Levinas. When asked about his proximity to Derrida and Blanchot, Levinas's quasi-posthumous avowal remains on this point as clear as possible and even decisive: "But it isn't in terms of writing that problems come to me"—however one understands in this instance the act of writing or reading scripture. But what basis then does Levinas begin to think or, better yet, "does God come to his mind"? Not on the basis of the text alone, as in a Protestant hermeneutic, or beginning with the world or the body, as in a Catholic hermeneutic, but beginning with Talmudic glosses on the text, precisely because they give body to the text in what might be called a "Jewish" hermeneutic. Interpretation is a communal process in Judaism, or it is not interpretation. More specifically, it deploys the infinite saying of a spoken Word, which first is proffered, said, and heard orally in the said, although subsequently it will let itself be inserted in a written work. Levinas's thought no longer moves from the text to the spoken word but inversely from the spoken word to the text, such that writing marks the moment of inscription of a trace rather than the transformation of a medium. An interpreter of Levinas rightfully highlights that

Revelation is the inscription of the spoken Word of God in the book where his saying lets itself be captured by the said, but at the same time, where he is also invited to share in the infinite amidst the multiple voices of those who constitute the interpretive community. . . . The God who inscribes himself, whose body is written (in scripture), makes the writing not into the sign of his transcendence but the trace of his retreat.

Levinas's hermeneutics teaches, and therefore helps us to learn, two distinct movements with respect to Ricoeur's hermeneutics. On the one hand, we learn to superimpose a plurality of significations to the point of expecting a reading from the community alone and not from the individual. On the other hand, we learn to seize in the letter of the text nothing but the trace of an absence rather than the mode of a presence—otherwise, we run the risk of seeking, conversely, to enclose the world of the text, now eternally appropriated, within the appropriating self.

Yet God enters the scope of the very text and inscribes himself in the text itself. Although in contrast to Christianity Judaism may have no concept of God's incarnation in a body, there is at play nevertheless a sort of incorporation of God in the letter: "a contraction of the infinite in scripture" or "a precarious dwelling place in the letters." Levinas insists, "the idea of the divine incarnation is foreign to Jewish spirituality" (in fact, this was a sufficient reason for the respect he received in his Judaism); further on, he continues:

But the fact that kenosis or the humility of God who is willing to come down to the level of the servile conditions of the human . . . is demonstrated in the first instance by the biblical texts themselves. The terms evoking divine Majesty or Loftiness are often followed or preceded by those describing a God bending down to look at human misery or inhabiting that misery.
In other words, if God does not come in a body as in Christianity, in Judaism he inscribes himself as a body, consecrating the letter of the Torah, exceptionally, not as text but as life, as a kind of incorporation of the logos (to return to de Lubac), or as a mode of dwelling for a God who would nonetheless not let himself be confined to it.

For Levinas, God does not become incarnate. He inscribes himself. He descends into the letter: he inscribes himself and deposits himself in the letter. In other words, his body is a written body, or yet a body that writes itself. The letter then ensures the connection between body and writing. If God inhabits the misery of humans, he can only inhabit it miserably, that is, by making letters his dwelling.\(^{52}\)

As a Protestant, Ricoeur was fleeing in a sense, and justly so within his hermeneutical perspective, from the literal sense in favor of the tropological sense. At that exact point, Levinas as a Jew rediscovers not the literality of the letter itself as the place God may dwell, extending even to the materiality of the ink and the form of the book.\(^{53}\) One more step has been taken toward what I am calling, somewhat abruptly, a “Catholic hermeneutic.” By “Catholic” I am not indicating first off this hermeneutic’s dogmatic character or force, rather simply its identity and specificity as determined by the movement I have traced thus far: on the one hand, from the written text to the living and incarnate body and, on the other, from the professed word to the exemplified voice.

**The Catholic Hermeneutic, or the Text of the Body**

From here onward, I will speak cautiously of “Catholicity” strictly as the name for a mode or manner of interpreting, wanting neither to impose it nor to universalize it. Today a form of ecumenism exists in theology and even in philosophy, which we would do well to claim, while at the same time the encounter with alterity should never exempt us from acknowledging our own identity. To illustrate, or actually to sing, with Claudel in his *Second Ode*—indeed the so-called Catholicity of this hermeneutic must be understood as praise for the created rather than a deciphering of textuality, and also of the thickness of corporeality rather than the appropriation of conscience seeking self-transformation:

Welcome then, o world made new in my eyes,
O world now one and whole!

Such a relation to the world and certainly to my own being in the world leads directly to assertions that are necessarily programmatic. First, the philosophical eventuality of the short way over the long way comes to the fore once again. Second, beyond mere theological possibility, an allegorical sense \((\text{quid credo}—\text{that which you must believe})\) and even an analogical sense \((\text{quo tendas}—\text{that toward which you must extend})\) of hermeneutics as well as scripture become theologically necessary.

First, the contemporary philosophical choice of, or return to, Heidegger’s short way via the understanding of Dasein on this side of or over against Ricoeur’s long way though analyses of language should be understood here neither as the simple indulgence of a phenomenology that has everything to win in breaking with hermeneutics nor as an absurd deference to the philosopher of Freiburg who could only be analyzed in our exposition to him. In reality, the question is the meaning of hermeneutics as well as of the phenomenology united and nearly identified with it. As noted, it is no longer a matter of thinking hermeneutics and phenomenology but that hermeneutics is phenomenology. Moreover, this predicative relation is reciprocal in the sense of an axiom for which all possibility of “graft” is definitely eradicated or at least suspended: they are each dependent on the same “sap,” as it were, although in different modalities, such as “dumb experience” or “the world of life”—describing or phenomenology for the one and interpreting or hermeneutics for the other.

