New Blackfriars

DOI:10.1111/j.1741-2005.2012.01504.x

Toward a Liturgical Existentialism

Joseph Rivera

Abstract

A liturgical existentialism attempts to situate Christian spirituality in view of a post-Heideggerian world. To this end, French phenomenologist Jean-Yves Lacoste has undertaken what is perhaps the most sustained analysis of Heideggerian existential phenomenology from a theological-mystical point of view, and this paper highlights his major achievement: the liturgical reduction. Certainly existentialism, after Heidegger, makes the "world" an object of inquiry, and yet Lacoste's reduction is problematic precisely because it privileges an ascetic spirituality that desires to "bracket" the world. Both the temporality and topology of the liturgical reduction are exposed to view in order to show that a liturgical existentialism properly conceived, does not bracket the world, but is realized carefully in and through the world-horizon itself.

Keywords

Jean-Yves Lacoste, Martin Heidegger, Liturgical Reduction, The World, Temporality

> It would, however, be untrue to suppose that relation to the Absolute natively structures experience. Dasein exists in the world without God—this does not presume the nonexistence of God but teaches only that the world, as world, draws a veil between Dasein and God.[1]

1. The World

While philosophical existentialism began in earnest with Martin Heidegger's ground-breaking work *Being and Time* (1927) and was popularized by Jean-Paul Sartre in the 1940s and 50s, these atheistic variants of existentialism were quickly supplanted by, among other

[1] Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man,* trans. Mark Raftery-Skehan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), p. 41.

© 2012 The Author. New Blackfriars © 2012 The Dominican Council. Published by Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2012, 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK, and 350 Main Street, Malden MA 02148, USA
https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2012.01504.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

things, the post-structuralism and deconstruction of the 1960s. Yet, the young Heidegger's study of being-in-the-world critically developed not only key methodological features drawn from Husserlian phenomenology, it also selectively exploited theological elaborations of the self from St. Paul, St. Augustine and Kierkegaard. It is at this intersection between existential phenomenology and theology that several French phenomenologists of the 1980s down to the present explore how a détente between phenomenology and theology might be struck. Jean-Luc Marion's widely read *God without Being* (1982), for example, generated interest in how Heidegger's interpretation of the "onto-theological constitution of metaphysics" can positively inform the theologian about the limits of conceptualizing God within the horizon of Being.[2] Yet, perhaps the most sustained appropriation of Heidegger from a theological point of view is found in another cohort of the "theological turn" who has yet to receive due attention, Jean-Yves Lacoste.

Lacoste undertakes a rigorous re-reading of Heidegger's existentialism, especially the temporal and topological dimensions of the existential analytic of being-in-the-world outlined in *Being and Time*. As an exponent of a style of phenomenology occasioned and informed by theological discourse, Lacoste is singularly focused on the Christian's existential dwelling in the world. To this end, Lacoste has dedicated most of his oeuvre to a theological interrogation of existential phenomenology, having published two monographs on the topic, *Note sur le temps: essai sur les raisons de la mémoire et de l'espérance* (1990) *Expérience et absolue* (1994), and three important collections of essays worthy of note, *Le monde et l'absence d'oeuvre* (2000), *Présence et Parousie* (2006) and *La phénoménalité de Dieu* (2008).[3] Primarily in *Experience and the Absolute* and *Note sur le temps,*[1] but also in various thematic essays, Lacoste elucidates and develops an innovative phenomenological-cum-theological principle designed to bring to light authentic existence in the world. He names

[2] See Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being: hors-texte,* trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); also see the second edition which added a chapter exonerating Aquinas from onto-theology; *God without Being: hors-texte,* revised edition, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

[3] See Lacoste, *Note sur le temps:essai sur les raisons de mémoire et de l'espérance* (Paris: PUF, 1990); Lacoste, originally *Expérience et Absolu: Questions disputeés sur l'humanité de l'homme* (Paris: PUF, 1994). See the following collections of essays: Lacoste, *Le monde et l'absence d'oeuvre* (Paris: PUF, 2000); Lacoste, *Présence et parousie* (Genève: Ad Solem, 2006); and Lacoste, *La phénoménalité de Dieu: neuf etudes* (Paris: Cerf, 2008).

[4] It is interesting to acknowledge that in *Note sur le temps* the reduction is originally entitled the "theological reduction," which is subsequently re-named as the "liturgical reduction" presumably to emphasize that the reduction is not just a theological act of reflection but specifically a spiritual practice. See Lacoste, *Note sur le temps,* p. 122.

© 2012 The Author
New Blackfriars © 2012 The Dominican Council

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2012.01504.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

it the "liturgical reduction."[5] Inevitably, for Lacoste, and for figures such as Michel Henry, Jean-Luc Marion, Jean-Louis Chrétien, Emmanuel Levinas and others, God or theological revelation obtains the status of "limit" phenomenon. Understood as an absolute gift without conditions, divine revelation becomes a pressing factor in human experience, for it expands the contours of what counts as a phenomenon and reprioritizes the hierarchy of the order of phenomena, privileging divine phenomenality over and above objective or worldly phenomenality.

