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***Les Discours Édifiants et la connaissance liturgique : Kierkegaard and a phenomenology of theological language***

According to Kierkegaard in *Practice in Christianity* the object of theology – the “God-man” – is a sign of contradiction which can never be theologically “exact”. Truth – and its telling – hinges therefore on the question of the appearance of that God-man, his *phenomenality*. This paper looks at the extent to which Kierkegaard informs the phenomenologist and theologian Jean-Yves Lacoste’s discussion of the *phénoménalité de Dieu* and how it motivates Lacoste’s own “liturgical reasoning”. It explores the tension between Kierkegaard’s own direct and indirect communication, particularly between the *Discourses* and the *Fragments*, and Lacoste’s inversion of the conservative paganism of the *Geivert* of Heidegger in favour of the radical Christianity of Kierkegaard founded upon a “logic of love” and how the *Upbuilding Discourses* offer an introduction to the knowledge of God by teaching humanity how get to *know* him rather than simply telling us *about* God.

**Introduction**

All theologians are hypocrites. That is the inescapable conclusion of phenomenologist and theologian Jean-Yves Lacoste’s reading of Søren Kierkegaard: ‘Can knowledge itself capture God? As soon as it is asked, one has to admit that that question is a hypocritical one. One discipline at least, theology, seizes God inside a propositional language that is intended to be cognitive: well trained on one hand, true

on the other.’<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless in the *Upbuilding Discourses*<sup>2</sup> Lacoste finds grounds for at least some confidence in theology’s capacity to address its subject:

*Les Discourses Édifiants* by Kierkegaard furnish one of the best examples. Theology, in these texts, loses all didactic ambition. It is designed as an introduction to the knowledge of God. Organized as a homily or rather, as a *lectio divina* made text, the speeches speak less about God and more about teaching us how get to know him. They certainly start to ... and cannot avoid talking to or about God. But this speech is not an end in itself. It obviously has no eschatological vocation. It also does not fulfil, in the time of the world, anything more than a subordinate function.<sup>3</sup>

Theology is ‘the work of sinners, its first sin is to treat God as an object, to speak of him as the being that is more important than anything else.’<sup>4</sup> Like Jean-Luc Marion, Lacoste is concerned with the shape of a post-metaphysical and post-Heideggerian theology, freed from the spectre of onto-theology; unlike Marion, who in his own riposte to Heidegger ‘redraws the border between theology and philosophy’<sup>5</sup>, Lacoste is not interested in any such distinction. Whereas his work was previously located in what Donald Mackinnon<sup>6</sup> called the “borderlands of theology” – a border area that, ‘insofar as we understand it, is defined either by a co-belonging or by an uncertain

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<sup>1</sup> « Un savoir peut-il se saisir de Dieu? La question, autant l’avouer, aussitôt que posée, est une question hypocrite. Une discipline au moins, la théologie, tient sur Dieu un langage propositionnel qui se veut cognitif : bien formé d’une part, vrai d’autre part. », Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Étude IX: « *Resurrectio carnis* » Du savoir théologique à la connaissance liturgique’, *La phénoménalité de Dieu: neuf études* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2008), pp.205-227; p.205.

<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that each of the eighteen *Upbuilding Discourses* of 1843-44 begins with a preface explaining that they are neither sermons (since their ‘author does not have the authority to *preach*’) or ‘discourses for Upbuilding, because the speaker by no means claims to be a *teacher*’).

<sup>3</sup> « *Les Discours édifiants* de Kierkegaard en fourniraient un des meilleurs exemples. La théologie, en ces textes, perd toute ambition didactique. Elle se conçoit comme une initiation à la connaissance de Dieu. Organisés comme une homélie ou, mieux, comme une *lectio divina* faite texte, les discours parlent moins de Dieu qu’ils n’enseignent à faire connaissance avec lui. Ils partent certes et, comme le remarque Bultmann à la fin de son essai, ne peuvent éviter de parler de/sur Dieu. Mais ce discours n’est pas une fin. Il n’y a évidemment aucune vocation eschatologique. Il ne remplit aussi, dans le temps du monde, qu’une fonction subordonnée. », *La phénoménalité de Dieu*, p.214.

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Étude IX: « *Resurrectio carnis* » Du savoir théologique à la connaissance liturgique’, *La phénoménalité de Dieu: neuf études* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2008), pp.205-227; p.206.