Although unjustified from the point of view of its root, Heidegger’s explicit and definitive renunciation of the term hermeneutics in his 1953 “A Dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer” still has something to teach us today:

It can hardly have escaped you that in my later writings I no longer employ the term “hermeneutics.” . . . I have left an earlier standpoint, not in order to exchange it for another one, but because even the former standpoint was merely a way station along a way.\(^{54}\)

We know the philosopher’s position and its origins because they were frequently restated in his writings. In this dialogue, they are succinctly described: “The term ‘hermeneutics’ was familiar to me from my theological studies. . . . Without this theological background, I should never
have come upon the path of thinking. But origin always comes to meet us from the future.” The heart of the matter, however, is not the origin as such—the theology at which we ordinarily stop—but its dependence on the hermeneutic to which it is explicitly, this time, united. The root term “hermeneutic” is suspect, even more than theology, which conceivably could have distorted everything. I am arguing that the turning point indicates a hospitality that, in Chretien’s terms, takes place in the pages of Chretien’s The Ark of Speech describe this vividly:

The animals have been gathered for human speech and brought together in this speech, which names them long before they are brought together, according to this same story, in Noah’s ark to be saved from the flood and the destruction it brings.

Second, the theological necessity of the allegorical sense—what is to be believed—and the analogical sense—that toward which one must extend—arises from the reality that the aim of Catholic belief instills also a philosophical hermeneutic. In this case, however, it is a hermeneutic of the body rather than the text, as faced with Ricoeur, or of what I might call the Ark of flesh rather than speech as encountered with Levinas or Chretien. The incarnation changes everything;” emphasizes Merleau-Ponty in Sense and Non-Sense, shortly after describing Catholicism. This formula is valid for phenomenology in terms of one’s own incorporation as well as for theology or for the incarnation of Christ. I come not only to the world but also to the text with my flesh and body. Moreover, the text only becomes incorporated in me when I also become capable of incorporating myself in it, in the same way as we become incorporated in Christ or in the church. Further, Marcel Jousse’s expressions are worth rediscovering today in the context of a Catholic hermeneutic of corporeality. When my “mouth” at once “eats and recites,” such that “by my mouthful” of bread and spoken word, I eat the body at the same time as the book, I advance toward the two tables and become incorporated in the Word [la parole] by my incorporation into the Eucharist. “Son of man, eat what is offered you,” as uttered by the speaker in Ezekiel 3:1, which was taken up again in Revelation: “Go, take the scroll which is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.” So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll; and he said to me, “Take it and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth” (Rv 10:8b–10a).

In a Catholic mode, we will thus no longer content ourselves with the ark of speech, which runs the risk of losing sight of the distinction of Christianity’s “Word become flesh in the Son” amid Judaism’s “speech become body in the text.” I will suggest that “the ark of the flesh” may be understood both as “a body of speech to be recited”—that is, mouthfuls of scriptural verses—and a “Eucharistic body” to be assimilated—that is, partaking of a meal or even as contemplation or adoration. Indeed, Pope Benedict XVI underscores that “the spoken word of God becomes sacramental flesh in the Eucharistic event.” Therefore, insofar as there is an allegorical sense in a so-called Catholic hermeneutic, it consists in the fact that “what is to be believed” is first of all “a real presence” in transubstantiated bread in which the act of speech itself is also incorporated.

A simple exegesis of the pericope of the disciples’ experience on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13–35) is sufficient to confirm that an other Catholic hermeneutic of the body and the voice (see Chap. 2) must provide the relay for Ricoeur’s Protestant hermeneutic focused on the meaning of the text and Levinas’s Jewish hermeneutic oriented to the body of the letter. Christ is described as the exemplary first interpreter or hermeneut of the sacred texts: “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?” (Lk 24:32). Significantly, his paradigmatic character appears only after, and not before, his manifestation and nearly simultaneous disappearance: “When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight” (Lk 24:30–31). According to the Second Vatican Council, in the Catholic liturgy the “table of Scripture” or the hermeneutic of the text does not precede ontologically but only chronologically the “Eucharistic table” or the hermeneutic of the body. Indeed, the hermeneutic of the text follows, and discovers its very foundation in, the hermeneutic of the body. The body of the text takes root in the body of the church—not the opposite. If the word of God is unique, it is heard qua text at the same time as it is eaten qua body; better, it only resonates on the eardrum, or is heard, because it is first tasted by the palate, or is manducated. Indeed, “the faithful are nourished in the Word of God at the double table of the Sacred Scripture and the Eucharist.”
In Origen’s famous tripartite division of “three bodies,” not only the (historical) “body of flesh” and the (textual) “body of Scripture” are essential, but also and most importantly the (Eucharistic) “sacramental body” by which all three are bound to one another in an intimate knot. St. Jerome later underscores this point, “when we are listening to the word of God, . . . God’s Word and Christ’s flesh and blood are being poured into our ears,” such that “the Holy Spirit fashions the sacramental body of Christ, as it fashions in Mary his body of flesh and the body of Scripture,” as Origen had already suggested. 64

§6. Toward a Phenomenality of the Text

Intentional Lived Experiences

The phenomenality of the text overtakes a hermeneutics of the text. The “lived experiences” (Erlebnis) of the reader, but also those of the author and perhaps even of what takes place in the text itself, will no longer be considered “dead material.” Rather, drawing further on the terms of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology, they are “intentional” lived experiences—that is, “a consciousness of.” 65 If for Ricoeur a triple reduction of the author, the reader, and the referent makes the world of the text appear clearly as such, what takes place in the text—and almost independently of the text—between the characters at play within the text proceeds indeed on a yet to be discovered and never to be reduced life-world (Lebenswelt). It is reasonable to maintain that the text will always provide support for the events and characters in the text: we should never detach ourselves from the text in the act of reading that consecrates the crossing. Nevertheless, we do not always require the medium of the text to “mediate” us. The finger that points to the moon will never mistake the finger for the target, at the risk inversely of confusing the target and the means to reach it. The demonstration of the phenomenality of the text will depend certainly, but in part only, on the context, which is itself borrowed from an unforgettable lived experience—whether via a historical or referential hermeneutic. But in addition, precisely in the “life” that it seeks to exhibit and, as it were, is inherent and even incarnate in it (as in a hermeneutic of the “fictorial life”), a true “lived experience of a consciousness-of”—or a mode of intersubjectivity—is now seen at work among the very actors in the text, albeit without always keeping strictly to the textual language that provides access to it. 66