What makes Lacoste's liturgical reduction so compelling for contemporary theology is that it thematizes the concept of "world" with a kind of rigor that only a close reader of Heidegger could do. Existentialism, as Heidegger understands it, is a philosophical discourse that discloses human existence, not within the subject-object duality, but within the horizon of the "world." Existentialism therefore makes the concept of "world" its principal object of inquiry. Not solely concerned with reversing the Aristotelian hierarchy of essence over existence, post-Heideggerian existentialism also examines the chief ontological structure ineluctably tied to human subjectivity: the feeling of being overcome by the "world." Heidegger insists that the world is the ontological site of human existence when he writes, "to Dasein, Being in a world is something that belongs essentially. Thus Dasein's understanding of Being pertains with equal primordiality both to an understanding of something like a 'world,' and to the understanding of the Being of those entities which become accessible within the world."[6] Of course, one may raise the question, as Lacoste continually does: how may God make an appearance to me in the world, if at all? How do I experience the sacredness of the Absolute who transcends my enclosure within the world? Can I put into play an ascetic spirituality that brackets the world thereby removing the world as the obstacle or the veil that stands between myself and God?

As we shall see momentarily, Lacoste coordinates Christian spirituality, as liturgy, fundamentally around the existential pole of faith

[5] Lacoste puts to work the liturgical reduction for the purpose of liturgical purgation. In accord with Husserl's ambitions to bracket the world and uncover the constituting power of pure consciousness (which eventually led to transcendental idealism) Lacoste symbolically brackets the visible topology of being-in-the-world so as to unveil the night of the non-place, as we shall see momentarily. It is important to bear in mind at this juncture, however, that Lacoste affirms Heidegger's insight that the world constitutes the fundamental structure of the self. He is more Heideggerian than Husserlian and thus not a transcendental idealist. For more on Husserl's reduction, see Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book—General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology,* trans. F. Kersten (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), §32, "The phenomenological epoché"

[6] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1962), p. 33.

© 2012 The Author
New Blackfriars © 2012 The Dominican Council

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2012.01504.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

realized in a corporate community of believers, rather than, say, resolute angst or guilt about the world as in Heidegger. Liturgy designates not only religious rites, prayer, vigil and the ritual of the eucharist sacramentally mediated by the church. Liturgy also embodies a primal existential attunement to the world, that of existing before God as a way of life, as if I were a monk or an ascetic.[7] Given the sacramental and ecclesial nature of the liturgical reduction, Lacoste does not promote a theistic existentialism of the sort that is radically subjective and anti-institutional, as one might tend to see explicated in Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky or Tillich, for example.[8] Concerned with the church life and sacrament, Lacoste also adopts the decisive mystical theme of darkness/absence from St. John of the Cross as a way to emphasize the subjective aspect of liturgical existentialism. Lacoste understands faith to induce a liturgical vocation or a an existential mode of being-in-the-world with particular reference, not to the anxiety associated with my own death, but to the death of Christ on the Cross. The Cross signals the moment par excellence of kenotic self-expenditure and paroxysm which, in turn, gives rise to the institutional and sacramental bodies of Christ. Faith signifies, in Lacoste's estimation, a particular mystical-and-ecclesial form of dwelling in the world.

Faith is also born of a decision. It is an act by which the ascetic imposes himself within the world. Made manifest by the freedom to choose to exist before God, faith operates on the order of a spiritual practice that puts into play a theological *epoché* or reduction of the world. As a symbolic subversion of the world, the liturgical reduction renders the ascetic indifferent to the resolute anxiety Heidegger ascribes to authentic being-in-the-world. To render myself indifferent to the world, as an ascetic who professes faith in a God outside the world, is to subvert the world as Heidegger conceives it. According to Lacoste, professing faith in God as a theological act is, at bottom, a way of coping amid a secular Heideggerian world that besieges me everywhere I look.

Taking a cue from Heidegger, then, Lacoste maintains that being-in-the-world is the ultimate horizon of all existence, even if that horizon is secular and without God. I am not "in" this world-horizon the way a fish is in an aquarium or a piece of chocolate is inside a box. Rather I am in the world by virtue of my very existence: I inhere in the world; I take my bearings from the world as it grips me

[7] For more on Lacoste's correlation of liturgy to "everything that embodies the relation of man to God" see *Experience and the Absolute,* p. 22.

[8] For an excellent overview of the anti-institutional nature of theological existentialism so common in many of the religious existential figures from Kierkegaard forward, see, George Pattison, *Anxious Angels: a Retrospective View of Religious Existentialism* (London: Macmillan, 1999).

© 2012 The Author
New Blackfriars © 2012 The Dominican Council

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2012.01504.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

prior to all acts of consciousness, as Lacoste writes, "the world takes possession of man and the function of his opening onto the world is to underpin his acts of consciousness, to provide them with a ground or basis."[9] And given that Lacoste acknowledges that Dasein's native reality is to exist in a world without God,[10] he invokes faith as a way to cope with that absence inasmuch as faith, as a spirituality born of the *theologia crucis,* is the means of bracketing the world.

Yet, Lacoste's emphatic critique of the world put into play by the liturgical reduction occupies a fragile line between, on the one hand, a contemplative ecclesial existence before God in the world and, on the other hand, an escape from the world altogether in a flight toward the monastery. The nocturnal style of faith he advances presupposes the quiet of the vigil and the isolation of the monk and thus avoids the angst of being-in-the-world, or even, the pagan wonder tied to the earth that the later Heidegger articulates.[11] By bracketing the Heideggerian "world/earth," Lacoste ascribes to the liturgical reduction a deeply mystical "dark way" exemplified in figures like St. John of the Cross. And yet, this Carmelite was interested in critiquing experiential excess of rapturous mystical experience, not in escaping the anxieties of the world. The liturgical reduction, as Lacoste conceives it, while signifying a richly theological mode of existentialism that accounts for life in the church, is problematic inasmuch as it neglects to embrace the world fully as the site of "existence." Contrary to Lacoste's reduction, the world, its temporal horizon and spatial boundaries, constitute the opening through which a liturgical existence properly conceived realizes itself. Pilgrimage unfolds within the logic of the world and its finite limits, and yet the world is not above theological critique, and it is on the basis of this critique that Lacoste's work is so valuable, even if problematic. In what follows, we maintain that, even though Lacoste's nocturnal spirituality engendered by the liturgical reduction enjoys the possibility of conferring upon the Cross the symbolic power of "bracketing" that alters the existential experience of the world, it nevertheless neglects a more careful approach to existentialism's link to the world. Can I really bracket the world? Can I really submit Heidegger's analytic of being-in-the-world to a theological "reduction" in the name of a hermeneutics of faith? Certainly I, as a pilgrim who professes faith in God, can critically attend to Heidegger from a theological point of view, but is it so certain that such a path must relegate the world to indifference, to an object put between parentheses? The following