<sup>5</sup> Cyril O’Regan, ‘Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Unwelcoming of Heidegger’, in Conor Cunningham & Peter Candler (eds.), *The Grandeur of Reason: Religion, Tradition and Universalism* (London: SCM/Veritas, 2010), pp.264-298; p.267. According to O’Regan, ‘Marion refuses to accept the terms of relation between (phenomenological-ontological) philosophy and theology intimated in *Being and Time* (1927), declared in the essay ‘Phenomenology and Theology’ (1928), reiterated in the Zurich lecture of 1951, and performed in the 25-year interim.’

<sup>6</sup> Donald M. MacKinnon, *Borderlands of Theology and Other Essays* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1968).

belonging’<sup>7</sup> – by Lacoste’s own admission his recent work tries to move ‘above and beyond the division between the philosophical and the theological’<sup>8</sup>. Indeed, in his discussion<sup>9</sup> of the *Philosophical Fragments* that border disappears completely<sup>10</sup>; ‘on the frontiers of philosophy, we have no sure and certain knowledge’.<sup>11</sup>

What, in fact, are the *Fragments* about? They do not make any secret of it: they are about salvation. However, the concept has no philosophical history. Philosophy can speak of happiness (for example). She knows about the absolute future of man, since Socrates. Salvation, however, is usually a question asked by religious, or rather, theological texts.<sup>12</sup>

The *Fragments* are therefore intelligible only when read in parallel with another text, that of the Christian tradition.<sup>13</sup> Similarly where Lacoste had earlier been engaged with Heidegger<sup>14</sup> in the development of a constructive liturgical theology there has been a notable move away from the conservative paganism of the *Geivert* and the hierogamies of earth and sky<sup>15</sup> towards the radical Christianity of Kierkegaard<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> « La zone frontalière, telle que nous l’entendons se définit par la double appartenance, soit par une appartenance incertaine... », Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Témoignage mystique et expérience philosophique’, *Présence et parousie* (Geneva : Ad Solem, 2006), pp.193-219 ; p.194.

<sup>8</sup> « Les études ici réunies ne prétendent pas se placer une fois pour toutes en amont de la division du philosophique et du théologique. Elles tentent toutefois de la faire. » Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Liminaire’, *La phénoménalité de Dieu: neuf études* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2008), pp.9-11 ; p.9.

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Étude I: La frontière absente : Philosophie et/ou théologie dans les *Miettes philosophiques*’, *La phénoménalité de Dieu: neuf études* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2008), pp.15-32.

<sup>10</sup> ‘...to read the *Fragments* as they are available to be read: as “a bit of philosophy.” As to what “philosophy” means, the text provides no clear information. Just as he never defines the theological, Kierkegaard never defines the philosophical.’

<sup>11</sup> « ...sur les frontières de la philosophie, nous ne disposons d’aucun savoir sûr et certain. »;

<sup>12</sup> « De quoi traitent en effet les *Miettes* ? Elles n’en font pas mystère : du salut. Or, le concept n’a pas d’histoire philosophique. La philosophie sait parler de la béatitude (par exemple). Elle sait parler de l’avenir absolu de l’homme, dès Socrate. Du salut, en revanche, il n’est classiquement question qu’en des textes religieux ou, mieux, théologiques. », *La phénoménalité de Dieu*, pp.15-16.

<sup>13</sup> However one should still take seriously George Pattison’s warning not to leap too readily to a mystical reading’ of the *Discourses* and their ‘displacement of conventional subject-object structures’ and to instead read them ‘philosophically’, ‘within the general horizons of human understanding and experience, without appeal to any special dogmatic beliefs.’ George Pattison, *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses: Philosophy, theology, literature*, (London: Routledge, 2002), p.65. Of course, this does not mean, as we shall see below, that such a reading is neither impossible nor invalid.

<sup>14</sup> Heidegger, of course, famously observed of Kierkegaard that ‘the existential problematic was so alien to him that, as regards his ontology, he remained completely dominated by Hegel and by ancient philosophy as he saw it. Thus there is more to be learned philosophically from his “edifying” writings than from his theoretical ones – with the exception of his treatise on the concept of anxiety.’ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), p.494.