Intersubjectivity

The following example, drawn from the Gospels—“good news” (euangelia) understood precisely as a lived experience and not exclusively as a text—may be helpful. A phenomenological meditation on the anguish of Christ before death consists first in seeing him, Christ-himself, experience the intersubjective sphere in which he is engaged with Peter, Jacob, and John. Second, it describes him in relation to his fear of dying in the account of “the cup.” Third and finally, it is to contemplate him passing all the way through the narrow path of anguish when he will accept to surrender himself—in Christ’s well-known utterance: “nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Lk 22: 42b). In this case, we are first and foremost facing neither text, although the text may set us in motion, nor ourselves from whom we must first learn to turn away in order to see him truly as he is showing himself. This lived experience is first his own before I share it: it is in letting it be as itself—the allegorical sense—that I will then be able to be challenged or even troubled—the tropological sense. 67

What is “to be read” and indeed “to be lived” in the proclaimed Gospel surely occurs in all literature—as with Flaubert’s Madame Bovary or yet Stendhal’s Julien Sorel, for example. There also intersubjectivity is at work and the play between the characters themselves matters at least as much as, if not more than, their effect of challenging me. In fact, their only intent is to collide and incorporate me into their own world. Moreover, with the “word of God” and especially with the account of the incarnate Logos—that is, the good news—the particular case modifies the rule (which typically in literature is determinative). The account of Christ at Gethsemane—but also and perhaps more than anywhere else, the prologue of the Gospel of John—produces the unique and exemplary observation that “the one of whom we speak”—namely, Christ—is at the same time “the one who speaks”—that is, the Word [Verbe]. This identification of the locution (the God of whom I speak) and the locutor (the God who speaks to me precisely when I speak of him) is original as well as extraordinary. It is precisely in this identification that one finds the specificity of the sacred text and in fact the fullness of its unity. In complete agreement with Ricoeur:

Theological hermeneutics present features that are so original that the relation is gradually inverted, and theological hermeneutics finally subordinates philosophical hermeneutics to itself as its own organon. 68
In other words, without overgeneralization, it is appropriate to recognize that the theological itself may modify the philosophical to the point of transforming its structure and even making it secondary (as in Ricoeur’s hermeneutics), even if it remains but a *hapax legoumenon* that he never brings to its term or, at least, never erects as a rule.

My hypothesis—and the Catholic hermeneutic unfolding in this text—entail the following key point. Although the text cannot serve as a unique basis for interpretation, we should, however, recognize its exemplary structural modification of theology understood as the identification of its “object” (discourse about God [*theo-logy]*) and its subject (discourse of God [*theo-logy*]), provided that we pay more attention to the *epiphany internal* to the text or to its own *phenomenality* than to its sole mediation by language. The biblical *logos* articulates, par excellence, the apophasic mode of being (*apophainesthai*) of Christic language: “showing Him showing himself”—more than we seeking to show him; “claiming Himself addressing himself to us”—though we seek to communicate him by evoking him. Indeed, we must recall Heidegger’s claim, the pioneer of a hermeneutic of facticity grappling with textuality: “Logos, as speech really means *deloun*, to make manifest ‘what is being talked about’ in speech. Aristotle explicates this function of speech more precisely as *apophaiesthai*.”

**Intercorporeality**

We should thus seek, and we will perhaps then find, intentional lived experiences (that is, consciousness-of) in a hermeneutic of facticity rather than textuality. Such a hermeneutic of facticity attends to what arises from the *intercorporeality* of lived experiences of what—and of the One who—is spoken of and speaks in the text (what I call the allegorical sense in relation to Christ), rather than focus on the trial of the one who reads the text and in that way exposes himself at the same time as he appropriates the text (what I call the tropological sense in relation to the reader). The Philippians hymn proclaims, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5)—not the reverse. I am thus not first, and don’t first understand myself “in front of the text” (is pick back up an expression dear to Ricoeur). On the contrary, the text is there *in front of me* as if I were saying “let me be read with authority by the Holy Scriptures.”

To cite Chretien’s new proposition that is yet to be deployed philosophically, “When faced with the Bible, every appropriation must at the same time be a disappropriation” such that “it is necessary for the intelligence to make itself a prayer in order for it to become exegeile, that is to say, to read as it allows itself to be read.” I do not first encounter God in God’s “letter”—whether as the historical-critical reference or the trace of the Torah or in *my* lived experience of consciousness—that is, in the tropological aim of the textual hermeneutics. Rather, it invites me to incorpoży myself into its fleshly lived experience—the allegorical aim, even anagogical, of the hermeneutics of the body.

The approach via the phenomenality of the text thus reverses the perspective of a textual hermeneutic. Where hermeneutics suggests that the text takes me as its aim, phenomenality maintains, at the fore, the character of the text as event in its pure and simple alterity, albeit to incorporate me into it and thus not let me become a total stranger to it. The transcendental aim of a text that, in the same way as nature in Kant’s understanding, would respond only to “the questions we ask it” is utterly and consciously eliminated. The alterity of disappropriation replaces the egoity of appropriation. Claudel strikingly insists, “But to say that we question the Scriptures is incorrect. It is better to admit that the Scriptures question us and find for each of us, throughout every age and generation, the right *claiming* of appropriation. Claudel strikingly insists, “But to say that we question the Scriptures is incorrect. It is better to admit that the Scriptures question us and find for each of us, throughout every age and generation, the right question.”

Moreover, the inauthenticity of the *happily* lost reader—all the more “himself” as he has accepted not to find himself—follows upon the authenticity of a being—there who is capable of managing everything. Indeed, Claudel, as already noted, claims that “[the Bible] is a drama, I would say, not enacted by us so much as through Him, just as the actors of the Old Testament lived through Him.”

*My* lived experience—the moral or tropological sense of textual hermeneutics—does not therefore matter, or very little, in light of the displacement and disorientation of my egoity and in view of its own alterity—that is, the allegorical, even anagogical sense rising from the text’s phenomenality. In reality, I will truly rejoin the text as a “never appropriated” lived experience and the place of a paradoxical “intercorporeality” only in turning away from the text as mediation.