[9] Lacoste, *Expereince and the Absolute,* p. 40.

[10] Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute,* p. 87.

[11] For more on the "four-fold" characteristic of Heidegger's interest in the sacredness of the earth, see Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," trans. Albert Hofstadter, in *Poetry, Language, Thought,* (New York: Harper Modern Classics, 2001), pp. 141–61.

© 2012 The Author
New Blackfriars © 2012 The Dominican Council

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2012.01504.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

takes issue with Lacoste on both the *time* and *place* of liturgical existence, arguing that a liturgical existentialism properly conceived shall, not bracket, but transfigure ecclesiastically the world from within.

2. Existence as Eschatological Vigil: Existing from the Future Onward

Before we interrogate Lacoste's proposal of existential temporality, we draw out some of the important lines of inquiry that shape his work. Taking as its exemplar the ascetic praxis of self-abnegation, Lacoste's liturgical reduction designates the world as an object of critique by incorporating the rich conceptual resources harbored by the tradition of Christian negative theology. To be sure, Lacoste subscribes to the "dark way" of negative theology that configures the spiritual life according to a narcotic depletion of spiritual fortitude through self-deprivation, a "night" whereby self-empowerment recedes and surrenders to bodily passivity and enfeeblement. This arid, desert-like sensibility of non-experience is thematized principally by St. John of the Cross (to whom Lacoste acknowledges a large debt),[12] however, it is also embodied by Martin Luther's conceptualization of the feeling of "Anfechtung" in the face of the *Deus Absconditus*[13] and, furthermore, features as a main theological principle of the apophatic mystical tradition.[14] As Denys Turner has adeptly argued, the mystical tradition in the West commands a long line of thinkers from Augustine, to Meister Eckhart to Denys the Carthusian, all of whom embrace strong elements of the dark, non-experiential style of negative theology.[15] The great merit of Lacoste's project is that he brings this mystical tradition as a particular mode of Christian existence to bear on the phenomenological-existential landscape of being-in-the-world.

In order to draw on negative theology's resources to address existence in the world, Lacoste introduces what is to him the most philosophically fertile style of thinking today about the world:

[12] Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute,* p. 2.

[13] See for example Bernard McGinn, "*Vere tu es Deus absconditus:* the Hidden God in Luther and Some Mystics," in *Silence and the Word: Negative Theology and Incarnation,* eds., Oliver Davies and Denys Turner, pp. 94–114 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[14] Lacoste recognizes a long mystical apophatic tradition from Pseudo-Denys to Jean of the Cross. See for example his illuminating essay, "La connaissance silencieuse: des évidences antéprédicatives à une critique de l'apophase" in *Présence and Parousia,* pp. 117–44.

[15] See Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge, UK Cambridge University Press, 1995).

© 2012 The Author
New Blackfriars © 2012 The Dominican Council

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2012.01504.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

Heideggerian existential phenomenology. Lacoste invokes Heidegger because *Being and Time* accomplished an indispensable philosophical breakthrough regarding the nature of human existence. Lacoste accepts as axiomatic, in other words, that the all-encompassing concept of being-in-the-world approximates what is most essential, even primordial, about the human condition—that the world exhibits the transcendental, visible horizon upon which anything may make an appearance. The Heideggerian concept of world is the absolute horizon of appearing, for Lacoste, because it represents the field of visible display, where all things come to light and appear. Lacoste shall consistently refer to Heidegger's existential construct of being-in-the-world as humanity's "native" or "original" condition.[16]

At this juncture, it is crucial to note that, for Lacoste, being-in-the-world is strictly worldly. Dasein, as being-in-the-world, cannot help but stand out from itself, but it can extend no further than the horizon of the world populated with things "present at hand" and "ready to hand" (*Vorhanden* and *Zuhanden*).[17] Dasein's "ek-static" orientation to the world therefore envelops Dasein entirely. Its absolute and irrepressible "there-ness" renders it structurally open to, and immersed in, the luminosity of the world. Always open to the world, Dasein displays worldhood as an inherent property, and thus its ipseity is grounded in its worldhood. Indeed a topological creature, Heidegger writes, "Dasein *is* its world existingly."[18] The problem of having an "interior" consciousness up against an exterior body in the world is resolved in Heidegger's unitary concept of being-in-the-world. Dasein's primordial circumspective concern about the world means that it cannot bracket the world, and cannot discover an inner consciousness without the exterior, visible horizon of the world always already there too.[19] Lacoste is right, then, to characterize Dasein with the pithy expression, "in a certain sense, Dasein is nothing but doors and windows."[20] Dasein cannot outstrip or transcend the world but is always already co-emergent with light of the world: Dasein is being-in-the-world.