<sup>15</sup> However, the question remains as to whether, in Cyril O’Regan’s words, Heidegger’s ‘chthonic insistence on ‘dwelling’ and ‘rootedness’ actually elaborates a type of piety ‘that is in direct competition with Christianity.’ Cyril O’Regan, ‘Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Unwelcoming of

which explores the tension between untruth and inauthenticity.<sup>17</sup> It is possible to see in the Heideggerian notions of “fourfold”, “festival” and “dwelling” quasi-liturgical forms that echo the Hegelian simulacra; Lacoste has offered a Christian critique of Heidegger’s liturgical and doxological forms<sup>18</sup> while agreeing that that liturgical form must not yield to modern amnesia or what one commentator has called ‘a metaphysical tailspin that instantiates the dreaded metaphysics of presence.’<sup>19</sup> Lacoste’s phenomenological analysis therefore distinguishes Heideggerian from Christian forms of liturgy and follows the Roman Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar’s refusal to separate “love” and “being” (in the way that Marion does) amid genuine concern that ‘any scheme in which the self or community finds the satisfaction of its desire in what bedazzles’<sup>20</sup> is idolatrous. Instead we are in search of *recognition*, particularly the recognition of the fact that only love is to be perceived.<sup>21</sup>

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Heidegger’, in Conor Cunningham & Peter Candler (eds.), *The Grandeur of Reason: Religion, Tradition and Universalism* (London: SCM/Veritas, 2010), pp.264-298; p.274.

<sup>16</sup> « L’affirmation kierkegaardienne, sur ce point, est la plus radicale que le christianisme, sous sa version protestante, ait produite : face à Dieu, l’homme est la non-vérité. » ‘Kierkegaard’s assertion, on this point, is the most radical that Christianity – in its Protestant version – has produced: before God, man is untruth.’ « Le lien et le rapport contradictoire qui unissent Kierkegaard et Heidegger deviennent ainsi patents. » ‘The link and the adversarial relationship that unite Kierkegaard and Heidegger thus become obvious.’

<sup>17</sup> « Et si nous entendons le salut comme don de la « vérité » (il ne faudrait bien évidemment qu’un pas pour parler du don de l’« authenticité »); ‘And if we understand salvation as the gift of “truth” (it would not be as obvious that one can talk about the gift of “authenticity”).’ Compare this to the *Upbuilding Discourses* which makes the distinction between “love” and “desire”, as the latter ‘defrauds a person out of himself and lets him keep only a superficial passing intimation of authentic being’ (EUD 76).

<sup>18</sup> Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man*, trans. Mark Raftery-Skehan (Fordham: Fordham University Press, 2004), pp.7-39.

<sup>19</sup> Cyril O’Regan, ‘Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Unwelcoming of Heidegger’, in Conor Cunningham & Peter Candler (eds.), *The Grandeur of Reason: Religion, Tradition and Universalism* (London: SCM/Veritas, 2010), pp.264-298; p.298

<sup>20</sup> Cyril O’Regan, ‘Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Unwelcoming of Heidegger’, in Conor Cunningham & Peter Candler (eds.), *The Grandeur of Reason: Religion, Tradition and Universalism* (London: SCM/Veritas, 2010), pp.264-298; p.273.

<sup>21</sup> The *leitmotif* of von Balthasar can be clearly felt at this point: ‘If God wishes to reveal the love that he harbors for the world, this love has to be something that the world can recognize, in spite of, or in fact in, its being wholly other. The inner reality of love can be recognized only by love. In order for a selfish beloved to understand the selfless love of a lover (not only as something he can use, which happens to serve better than other things, but rather as what it truly is), he must already have some glimmer of love, some initial sense of what it is. [...] Knowledge (with its whole complex of intuition and concept) comes into play, because the play of love has already begun beforehand, initiated by the

## The Phenomenality of Christ

‘Things,’ Lacoste notes, ‘exist inasmuch as they invite themselves to us’. If humanity were able to offer an ‘account of this invitation’, to perceive that things do not appear to us in disguise, and to ‘know the conditions under which consciousness is open’, then ‘all the work of philosophy would be achievable.’<sup>22</sup> Lacoste draws our attention to an example from the *Philosophical Fragments*, where amid the many emphatic declarations by Kierkegaard that the god is completely unknown he confesses that: ‘his aim, therefore, cannot be to walk through the world in such a way that not one single person would come to know it. Presumably, he will allow something about himself to be understood’.<sup>23</sup> In phenomenological terms the question therefore becomes one of *intentionality*.<sup>24</sup> It does not depend, as Kierkegaard himself notes in the *Upbuilding Discourses*, ‘merely upon what one sees, but what one sees depends upon how one sees; all observation is not just a receiving, a discovering, but also a bringing forth, and insofar as it is that, how the observer himself is constituted is indeed decisive.’<sup>25</sup>

The question of Kierkegaard and phenomenology<sup>26</sup> (understood here as the

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mother, the transcendent. God interprets himself to man as love in the same way: he radiates love, which kindles the light of love in the heart of man, and it is precisely this light that allows man to perceive this, the absolute Love: ‘For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness’, who has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor 4:6).’ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), pp.75-76.