The époché of a true hermeneutics of the facticial life (see Chapter 4, §13) suspends not only the author in his genesis, the referent in its historicity, and the reader in his singularity, but, also and most significantly, the very textual “base” in its role as the incessantly imposed “medium.” The aim of this last bracketing is to come to all that is ineffable and silent in intercorporeal relations or in the *infans* (not as “the struggle to speak” but) as the engendering of a body, which is ceaselessly being knit together. The body of scripture always waits for the bodily combative embrace with its reader, and in this “dumb experience” alone is said; or rather is heard and lived, what the text does not say. The text opens on the “white” of *A Roll of the Dice* (to draw on Mallarmé), itself waiting to be undergone (ex-periri) rather than simply expressed. Joseph Conrad professes with
regard to literature, which I adopt in all its detail, and all the more so, for a hermeneutics of scripture:

My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see. That—and no more, and it is everything. If I succeed, you shall find there according to your deserts: encouragement, consolation, fear, charm—all you demand—and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask.5

Neither text nor writing as with Ricoeur, neither letter nor trace as with Levinas, the phenomenality exhibited in the act of reading is thus, in a Christian or rather a Catholic mode, that of the body or, better yet, of the bodily, “hand-to-hand combative” embrace of the reader always in a struggle with “what is spoken,” letting himself be displaced, even forgotten, in an incorporation where the Eucharist, of course, constitutes the key event. Moving from the meaning of the text in the Protestant hermeneutic to the body of the letter in the Jewish hermeneutic and finally to the text of the body in the so-called Catholic hermeneutic, the focus shifts to the voice rather than writing and to incarnate flesh rather than embodied speech. Indeed, held at all times in a body, the quasi-carnal voice of the incarnate Word [Verbe]—thus not only his spoken word and even less so his text—resonates still today in scripture such that, “in the Word” precisely, we might “live bodily” in the whole fullness of divinity (Col 2:9). In listening “almost with the ears of our flesh,” in St. Francis’s phrase, and according to a “conversion of the senses” as Bonaventure taught, we will hear his voice more than we will read his text and we will find his iconic presence rather than his quasi-amnesic trace. Thus, I can conclude with Hugh of Saint-Victor’s admirable text that will serve as the guiding thread for the next chapter:

The word of God closed in human flesh appeared visibly a single time and now, each day [Quotidie], this same word comes himself to us under the cover of a human voice [humana voce conditum]. Certainly its manner by which it makes itself known to humans is different according to whether it’s by his flesh [per carmem] or by the human voice [per vocem humana]. And yet, in a certain manner [quodammodo], the voice of the word must be understood at present as the flesh was then [hic inteligenda est vox verbi quod ibi caro Dei].75

For a Hermeneutic of the Body and the Voice

Hic intelligenda est vox Verbi quod ibi caro Dei—“the voice of the Word must be understood at present as the flesh of God was understood then.”10

This single formula from Hugh of Saint-Victor is sufficient to illuminate the Catholic hermeneutic of the body and the voice as introduced so far. The reminder is certainly appropriate. A “Catholic” hermeneutic should not be opposed to a “Jewish” hermeneutic or to a “Protestant” hermeneutic in a confessional struggle, which fortunately today is by and large left behind. Catholic theology lives in an ecumenism of good taste; it regularly recognizes its debt to Jewish or Protestant contributions to theology—contributions it should safeguard. These contemporary approaches are not, and never have been, modes of condemnation. The inflection orienting their thought is solely significant (see Chapter 1, §5). Ricoeur’s Protestant hermeneutic, with its focus on the meaning of the text, insisted on the book of scripture rather than the book of the world as its anchor. Levinas’s Jewish hermeneutic centered on the body of the letter sought to show how the sacred text itself becomes the trace of the materiality of an inscription, which incessantly returns to the text without our ever being able to be freed from it. As observed in Chapter 1, we face the medium of the text on the one hand, and on the other a quasi-carnal inscription. Thus, the written text is primary in Protestantism and Judaism according to a truly necessary “liturgy of the Word,” but in a Catholic structure it designates only one of the “two tables”—the other being the Eucharistic table—where we consecrate as well as celebrate.
From Valentinus to Bultmann this flesh and blood have been spiritualized and demythologized. 37

Scotus’s “horizon of finitude,” Aquinas’s “overlaying” such finitude in the figure of the God-man, and Bonaventure’s notion of its “conversion” at the heart of a trinitarian monadology marks the three steps by which metaphysics indicates the crossing of the world (meta-phusis) carried out as much by the human as it is transformed by God. The audacity of the [crossing of the] Rubicon is this suffering and passage—without being overtaken, however. The crossing of the ford of this truly small river, yet with such high stakes, leaves no one indifferent—neither the one who leads his army, nor those who remain somewhat dumbfounded by such an act. Nevertheless, alea iacta est: the die has been cast,” as Caesar proclaimed before launching his conquest. The march is underway, and it must now be completed in Chapter 6, “Finally Theology.” Then at last, the author as well as the reader will have the task of discovering a new opening with an “after” (or conclusion) that will not fail to newly orient them together.

“Finally theology.” A theologian should utter this phrase—not a philosopher. One could fear that the great crossing finally had no other goal than to push us across the ford, as if the crossing of the Rubicon signified only the time of an Iliad without an Odyssey. Yet my principal thesis is that the two-way journey, there and back again with a definite return, is necessary to give each riverbank its specificity. I am first of all a philosopher and want to remain one. I am all the more committed to remaining a philosopher after having engaged in a vis-à-vis without a mode of subsidiarity with another discipline. Barely a few years ago, at least in France, cries of treachery, renouncement, even defeat or blasphemy would probably have been heard. Will the philosopher capitulate—he who had acquired his rights to the highest struggle, convincing the theologian of his autonomy and ignoring all theological matters in his haughtiness? Today philosophy certainly is no longer kept separate, and the hour has perhaps struck for a so-called “return to theology.” But should we so quickly proclaim, along with Gilson, a “rediscovered theology” in opposition and contradiction to a “lost theology”? Is it sufficient to restore an ancient model, such as Aquinas’s, as the satisfactory and unique paradigm, even if it traces the way for a distinction without confusion or separation, as we showed above (Chapter 5, §17)?

Certainly a kairos appears today to disrupt the chronos; a timely event in the course of time. Where one might have believed theology forgotten, even rejected, it returns in force at the heart of the French university in the
hole in the wall separating philosophy from theology. In this way, Blondel created some open space that remained to be occupied and that de Lubac would eventually fill. If for Blondel the supernatural is “necessary but inaccessible,” then revelation itself will dictate the conditions of its accessibility in the “mystery of the supernatural” of what has been revealed, according to de Lubac. The one remains on the threshold of the opening that he pierced; the other invests the field opened by the gaping hole.