Lacoste's liturgical reduction develops a theological-existential variant of being-in-the-world without taking leave entirely of the internal logic of *Being and Time.* Or does it? If God is unable to

[16] Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute,* pp. 20, 34, 87, 101, and 175 for example.

[17] Heidegger, *Being and Time,* §16.

[18] Heidegger, *Being and Time,* p. 416.

[19] The description of Dasein as being-in-the-world is therefore an indictment on the Cartesian, Kantian and Husserlian notions of interior consciousness or constituting subjectivity. Heidegger overcomes what he perceives to be a rather long-standing, but poorly conceived, philosophy of the ego when he writes, "the perceiving of what is known is not a process of returning with one's booty to the 'cabinet' of consciousness after one has gone out and grasped it." Heidegger, *Being and Time,* p. 89.

[20] Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute*, p. 11.

© 2012 The Author
New Blackfriars © 2012 The Dominican Council

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2012.01504.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

make an appearance in the luminous horizon of the world because God transcends the finitude of the world, how might the ascetic experience God without also seeking to escape the world? Lacoste's notion of the "night" comes into play at just this juncture. It opens up the possibility of Christian existence informed fully by faith, a "dark night of faith" that hopes in a God whose appearing transcends, and is thus hidden from, the visible display of the world. This has profound theological ramifications in Lacoste's mind for how the Christian confronts the world.[21] Only after being-thrown into a world without God does Lacoste insist that the liturgical reduction, as a Christian form of life, can be summoned forth. The supernatural comes posterior to the natural. Lacoste's liturgical reduction, then, counts as both a homage to, and subversion of, Heidegger. What is at issue is not that the world designates the sphere of all human experience—for Lacoste it certainly shapes all existence. Rather, he argues that Heidegger prohibits the night of faith as a specifically vocational, performative way of being-in-the-world.[22]

We highlight briefly here the main Heideggerian axis of Lacoste's liturgical reduction: temporal existence or "existing from the future onward" symbolically expressed in the liturgical play of the vigil. To this end, Lacoste writes, "the way in which the recluse plays with his being-there, and thus finds himself grappling with his facticity is nonetheless born of a desire for the eschaton."[23] An existential phenomenology of liturgy, for Lacoste, maintains as its ideal the temporal disposition of the recluse who keeps vigil. Though the recluse may occupy the temporal horizon of the world (and can never leave it behind) he temporally exists in the presence of the parousia, from the "future onward" by bracketing the temporality of the world—especially the wakeful daytime of activity and "salaried work."[24] An ascetic or reclusive being-in-the-world sustained and nourished by faith deploys a specific type of temporality ordered by the vigil, "the present lived in the shelter of the eschaton."[25] It is through self-alienation from the time of the "world" by way of the liturgical

[21] Unlike the Thomistic doctrine of *analogia entis* or its contemporary inflection of Neo-Transcendental Thomism, Lacoste draws an essential distinction between natural and supernatural or the profane and sacred. Insisting on the stark distinction between the visibility of the world and the darkness of faith, Lacoste opts, not for *anlogia entis*, but for the term "alliance" to describe how the Christian dwells "toward" God (*être-vers*) in an alliance with the Cross while always remaining in the world. Lacoste, *Notes sur le temps,* pp. 79–80.

[22] For his detailed reading of *Being and Time* on just this point, see Lacoste, "Existence et amour de Dieu: sur une note d' "Être et Temps," in *La phénoménalité de Dieu,* pp. 111–32, especially 119–20.

[23] Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute,* p. 29.

[24] Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute,* p. 80.

[25] Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute,* p. 82.

© 2012 The Author
New Blackfriars © 2012 The Dominican Council

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2012.01504.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

reduction (or bracketing or suspending) that enables the ascetic, the recluse, the monk (i.e., he who is cloistered) to appropriate, or at least, hope to appropriate eschatological time through keeping the nocturnal play of the vigil intact.

The liturgical reduction so conceived is a powerful symbolic gesture. It aims to remove the world as the obstacle interposed between the self and God, as if the world were there as an opaque blade slid between myself and God, not just causing me to look through a glass darkly but to look at a glass opaquely. Lacoste's reduction is therefore that spiritual practice which removes this opaque blade or the veil through the symbolic power of the midnight vigil, for the "the experiential practice of liturgy can open up a space where neither world nor earth is interposed between man and God."[26] But how can the liturgical reduction symbolically bracket the world?

We recall Lacoste conceives of the liturgical reduction as a spiritual exercise symbolized in holding vigil that renders the ascetic indifferent to the world. Lacoste shall even argue that this nocturnal non-experience is passive, tantamount to making myself like clay in the divine potter's hands;[27] the reduction even provides "a sanction for the liturgical dismantling of the 'subject.'"[28] To negate the self-positing subject through vigil, of course, seems like folly to the "world" and exhibits a weakness which is precisely, according to Lacoste, its strength—the vigil valorizes the "belittled man," the "fool," the "lunatic" who is mad about God.[29]

But how does the liturgical reduction so conceived give rise to confusion with regard to Christian existence in the world? Undoubtedly, Lacoste accounts for temporality of being-in-the-world as the native horizon through which I project possibilities. But he also insists that Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death and the future possibilities it makes possible is not the final word on my destiny. The liturgical reduction understands being-toward-death as inescapable,

[26] Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute,* p. 28.
[27] Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute,* p. 156.
[28] Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute,* p. 162.
[29] Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute,* 177ff. This celebration of the weakness of the Cross finds allies in other contemporary phenomenological renderings of Christology, ones which take on a more prophetic/ethical tonality. This is especially evident in John Caputo's recent work on the "weakness of God," which gives way to a radical ethics of social justice. See Caputo, *The Weakness of God* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006). Equally, Stanislas Breton utilizes the symbolic power of the Cross to call into judgment the power of the strong in favor of the weak. See Breton, *The Word and the Cross,* trans., Jacquelyn Porter (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002). While Lacoste would not divorce the Cross from ethics/justice, the liturgical reduction he advances is a type of spirituality that privileges the "ascetic self" as preparatory work for praxis. For commentary on ethics as a second order praxis, see Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute,* pp. 70–80; also for an Lacoste's critical engagement with Levinas' claim that ethics is first philosophy, see, "Ethique et Phénoménologie" in *Présence and Parousie,* pp. 231–256.