<sup>22</sup> Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘The Work and Complement of Appearing’ in Jeffrey Bloechl, ed., *Religious Experience and the End of Metaphysics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), pp.68-93; p.68.

<sup>23</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p.56.

<sup>24</sup> George Pattison points out Kierkegaard’s recognition that what matters ‘is not merely what one sees, but what one sees depends on how one sees; for observation is never merely receptive, but is also productive, and insofar as it is this, then what is decisive is how the observer himself is.’ SKS 5, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p.59.

<sup>25</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, ‘Love Will Hide a Multitude of Sins’, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p.59.

<sup>26</sup> On this see Arne Grøn, *Subjektivitet og Negativitet: Kierkegaard* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1997) p.37: The phenomenon ‘shows itself through the individual’s manner of presenting himself. It is not available for direct observation, but requires a particular mode of attention...a sign that is to be interpreted phenomenologically reveals itself to us in and as an expression of what is to be interpreted.’

study of the human aptitude for experience) rests upon the crucial importance of the ‘phenomenality of Christ’.<sup>27</sup> The opening question of *Fragments*, ‘Can the truth be learned?’ is asked ‘not in order to solve some abstract or pedantic epistemological issue’ but because the truth that is sought is one that is appropriate to human beings and their salvation.’<sup>28</sup> As George Pattison has observed, the *Discourses* ask the question as to ‘whether we bring to the phenomena the right conceptual understanding for deciphering its presence, a presence that, of itself, because of its transcendent nature, is always ambiguous, indirect concealed.’<sup>29</sup>

### The Logic of Love

In order to address the question of quite how God might appear Lacoste refers to Heidegger’s concept of *Befindlichkeit* which established that the affective life - notably love - is itself still possessed of some cognitive content:

In an all-important passage of *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes affection, *Befindlichkeit*, as endowed with cognitive abilities. He then praises Scheler for having rediscovered these abilities, following impulses by Augustine and Blaise Pascal. And there, in footnote 3 to section 29, he quotes both Augustine and Pascal. According to Augustine, *non intratur in veritatem nisi per caritatem*: one does not reach truth except through love. And according to Pascal, who develops Augustine’s maxim, ‘in the case we are speaking of human things, it is said to be necessary to know them before we can love... But the saints, on the contrary, when they speak of divine things, say we must love them before we know them, and that we enter into truth only through charity.’ We can prove *ab absurdo* the rightness of the argument. Could God appear to us and not be loved? Can we figure an experience of a non-lovable God? Otto’s *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, admittedly, is no lovable object. The primal experience in Schleiermacher’s *Christian Faith* (that is, the feeling of absolute dependence) makes no room for love.<sup>30</sup>

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Cited in George Pattison, *Kierkegaard’s Upbuilding Discourses: Philosophy, Literature and Theology* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.74.

<sup>27</sup> Jeffrey Hanson, ‘Michel Henry and Søren Kierkegaard on Paradox and the Phenomenality of Christ’, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 17: 3 (2009) pp.435-454; Hanson points out that for Henry the question ‘Can the truth be learned?’ was ‘as much an aporia as it was for Kierkegaard’ (p.436) and borrows the term from p.93 of Henry’s book, *I Am the Truth*, where Henry refers to the phenomenological aporia that Christ cannot show himself in the world as Christ. Michel Henry, *I Am the Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity*, trans. Susan Emmanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). Originally published as *C’est moi la vérité: pour une philosophie du christianisme* (Paris: Seuil, 1996). Hanson is referring specifically to the opening question of *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

<sup>28</sup> Hanson, p.436.

<sup>29</sup> George Pattison, *Kierkegaard’s Upbuilding Discourses: Philosophy, Literature and Theology* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.80. For Pattison it is this question of intentionality that separates Kierkegaard from more ‘classical’ forms of phenomenology’.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell,

It is this “logic of love” that is both crucial for Lacoste and also invites a criticism of Kierkegaard. For Kierkegaard<sup>31</sup> the relationship between God and human being occurs almost exclusively through love to the point of absolute knowledge:

Love is both the fact of God before it is the fact of man, and it requires little attention to notice that love comes into play in the text to describe the relationship of God and the man, and it alone. The relationship between man and man is absent, as is absent any relationship of knowledge in which the divine does not intervene.<sup>32</sup>