Nevertheless, one must ask whether then as now the one ever truly meets up with the other. If philosophy and theology no longer stare stonily at each other, as in the case of a “separated philosophy,” nor are only complementary in a “subaltern philosophy,” are they not still, and always will remain, each in their separate field? Having become allies, have they actually met each other? After years of dividing up their tasks—the philosopher opens and the theologian fills—have not philosophy and theology progressively fallen into a division of labor where each shift’s team continues to be separated one from the other, even though the lines of production are interconnected? In other words, although theology can no longer be produced without philosophy and philosophy can indeed open onto theology without letting itself be annexed, have philosophers and theologians truly engaged in debates and deliberations? Have they at least communicated, but more importantly found that the work of the one could become the professional experience of the other? This is not to confuse the tasks, since each one has its proper approach to the material, but to introduce flexibility into the labor for a new and more fecund productivity. To further play out the metaphor: as “in a factory,” in fashioning a discourse on God, both philosophers and theologians labor today and are better informed of the professional experience of the other insofar as they attend trainings in order to become familiar with and try out the other’s job, not to usurp it, but to enrich it with their own experience and their original way of conceptualizing it.

What appears here as a request for a division of professions, rather than a division of tasks, is far from being realized. The threshold established by Blondel, which opened a space for de Lubac, remains the only model affirmed today, or rather, the only properly “legitimate” one. Ricoeur can thus be seen as its standard-bearer, repeating in his Protestant context what Blondel carried out in his Catholic one. The philosopher from Nantes had many occasions to step across the threshold or brave the prohibition. Already in Finitude and Culpability (1960), where he discusses fallibility and sin, he could have addressed grace and even redemption, as in Lacoste’s work. The radicality of the rupture, however, consecrates again both the imperative of conversion and the logic of separation. If the chiaroscuro remains within the eschatological horizon, we might ask if
the revealed does not once again overdetermine existentiality or the “being over-there” of our pure and simple “being there.” (e) To work strictly with the scriptural texts as the basis for thought, in particular the Gospel of John as Henry promotes could lead one to believe in a new unity. But here also the encounter is distorted. Not knowing when we philosophize and when we theologize, as shown in §20, we cannot know who we are when we believe to be, at the same time, on both sides of the opening. (f) Finally, to claim, along with Chrétién, that the scriptural text itself is the place of philosophy’s greatest literality is not to theologize anymore than philosophize. The one who stands on this side of the distinction between the disciplines certainly has the advantage of not needing to decide, but also forgets the significance of the prior debates about a separated philosophy. Clearly, no one crosses the Rubicon when he may have thought that he did so. No one practices philosophy and theology by appealing to the text as a literary given, authorizing oneself, at times wrongly, to dispose of what truly constitutes a tradition and is necessary for any real interpretation.

The Illusion of the Leap

From the threshold upon which philosophers stop at the doors of theology and leave to others the care for that task, should one then take the leap? I noted this question in passing, at least in reference to Scotus, but have yet to develop it. A common requirement for all contemporary phenomenologists who draw on theology is disjunction rather than conjunction, the gap rather than continuity, a rupture rather than an overlaying.

Pascal can serve as a figurehead and example in light of a rarely discussed interpretation of his text. The “God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, and not of the philosophers and scholars” found in his Memorial,4 dating from 1654, serves as a prism for a philosophy that up until today takes its proper name not from being specifically philosophical, but from being nonphilosophical—that is, not “of the philosophers”—at least in the sense of rejecting any abrupt imposition of a discourse of God (theo-logia) that cancels out, at the same time, any discourse about God (theo-logia). In other words, the philosopher paradoxically negates his own discipline and renames it metaphysics or ontotheology in order to lay claim to a so-called “other” discipline that he newly calls philosophy. Yet this newly created philosopher remains well versed, and even dabbles, in theology without acknowledging or addressing it. In an exemplary fashion, the contemporary interpretation of Pascal’s “three orders” displays this very problematic. “The infinite distance between bodies and minds is a figure of the infinitely more infinite distance between minds and charity, for charity is supernatural.”5 The ordering of the flesh, the spirit, and charity is telling. Each inferior order remains autonomous and foreign to the superior order, such that a radical rupture establishes itself between the spheres to the point of instituting a hierarchy of classes. The kings, the wealthy, and the captains (the people of the flesh) share nothing in common with the sages and the great geniuses (the people of the spirit) who look down on them or contemplate them from above. Having no need for fleshly or spiritual greatness, since God alone suffices, the saints (the people of love) alone are seen by God and the angels.6 In sum, the superior level alone sees and supervises the inferior level, and not the opposite. As a result, the purity of the discourse about sanctity, whether philosophical or theological, is gained by denouncing any intermixing with a common humanity, who is not yet converted and “metamorphed.” This angelic “swan dive,” to say the least, produces, on the one hand, an overdetermination of Pascal’s interpretation in the radical rupture between the human and the divine and, on the other hand, an apology for theological reason, which has nothing or barely anything in common with philosophical reason.

Turning first to Pascal’s interpretation: neither the recourse to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob nor the presumed ruptures among the three orders of flesh, spirit, and charity are sufficient to consummate the separation to such a degree. An attentive reading of the Memorial and its interpretation leads us to the “figure” rather than the “rupture,” to the God of Jesus Christ, cited immediately afterward, rather than to the denunciation of the previously rejected God of the philosophers: “God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, and not of the philosophers and scholars ... God of Jesus Christ.”7 In fact, nothing requires or compels us to think of the God of Jesus Christ in a radical opposition to the God of the philosophers, even here in Pascal’s work. After all, what gives itself figuratively as “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” could just as well designate “the God of the philosophers and the scientists.” The structure of Pascal’s thought, inasmuch as it is biblical and not only philosophical, consists in anticipation rather than opposition, in figuration more than separation. Reread figuratively, the philosophers and the scientists, along with their God or their concept, are not so terribly heterogeneous to salvation that they cannot participate in it. They do not imply the condemnation of the whole of humanity for neither wanting nor succeeding to attain “love.” The elitism of the third order, which is called “love” but generally excludes philosophers on account of their “thinking,” forgets the essential character of the human per se, known in the prefiguration and continuity of genus’s rather than in the opposition of classes. As proof, Pascal emphasized, as
cited above, that the "infinite distance between bodies and minds is a figure of the infinitely more infinite distance between minds and charity." The *Memorial*’s notion of "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" and of also the three orders of flesh, spirit, and love in the *Pensees* present relations of figuration rather than exclusion, differentiation more than disqualification.