© 2012 The Author
New Blackfriars © 2012 The Dominican Council

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2012.01504.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

certainly. And yet, the liturgical reduction also seeks to "bracket" being-toward-death and its finitude, its crude atheism. In *Note sur les temps,* for example, Lacoste reduces Heidegger's conceptual framework of authentic being-toward-death to a half-truth. Being-toward-death represents my pre-eschatological existence but cannot denote the ultimate temporal destiny of my alliance with the Cross and the promise made on Easter that vouchsafes the coming parousia.[30] This eschatological hope is nourished by a promise and, "the promises of God are not measured by the limits of the world and death, human experience shared by God himself, in the person of the Son, constitutes in fact a penultimate reality."[31] Indeed, Lacoste retains the existential symbolism of the paroxysm of the Cross because it invests pre-eschatological temporality with theological meaning. The alienation of the Cross is the condition for the possibility of the midnight vigil I hold now, prior to the parousia, when faith alone satisfies. To render myself indifferent to being-toward-death does not annihilate its reality, for "liturgy does not annul what it brackets: the world is all that is available to us within it."[32] If the liturgical reduction is forever ensconced in the temporal horizon of the world, then it follows that I attend to my present time with great violence, overcoming it by actively bracketing its existential hold over me.[33] Correspondingly, Lacoste's liturgical reduction attests to the rigor and discipline of ascetic spirituality. As such, the violence Lacoste associates with the reduction is pitted over against the existential power the atheism of being-in-the-world. My hope in the coming eschaton is in continual "danger" as long as I dwell in the world. I run the risk of "constantly of being enfolded within being-in-the-world… The world urges us to conform to its measure of, i.e., to its mode of existence."[34] The liturgical reduction, by rendering me indifferent to death, is therefore a subversion of Heideggerian temporality inasmuch as it violates its obsession with death. Lacoste writes, "the meaning of this subversion must not elude us. Liturgy actually suspends, or treats with utter indifference, the dialectical unfolding by which the world can appear to whoever exists there as a homeland or a land of universal exile."[35] Further, he writes that the liturgical reduction "does not approve of nor contest world and earth but rather brackets it."[36] In other words, I occupy a fragile state, tarrying amid the danger of the world where,

[30] Lacoste, *Notes sur le temps,* §92, "De l'être-vers-la-mort a l'hoirzon de la croix."
[31] Lacoste, *Notes sur le temps,* p. 208.
[32] Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute,* p. 174.
[33] Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute,* p. 89.
[34] Jean-Yves Lacoste, "Plus qu'existence et être-en-danger," in *Presence et Parousie,* pp. 145–68, reference on p. 164.
[35] Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute,* p. 33.
[36] Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute,* p. 34.

© 2012 The Author
New Blackfriars © 2012 The Dominican Council

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2012.01504.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

if not carefully bracketed, it can limit my destiny to the finite horizon of being-in-the-world.

The confusion of such a bracketing of temporality emerges at just this "fragile" situation between passive indifference and active concern with my present temporal démarche toward death. That is, the liturgical reduction engenders a spirituality of passive vigil, of existing as a contemplative ascetic upon whom nothing weighs but the desire for the eschaton and by which the modern subject is challenged (the "I" is dismantled as if I were clay in the divine potter's hands). Indifference to the time of the world-horizon is the chief fruit born of the reduction in which I am disoriented by keeping vigil—I am constituted by the divine Subject.[37] Yet the reduction is nevertheless a theological act imposed with great violence and discipline over against the temporal streaming of the world-horizon. A contradiction is plainly in view here on Lacoste's part. If the liturgical reduction overthrows the modern subject who actively constitutes the world through being-toward-death and thus puts in its place the "dismantled subject" holding vigil passively, how can such an ascetic disposition actually "bracket" the world and remove it as the obstruction that stands between myself and God? If the reduction is imposed with great violence as a subversive act, an act to which Lacoste consistently equates the reduction, then how can such a passive de-centered subject[38] find the fortitude to overcome the temporality of being-toward-death? If Lacoste privileges such existential states as "anticipation"[39] and restlessness, then surely the liturgical reduction achieves this, not by rendering myself indifferent to the world; rather it achieves this by valorizing my subjective power to bring about an existential critique of being-in-the-world. The ascetic is, in some sense, a subject who displays a world-forming power.[40] If the

[37] Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute,* p. 152.

[38] My transcendental "I" is liturgically disoriented, more precisely, reversed, as I become the object of the gaze of the divine subject. Much like Jean-Luc Marion's 'Gifted' (*l'adonné*), Lacoste's liturgical existentialism argues that the ascetic's subjectivity is eliminated insofar as his identity is given by the Absolute subject's givenness—the ascetic is the screen upon which God manifests the not-yet in the already. This parallels Marion's notion of the subject as *l'adonné.* See, Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 248 ff. Lacoste speaks of the gift in the context of subjectivity, see Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute,* p. 157. Joeri Schrijvers performs the service of drawing out the connection between Lacoste and Marion on this point, see his excellent article, Schrijvers, "Ontotheological Turnings? Marion, Lacoste and Levinas on the Decentering of Modern Subjectivity," *Modern Theology* 22 no.2 (2006): pp. 221–53.