The problem with the Jansenist concept of grace in theology can sometimes translate into an elitism of reason and philosophy, which a number of contemporary philosophers perpetuate without daring to openly acknowledge it. When read carefully and reread within a horizon of figuration, Pascal eludes that interpretation. Salvation is not a matter of separation but integration. All philosophy worthy of the name (and all theology, as well) would no longer look down on or contemplate from above the life lived over-there or down-below, without risking losing the double movement that goes from below to above and from above to below. We want to neither omit nor even denigrate each of the orders that constitute our common humanity. Theology from above, as indicated in Chapter 5, §16, can only be received from a philosophy from below. Failure to understand this problem leads at times to the more or less unacknowledged conversion of theology from above into philosophy from above, as if reason itself—even philosophy—could receive a supernatural or revealed status that cannot truly be directly attributed to it.

The philosophical apology for "the three orders" and the false opposition of the "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" to the "God of the philosophers and the scientists" produces a "pastorale" of the rupture rather than continuity, of the quest for purity more than the recognition of our own obscurity. Certainly that may be surprising. A similar attitude of "looking down on" or "surveying from the heights," as Merleau-Ponty also says, joins the phenomenological discourses on revealed reason and the evangelical practices of a pure and totally separated faith as the two ends of one same chain. Catholic theology took in the past a position against demythologization and de-hellenization, as shown in Chapter 4, §13. Today the philosophical quest for a pure rationality without admixture in the order of charity may have the same weakness as the argumentation previously denounced. In claiming to boldly separate what gives itself first as mixed by means of a "leap" into pure faith (or philosophy), we sometimes forget the obscurities and oscillations in all humans. When thinking any alterity "on the way"—on *his* way—upon a predetermined route, the Christian’s "evidence" leads him often to forget the *Holzwege*, or the wild trails, upon which God can also reveal himself through humanity this time. It is a matter of finding a new equilibrium between the ways, or approaches, as well as between the *corpora*. Assuredly this entails accounting for the rupture in Bonaventure’s work, for the continuity in Aquinas, and for St. Damien’s immediate conversion before Christ in Saint Francis’s account, but also the slow and laborious discussion with the Cathar innkeeper in Toulouse in St. Dominic’s writings.

The Limited Phenomenon

The appeal to the double interpretation of the Lukan passage describing the experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (§17) introduced Marion’s approach determined by his concepts of excess or the saturated phenomenon. But in counterpoint, it indicates also a way via poverty or the limited phenomenon, which I am here advancing. In reality, these two approaches are not opposed: they signal two different, even complementary, ways to consider the rupture and the opening; that is, the absoluteness of revelation but also the possibility of transformation. Surely the "Rubicon" could flow between the two "banks" of philosophy and theology, provided that, from the human point of view, one accepts crossing from the one to the other. No one will pick a fight when and where the armies are advancing into battle, each one according to its own marching orders and according to its proper strategy. No one engages in battle by mistake if clearly aware of fighting a different war.

Nevertheless, even if the pathway of transformation begins with the human per se and takes precedence over the absoluteness of the revelation of God or reason, no argument for humanism could constitute alone the meaning of Christianity. The well-known saying by Irenaeus in *Adversus Haereses* that "God was made a man among men so that man may become God" is precisely why divinization serves as the horizon for humanization, or the condition of the divine as the desire of the human. Yet in insisting too much on the brilliance of the Greek tradition, from Irenaeus to Denis the Aeropagite after the timely rediscovery of the church fathers during Vatican II, we have forgotten the greatest strengths of the Latin tradition from Tertullian to Aquinas. This forgetfulness is compounded by an ancient misinterpretation of the thought of St. Augustine, which believes and mistakenly judges that the weight of sin constitutes the whole of the Latin tradition. As a consequence, we have turned today to the primacy of glory as the unique mode of Christianity.

Aquinas, however, at the very heart of the Catholic tradition, never ceased to emphasize that *Deus non est primum quid a nobis cognosci*—that is, "God is not the first object of our knowledge." Of course, there is the unlimited. Certainly we would always prefer the evidence of illumination to
fumbling around in darkness. And clearly, we want to believe to have already arrived when we have barely set out on our way. Yet, as Aquinas says, “our soul, as long as we live in this life, has its being in corporeal matter; hence naturally it knows only what has a form in matter. . . . Hence it is impossible for the soul of man in this life to see the essence of God.”

Everything has been said. We would like to see God in his essence, but we only discover his existence. We desire the saturated, but we see only the limited. We would like to be clothed in the garments of angels, but we find ourselves only in human skin.

We could regret not having arrived. We could increase the pace only to be weakened in other ways. This is neither God’s plan nor the human’s, however, as soon as we realize that we pass through the God-man. The status viae or the horizon of finitude—that is, the properly philosophical discourse of the human—is not simply the consolation prize of the being-there in patria or of the life in beatitude—namely, the theological reasoning of God. Even in the new life after the final resurrection, Aquinas surprisingly declares as he speaks of beatification, “the created light of glory received into any created intellect cannot be infinite.”

“perpetually, then, the soul will not be without the body.” In other words, and this is the full force of Aquinas’s thought and his teaching for us today, the limit or finitude is not the only fact about the human being-there that would need to be overcome or should be opposed by the verticality of a God who comes abruptly to change everything. It belongs through and through to our humanity, because “nothing can be received from beyond one’s own measure.” Since the human is created within the limits, precisely on account of his status of creature, he does not expect to escape into the unlimitedness of the uncreated. He will wait only for the splendor of the One who desires to dwell at the heart of his finite condition, to shine within him. To forget this limit qua creature is to seek wrongly to leave behind our God-given human position. After all, God offers it to us as our vocation: to let us then be converted and “metamorphed” within his divine Trinity.

Humanity’s temptation—perhaps also the key temptation of a certain form of contemporary and Christian philosophy—is to seek to escape into the unlimited, when, in fact, the human being is desired and considered within the limit, or yet to invest in the secret hope of our being-over-there or being-up-above, when we are first called to remain and love our being-there in its here-below. Where finitude is only observed in philosophy, it is, on the contrary, sought and desired in theology. Perhaps this is the greatest gap between philosophy and theology, now understood in terms of the difference between the concepts of world and creation. While we are “purely nature” from Cajetan to Heidegger, we discover ourselves “creatures” from Aquinas to von Balthasar. The reality is the same: finitude or the human per se. Nevertheless, the interpretation is different: cornered in our being-there for Heidegger, on the one side, and awaited in our being-here-below for Aquinas, on the other. Far from breaking away from the whole of humanity or making his own path into the unique modality, the Christian offers another reading of what is first given to every human. The attitude is not exclusionary or a demand for conversion, but the meeting of a diversity of interpretations and relationships. Knowing where to dwell, that is, in his humanity, the philosopher will not or no longer need to regret not being a theologian or need to play the theological game without knowing his specific philosophical task. On the contrary, he receives from theology itself the right and the duty, or, better the vocation, to be and remain always a philosopher—in the same way that Christ as the figure of the God-man enjoin us paradoxically to attend also to the human and go through humanity in order to find God there. Therefore, a principle of proportionality will govern the exercise of philosophy in relation to the joint practice of theology: after the opposition or the simple complementarity of the disciplines, the relay takes place finally here in their connection as much as cross-fertilization.

§20. The Principle of Proportionality

The More We Theologize, the Better We Philosophize

The thesis of a passage toward theology, following the image of a two-way crossing of the Rubicon—“there and back again”—could offer the impression that I am ready to confuse everything or usurp the garments of the other and appear, as it were, in disguise. Such assertions are based on mistaken principles and are at variance with history. They must be denounced. In fact, the exact opposite is the case: we forget what constitutes our own attire at times because we do not know how to wear the other’s clothing.

Philosophia ancilla theologae—philosophy is a servant of theology—returning to Aquinas’s formula ($17) no longer means being content to recognize only that the servant is surely not the mistress of the house and must not be destroyed in order to continue serving the master. Even if she is present in the house and even resides in the home itself, still sometimes, she must be invited into the master’s apartments and not restrict herself to the simple role of serving. In refusing to share his intimacy, even his bed, the master stands guard over his sphere of influence, which the
servant will always seek to usurp. Yet to accuse the disciplines of adultery, or even indict a possible illegitimate child, is to fail to understand that the lovers have been married at all times and are bound for eternity. Aquinas is not a philosopher or a theologian but philosopher and theologian. Moreover, what Aquinas accomplished in his position—that is, maintaining in the unity of a same being both philosophy and theology—theologically explaining for example the question of the Trinity (Prima Pars of the Summa theologiae) or of the Incarnation (Tertia Pars), as well as philosophically how the human being in his action is taken up in this act of return to God without losing anything of his humanity (Secunda Pars)—was not accomplished by Gilson any more than by all the other protagonists of contemporary phenomenology. Of course, the solution is not simply to return to Aquinas. It consists in showing the extent to which his gesture, which founds Catholicism, at the same time, forbids us to be satisfied today with the simple strategy of "threshold" and "complementation." The prohibition of the passage of philosophy to theology is not a matter of forbidden fruit or even an error in which not to fall. Only the history of philosophy and theology erected that wall. The twentieth century created the breach in it; the twenty-first century will have to find a passage through it.

The principle of proportionality according to which "the more we theologize, the better we philosophize" will serve as the leitmotiv for this liberated theology. The ambiguity faced today is not, as mistakenly believed, that philosophy opens onto theology or takes over its field, but that it no longer knows when the discourse of the self-proclaimed philosopher falls under the jurisdiction of philosophy or belongs to theology. In reality, we must theologize if we want to truly philosophize, at least when philosophy claims to reach theology's threshold. Neither the scriptures nor the exegete alone can remain philosophers' sole partners, as is the case in the gestures of hermeneutics or phenomenology today (for example, the exegetes are Ricoeur's partners and the Gospel of John, Henry's). Tradition imposes the passage through theology and its study as such, even in an ecclesial and institutional mode. The proportionality of this saying—the more we theologize, the better we philosophize—appears with great clarity only in the practice of both disciplines. Knowing precisely when and where we pass into theology, we know exactly when and where we were in philosophy, and vice versa. Finitude, or the human per se, returning to dearly held formulas, are indeed starting points for philosophy and under the jurisdiction of the philosopher (§16). But only as this finitude is then rejoined (§17) and transformed (Chapter 5, §18) in the recited and assumed act of the Resurrection, is it made known that we were actually within the realm of true humanity and thus of philosophy—not of divinity concealed under the cover of humanity—that is, theology. The starting points are all the more philosophical when the endpoints are theological. This position can be summarized as the principle of "the philosopher before all else," which should be adopted today not against theology but, on the contrary, for it, in order to dwell otherwise and better situated within it.17

The Counterblow

The movement from the conquest to the crossing of the Rubicon—in opposition to the philosophies of the threshold and the leap (§19)—and from the recognition of the meaning of the limit to the proportional relation of philosophy and theology (§20) ultimately generates a counterblow upon philosophy itself, or at least upon phenomenology. Indeed, ever since the dawn of the theological turn, if one is to believe Janicaud, beginning with the publication of Levinas's Totality and Infinity in 1961, we have not ceased making theological inquiries on the basis of phenomenology, recognizing that a notion of "the God who comes to mind" could also be developed phenomenologically. One question must still be answered. If phenomenology can utterly renew the approach to the divine on its own account with a fecundity that must be honored today, would not theology itself also have the means, in a "rebound" or a "backlash," to question phenomenology as such, even to make it see its insufficiencies or at least its insufficiencies?