[39] For more on the liturgical structure of anticipation, see Lacoste, "La phénoménalité de l'anticipation," in *La phénoménalité de Dieu,* pp. 133–57.

[40] Heidegger maintains that Dasein is existential because it is "world-forming" insofar as the animal is "poor in world" and the stone "without world." See Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude,* trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), §42 ff.

© 2012 The Author
New Blackfriars © 2012 The Dominican Council

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2012.01504.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

liturgical reduction reflects a subjective act that seeks a temporal destiny outside of the world, then how can Lacoste characterize the reduction as both an indifferent "undergoing" or a passive "submitting to" the gaze of the Absolute on the one hand, and a violent overdetermination of being-in-the-world, on the other? This is a tension in Lacoste that certainly calls for greater clarification.

The type of liturgical existentialism Lacoste promotes here is therefore one that fails to account for the irreducibly temporal structure of being-toward-death. By emphasizing *hope* over Heidegger's fundamental attunement of *angst* (Heidegger says that "being-toward-death is essentially anxiety"[41]), Lacoste achieves a breakthrough that calls for greater development. The way forward, beyond Lacoste, then, is to develop a liturgical existentialism that integrates hope with Heideggerian angst, as two temporalities intertwined. Certainly hope is structured, not according to indifference, but to an active yearning, a seeking in and through the temporal streaming of the world-horizon. The temporality of hope cannot bracket time (contra Lacoste) since hope is temporal itself. Hope thus penetrates time, especially the possibilities of destiny associated with being-toward-death—which is the possibility of impossibility.[42] In view of angst about my existence in the world, hope does not eliminate angst but rather recalibrates it to attest to the possibility of eternal life. Hope never relieves angst about my death and the projection of possibilities ahead of myself; rather hope secures angst's world-disclosing power only to ground it in an absolute hope aimed at the resurrection of the body and the renewal of the world.[43]

A liturgical existentialism properly conceived upon the foundation of Heidegger's world does not hope in circumventing the world and the temporality of death but in reconfiguring the temporality of the world. As a pilgrim I groan for the parousia, along with the world (Romans 8.22), in hope determined by a promise of redemption and the eternal Sabbath to come. Because hope is a temporal act tied to the world and its renewal, it cannot bracket the world. Although hope is prior to angst, hope does not detach from angst. Hope is professed in a world in need of redemption, in a world riddled with angst. In other words, I never receive the eucharist in the body of Christ free of the world that besieges me with its angst, finitude and frailty—and most of all, death. I never enjoy the favorable time of eucharistic hope as a pure temporality that enables me to bracket the finitude of death and the temporality of the world. Hope reorders temporality

[41] Heidegger, *Being and Time,* p. 310.

[42] Heidegger, *Being and Time,* p. 294.

[43] Heidegger, *Being and Time,* §50. For more on how Heidegger's existential interpretation of death differs from the biological understanding of death as simple "termination of life" or "stopping", see *Being and Time,* §48.

© 2012 The Author
New Blackfriars © 2012 The Dominican Council

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2012.01504.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

and calms my angst but it does not bracket angst, for it is anxious hope that impatiently hastens the eschaton, that asks "death where is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15) all the while assured that death leads to eternal life. Yet hope flourishes in the context of life together, in a community that together professes hope in the resurrection to come. It is the place of liturgical existentialism to which we now turn.

3. Existence and Topology: The Non-Place of the Cross

The second axis of Lacoste's liturgical reduction is place. Just as the finite temporal horizon of being-toward-death was bracketed in favor of the eschaton, the place of the "world" is bracketed so as to open up a "non-place" of the Cross. Lacoste's liturgical reduction affords the ascetic a dwelling place not at center but at the darkened margins of the luminous space of being-in-the-world. By margins, Lacoste means the edge, the hinterland or the far reaches of the visible horizon. It is beyond the lights of the city, where ascetic appeals to the nocturnal stillness of the forest, desert or cave – like the cenobitic and eremetic recluse.[44] As a non-place, the cave symbolizes poverty, destitution and the darkness of a purged consciousness and a pruned self-awareness.

Lacoste ceaselessly acknowledges that Heidegger's world is the only one I have and I cannot escape it. However, Lacoste also understands my native being-in-the-world as a profane sphere of existence (i.e. entirely finite and temporal), and one that must be subverted if theology is to articulate how I can authentically confront my existence in the world.[45] Consequently, the ascetic must hollow out the sacred non-place inside the profane itself, for the non-place is a site where I can symbolically "let go" or detach from the affairs of the so-called "neutrality" of being-in-the-world.

Lacoste observes that the one who prays is symbolically nowhere, which means that there are not two regions of being, or two worlds, but merely two experiences of the selfsame world.[46] Lacoste describes the experience of the prayerful life of faith in the non-place as a non-experience, which is also a *relance* of experience—the French word for the "relaunching," "reopening" or "restarting" of the basic structure of experience.[47] Because God cannot break into the light of the world and because the ascetic cannot transcend his

[44] Lacoste explicitly links liturgical existence to cenobitic and eremetic monasticism. See, *Experience and the Absolute,* pp. 31 and 175.

[45] See for example, Lacoste, "Existence et amour de Dieu," especially pp. 117–20.