As denounced earlier, contemporary phenomenology exhibits a triple excess that must be restated, not to leave it behind but to consider them otherwise: first, the hypertrophy of the flesh over against the body; second, the surplus of sense over nonsense; third, the over-determination of passivity with respect to activity. The deviations of the flesh led to its stigmatization, which was so completely and adeptly typified that nothing remained of the body or the organic—the Körper—by dint of drawing it into a simple lived interiority. Between the extended body and the lived body, it was thus necessary to find and define the spread body—that is, the body on this side of any significating, all the way into the depths of its interior chaos. Christ indwells this very body in his Eucharist.18

The questioning of phenomenology itself, and its very capacity to attend to non-sense or the organic body, arises from the counterblow of theology on phenomenology—not the opposite. Everything changes here: it is no longer the flesh or Leib that explains Christ's Incarnation as with Henry, but Christ's Incarnation that questions Leib or the meaning of its consistence qua body, according to my own perspective. This means retracing
one's steps, since the approach is now taken in reverse direction: the move is now from the theological to the phenomenological, and no longer from the phenomenological to the theological. Only without reading Tertullian or in reading him poorly, is it possible to think that the flesh of Christ is no more than an illustration of the lived body in its interiority or auto-affection. Rather, it is a body "spread out" in its organic character, as inaccessible to conceptuality as it is determinative for my affectivity. The wonders that astonished the church fathers as they argued against the Gnostics, in particular against Valentinus, were precisely that Christ himself had, like us,

the muscles as turf, the bones as rocks, even a sort of pebbles round the nipples. Look upon the clinging bands of the sinews as the fibres of roots, the branching meanderings of the veins as the twistings of rivers, the down as moss, the hair as grass, even the very treasures of the marrow in its secret place as the goldmines of the flesh. 19

Here, it is not a question of the appearance of a body or the reduction of the body to a lived experience, but a matter of the corporeal and biological human reality of this God-man, which establishes his kinship with "our race" (Acts 17:26). Certainly he is not portrayed here as the Christos Angelos, evanescent within a glorious cloud, which, however desirable it would be, is evidently false. In losing the thickness of the body, the heart of the divine's—but also the very human's—incarnation is lost.

The time has thus come to question phenomenology on the basis of theology and not always and again to develop theology phenomenologically. Criticisms may arise mistakenly asserting that I am engaging in a radical theologization of phenomenology or a phenomenological turn of French theology. In this case, the error is to believe that it is appropriate first of all and exclusively to theologize. I am not following or want to follow that approach. Rather than writing theology, I desire to write philosophy, but I will philosophize that much better if I agree also to do theology. The paradox is that precisely where and how philosophy and theology have been separated is now where and how they should properly be united. Only in uniting philosophy and theology can we see that we are consciously crossing the ford at the same time from philosopher to theologian and reciprocally from theologian to philosopher. The whole movement is held and maintained in the unity of the same being and according to a mutually fecund investigation.

The Liberation of Theology by Philosophy

A few years ago, in an ongoing Hegelian gesture, claims of a liberation of philosophy by theology were still resounding in that "in the elevation of one who thinks (or philosophizes) is also found a liberation of his thought for philosophy."20 In direct contrast, I propose here a liberation of theology by philosophy (as already indicated in §18) by which philosophy discovers its marks of nobility and one of its principal raison d'êtres. A philosophy of religion is not identical to a philosophy of religious experience (§13). An account of the experience of faith as such, albeit rooted in a form of belief originally shared by all humanity (see Chapter 3, "Always Believing"), must itself be undertaken in order to account for a distinct conceptuality. Augustine, Pascal, Kierkegaard, even Nietzsche himself cannot be studied independently of this mode of faith (or nonfaith), which produces a discourse anchored in a truth that is not content with simply being objectivized. The significant question and line of demarcation is not whether one is or is not a "confessing believer." At the very least, we should recognize that a confession, or a refusal to confess, energizes this type of discourse, whose subjective heart must be engaged—otherwise we run the risk of missing the authentic and unsurpassable realities that are the sources of inspiration for what is simply stated or conceptualized.

To liberate theology by means of philosophy and not the opposite is neither to renounce philosophy nor even to reduce it to an ancillary role (§17). On the contrary, philosophy will be all the stronger as it will have proved its power of deliverance precisely at the point where the theologian would probably have remained in a purely didactic exposition if he had not also found the philosopher's heuristic capacity to question and enroot thought in the figure of the human per se. As the philosopher and the theologian cross the Rubicon, they will have no choice in passing each other but to let themselves be transformed—each one by the other. The first will teach the second about the human journey. The second will make the first see that he cannot refuse to open himself—upon a decision, of course (Chapter 4, §14)—to the transcendence of the One who comes to "metamorphose" everything, to the extent to which he has first assumed it in its entirety. Philosophy liberates theology not only insofar as it "prepares it" (preambula fidelis) but also as it makes it its own object according to a heurisic, descriptive—but not actualizing—mode (§16). Theology receives itself from philosophy at the same time as it opens onto it and offers it the actuality of an act of faith that only the revealed and its "in-common" can at once provoke and accompany (Chapter 4, §15). Working neither in pure
opposition nor in simple complementarity—and even less in competition, the two disciplines present themselves and articulate a discourse according to a common ascēsis or spiritual exercise—its source of movement, as it were—whether it is the askēsis of ancient philosophy or the examination of the conscience in the Christian tradition.  

§21. A Sigh of Relief

Finally Theology

The phrase “finally theology” sounds first like an avowal, but also a program. The battle against the previously much-heralded declaration of a “separated philosophy” no longer needs to be carried out. We have learned this from Gilson’s past work in his endeavor to set forth a rediscovered theology. But more is to be found in the release, liberation, or even relief that is drawn from the act of “crossing the Rubicon.” In fact, to brave the prohibition and pass from philosophy to theology (and vice-versa) makes it possible to follow the path without hesitation, step into the breach, and pass through the opening. The stranger’s country becomes my own land, without confining me to the status of an expatriate. Of course, no one will forget his country of origin. But we will also remember that only our country of origin makes the opportunity to travel possible, and that we must finally oppose patriotism’s code of silence and disciplinary boundaries and divisions, the transformation of ourselves by that which is foreign.

Finally Theology

“Finally” or in-the-end ultimately indicates theology “at the end”—not that the theologian always has the last word, as if the philosopher had no other destiny than to be the subaltern in a battle that was wrongly engaged. “Finally theology” indicates a finale that was already present at the beginning. Yet the ending does not impose itself; from the start, it was a matter of the design and proper character of the incarnate God. Since God became man, and that was his choice, it is first through the human that we reach God, only seeing after the fact and with a heart still burning that he was already walking at our side when he was speaking to us along the way (Lk 24:32). The relationship between philosophy and theology is similar to the intimate connection between the Incarnation and the Resurrection. Only a prolepsis, according to Pannenberg, causes the end to shed light on the beginning, or upon the discovery that one is all the more