[46] Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute,* pp. 44 and 54.

[47] Lacoste, *Notes sur le temps,* pp. 69, 74, 201.

© 2012 The Author
New Blackfriars © 2012 The Dominican Council

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2012.01504.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

being-in-the-world, Lacoste founds the non-encounter with the Absolute as one entirely within the world, a non-place at the margins that re-opens human experience in the shadow of the Cross. The re-opening of experience reconstitutes the proper place of that experience, and takes the symbol of the Cross as its exemplar. In the symbolic non-place of the Cross, then, the dark night of faith inspires imitation of Christ's radical humility and sense of alienation from the world. Similar to the Johanine duality of world and Cross, darkness and light, the non-place symbolizes a shelter from the secular order of Heidegger's being-in-the-world. But how does one put into play this alliance with the Cross?

As Kevin Hart notes, Lacoste follows Henri de Lubac by rethinking the concept of Dasein as wholly contained in the mystery of the supernatural, which is embedded in the mystery of Christ.[48] Yet unlike de Lubac, Lacoste seems to insist on a sphere of *pura natura,* which introduces the dualism between natural and supernatural, between the "place" of being-in-the-world and the "non-place" of the Cross. Consequently, a creeping dualism emerges at just this point, and it is the liturgical reduction that brings into focus this dualism. Thus, the authentic encounter with the divine through faith is achieved in and through the bracketing of the profane state of being-in-the-world. The liturgical reduction represents the posterior act whereby I cut the existential strings tied to the profane space of being-in-the-world so that "the world ceases, in a liturgical sense, to envelop us."[49] I no longer am Heidegger's version of Dasein who dwells in a luminous world. Rather, I am now the ascetic on a quest for the parousia who dwells in margins of the world, in the cave or forest. As an obstacle that stands between the ascetic and the Absolute, the spatiality or place of the world must be put between parentheses, put out of play, made (existentially) perfunctory. The spiritual practice of the liturgical reduction sets the ascetic on the path to standing in alliance with the non-place of the Cross.

If one is tempted to interpret the liturgical reduction as a removal of the world so as to enable a mystical rapture or ecstatic religious experience with the divine, one would be sorely mistaken. Lacoste would rather detach from, if not eliminate altogether, the need "to experience" God; privileging faith or knowledge, Lacoste writes that, "our knowledge nevertheless exceeds and judges every experience of the Absolute falling within the measure of being-in-the-world. Liturgical inexperience must teach us to demystify our capacity for

[48] Kevin Hart, "The Liturgical Reduction" *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 15, no.1 (2008):pp. 43–66, especially pp. 64–66.

[49] Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute,* p. 44.

© 2012 The Author
New Blackfriars © 2012 The Dominican Council

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2012.01504.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

'religious' experience."[50] And this joy of knowledge corresponds to the bare fact of faith, pure faith with no recourse to fulfilling content. Lacoste contends that it is in this state of Christic poverty that one naturally elides faith with the darkness of Good Friday, the non-place of Golgotha outside the gates of the city.

The non-place of the *theologia crucis* gives way to the *experimentum crucis.* The spiritual movement of the liturgical reduction achieves its climax at the foot of the Cross, at the top of Mt. Carmel, the non-place of alienation and expropriation carved out within margins of being-in-the-world. The non-experience associated with the *experimentum crucis* indicates the "place" of Mt. Carmel where faith alone is sufficient. I dwell in this non-place, at the (symbolic) edge of the world, in order to participate in the humility of the Cross. The deprivation and toil intrinsic to non-experience coincides with an existential mood of weariness and fatigue[51] and a feeling of pure passivity, one that compels Lacoste to conclude "the I to be nothing but its opening to God."[52] This parallels the radical passivity of St. John of the Cross' dark night, "wherein the soul does nothing, and God works in the soul, and it remains, as it were, patient."[53] This is to say that being-in-the-world, according to Lacsote, does not have the final say on the bounds of Dasein's existential potentiality, and though faith is a choice it is also a way of patiently being-in-the-world before a God who transcends the world.

Certainly, Lacoste recognizes that professing faith in a hidden God also produces frequent bouts of frustration, pain and humiliation. As an existential symbol of weakness and powerlessness, the *Logos* of the Cross fosters the Christian ascetical practice of building a shelter from the atheistic petitions arriving from the horizon of being-in-the-world. But confronting the atheism of the world is, in fact, not a confrontation at all but rather a circumvention of its dangers altogether. The ascetic, in professing faith in a God who is not of this world, seeks refuge in the sacred space of being-in-church,[54] yet as a refugee, the ascetic rests in a state of inoperativity, quietly and patiently dwelling under the shelter of the non-place. As a site of passivity that is indifferent to the place of the world, the ascetic

[50] Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute,* p. 145.

[51] See for example, Lacoste, "Petite phénoménologie de la fatigue" in *Présence and Parousie,* pp. 309–322.

[52] Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute,* p. 163.

[53] St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel,* trans. and ed., E. Allison Peers (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2008), book 1, 13, 1.

[54] This is Lacoste's phrase in his earlier work, *Note sur le temps,* p. 190. Lacoste does discuss an intersubjective dimension of non-experience with the term "co-affection," though it remains underdeveloped in his overall project. See Lacoste, "Liturgy and Coaffection," in *The Experience of God: A Postmodern Response,* eds., Kevin Hart and Barbara Wall (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), pp. 93–103.

© 2012 The Author
New Blackfriars © 2012 The Dominican Council

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2012.01504.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

manages to occupy a form of kenotic dispossession, the life of voluntary poverty: "strictly speaking, those who liturgically face the Absolute neither have anything nor can take possession of anything."[55] The existential upshot is that the ascetic who is dispossessed of everything cannot forget God. It is only by making God his sole concern that the ascetic is able to find sustenance he needs. So, "whoever desires poverty takes up a position—he clearly states that God alone 'suffices' for him."[56] And it is only by virtue of an embodied knowledge practiced in the shelter of the church that the ascetic can "know" God through faith.

It is not merely enough for the ascetic to find a place where he can claim he knows (*savoir*) God through theological propositions, for he can do that in the world. In his recent essay, "'Resurrectio Carnis': du savoir théologique à la connaissance liturgique" Lacoste argues that the knowledge to which faith gives rise is a *connaissance liturgique,* or type of knowledge that exceeds the propositional knowledge of *savoir.* To know God through faith is to situate myself bodily in a particular place. To know God liturgically is realized in knowledge acquired through friendship or, more precisely, through intimate worship in an ecclesial context informed by chants, eucharist, prayer and sacred community.[57] For Lacoste, God is surely "felt" and "known" as unknown through liturgical gesticulations. Simply put, faith occupies the lifeblood of sacred existence but is regulated by the space of the church, a shelter where, writes Lacoste, "liturgically the knowledge of God learns to break with the quotidian order of the world," which leads to *la rupture inaugural* with the place of the world that the reduction makes possible.[58] But is it possible to put the place of the world between parenthesis? And, furthermore, is it theologically appropriate to place the church at the margins of the world, as a shelter from the secular order of being-in-the-world?

Certainly Lacoste is emphatic that the church as the site of God's self-revelation is not "other-worldly." He describes the tension between the church and world, or the non-place and the world, as ordered by a *clair-obscur* or mixing of light and darkness, an intertwining of two spheres of manifestation.[59] But if church and the world relate by way of *clair-obscur*, and we affirm that they do, then why is the reduction or the "bracketing" of the world necessary, not to say, possible? If Lacoste relegates the liturgical reduction to a merely

[55] Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute,* p. 174.

[56] Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute,* p. 177.

[57] Lacoste, "'Resurrectio Carnis:' Du savoir thélogique à la connaissance liturgique," in *La phénoménalité de Dieu,* pp.205–27.

[58] Lacoste, "Resurrectio Carnis," p. 227.

[59] Lacoste, "L'apparaître du révélé: sur le clair-obscur," in *Présence et parousie,* pp. 323–38.

© 2012 The Author
New Blackfriars © 2012 The Dominican Council

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2012.01504.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

symbolic gesture set into operation literally by the ascetic or recluse, then what utility does it hold for the Christian who is not an ascetic but a layperson sustained by "salaried work" taken up in the world?

Jean-Louis Chrétien, a phenomenologist who has written extensively on the necessity of silence and the benefits of contemplative non-experience, rightly warns against the danger of overemphasizing the symbol of the Cross. He sees it, as we do here, to signal a particular case of Christological imbalance: "Negative theology and the extolling of silence necessarily come up against both their limit and their supersession when it comes to the revelation of God and of the incarnation of the Word."[60] In other words, the Cross (absence) cannot be divorced from the Incarnation (presence of God in the world). To combat this Christological imbalance to which Lacoste's liturgical reduction is liable, we propose that a liturgical existentialism properly conceived is ordered, not by a sequestered asceticism, but by what we can call after St. Augustine, an incarnate "pilgrimage." As Augustine states, pilgrimage takes place in and through the place of the world-horizon, for the Christian, "by grace he was a pilgrim below, and by grace he was a citizen above."[61] Not a circumvention of the world by way of a reduction, pilgrimage necessarily engages the world, critiques the world because it desires to transfigure the world following upon the Incarnate present of God in Christ. Augustine also insists that the church, as the body of Christ and as the vehicle of pilgrimage, is to function as a burden to the world, which is to say the church is not the same as the world—a point Lacoste throws into sharp relief for us.[62] Yet in order to be a burden to the world the church cannot render itself indifferent to the world or exist at the margins. In fact, just the opposite: the liturgical reduction finds no utility in pilgrimage, for the pilgrim nourished by the church engages the world, brings to light evils in the world and witnesses God's love to the world, whether through ethics, social justice, worship or charity. Regardless of precisely what path it takes, the pilgrimage orders all action in the center of the world around the temporal destiny of the world, thereby leading the world-horizon itself toward its absolute goal. Highlighting the world's renewal in the parousia, the pilgrim announces that though we look through a glass darkly now, we shall, in that final

[60] Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Ark of Speech,* trans., Andrew Brown (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 72.

[61] Augustine, *City of God,* trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 15, 1.

[62] Augustine writes, "But the Heavenly City knows only one God Who is to be worshipped... Because of this difference, it has not been possible for the Heavenly City to have laws of religion in common with the earthly city. It has been necessary for her to dissent from the earthly city in this regard, and to become a burden to those who think differently." Augustine, *City of God,* 19, 17.

© 2012 The Author
New Blackfriars © 2012 The Dominican Council

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2012.01504.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

day, see God face to face (1 Corinthians 13), and it is that destiny for which we hope today that inspires us to transfigure the angst of the world into a ongoing anxious hope that shall be consummated in that final day.

Joseph Rivera
School of Divinity
University of Edinburgh
1 Mound Place
New College
Edinburgh
United Kingdom
EH1 2LX
rivera30@gmail.com

© 2012 The Author
New Blackfriars © 2012 The Dominican Council

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2012.01504.x Published online by Cambridge University Press