Love, according to Kierkegaard, ‘will hide a multitude of sins’<sup>33</sup>; it is what ‘witnesses when prophecy is silent’, what ‘does not cease when the vision ends.’<sup>34</sup> It remains constant ‘even though everything is changed’<sup>35</sup> ‘that which gives away *everything* and *for that reason* demands nothing and therefore has nothing to lose.’<sup>36</sup>

Although sympathetic to such a doctrine of love<sup>37</sup> Lacoste recognises the complexity, the partiality and the plurality of our affective lives:

God may appear to us, not according to the laws of theophanies, but in the modest way of his presence being felt. Peter’s presence does not provide me with a ‘comprehensive’ affective knowledge of Peter: I just know that this one is Peter; I am acquainted with him though I keep discovering new aspects of his personality, etc. Peter is visible and God is invisible. But in both cases, we are not dealing with an apocalyptic disclosure of any sort. It will take years to

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1962), p.178 and note on p.492; Lacoste continues, ‘And I am ready to admit that in such experiences, if we stick to interpreting them from a theological point of view, God hides himself more than he discloses himself. What I have just said, nonetheless, was no slip of the tongue, and I intend to suggest that God can appear, paradoxically, as a hidden God – or more precisely, that it belongs to God’s disclosure that his hiddenness is ever greater.’ See Jean-Yves Lacoste, trans. Aaron Patrick Riches, ‘Perception, Transcendence and the Experience of God’, in Conor Cunningham & Peter Candler (eds.), *Transcendence and Phenomenology* (London: SCM/Veritas, 2007), pp.1-20; pp.15-16; *La phénoménalité de Dieu*, pp.48-49.

<sup>31</sup> « n’a rien d’autre à espérer que d’aimer et d’être aimé. » See note below.

<sup>32</sup> « Aimer aussi bien est le fait du dieu avant d’être le fait de l’homme ; et il faut peu d’attention pour remarquer que l’amour n’entre en jeu dans le texte que pour qualifier la relation du dieu et de l’homme, et elle seule. La relation d’homme à homme est absente comme est absente toute relation de connaissance dans laquelle le divin n’intervienne pas. » *La phénoménalité de Dieu*, p.28

<sup>33</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, ‘Love Will Hide a Multitude of Sins’, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p.55.

<sup>34</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, ‘Love Will Hide a Multitude of Sins’, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p.55.

<sup>35</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, ‘Love Will Hide a Multitude of Sins’, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p.56.

<sup>36</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, ‘Love Will Hide a Multitude of Sins’, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp.56-57.

<sup>37</sup> George Pattison writes of the ‘need to develop an ethical and religious transubstantiation of erotic love’ that may act as an ‘interpretative bridge’ that ‘does not require us to presuppose the prior acceptance of dogmatic principles or ecclesiastical authority.’ *Kierkegaard’s Upbuilding Discourses: Philosophy, Literature and Theology* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.193.

become ‘perfectly acquainted’ with Peter, if it is possible at all. And can we say it is possible to become ‘perfectly acquainted’ with God?<sup>38</sup>

Even though we cannot refuse God the right to reveal himself as love, this does not imply that such an appearance would reveal any more than it might conceal. If God can indeed be present in phenomenality then it should be understood that such presence is not only mere presence (as opposed to the divine *parousia*) but also ‘essentially frustrating’<sup>39</sup>. Moreover, the *Fragments*, he observes, are characterised by their lack of attention to eschatology<sup>40</sup>; the ‘conceptual prose of our theologies can not claim any eschatological destiny. We must never believe that “theology” is predicated univocally upon both a “theology of the blessed” and *theologia viatorum*.’<sup>41</sup>

Even according to Anti-Climacus, God is ‘a friend of order’<sup>42</sup>; the birds’ and the lilies’ being in this world is their obedience to God<sup>43</sup>. Furthermore, nature in ‘its

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<sup>38</sup> Jean-Yves Lacoste, trans. Aaron Patrick Riches, ‘Perception, Transcendence and the Experience of God’, in Conor Cunningham & Peter Candler (eds.), *Transcendence and Phenomenology* (London: SCM/Veritas, 2007), pp.1-20; pp.17-18.

<sup>39</sup> ‘God’s presence, in so far as ‘presence’ is understood as present to the ‘heart’, is essentially frustrating. Anticipations may be enjoyed, but the God whose presence we enjoy is more to be desired than to be enjoyed.’ Jean-Yves Lacoste, trans. Aaron Patrick Riches, ‘Perception, Transcendence and the Experience of God’, in Conor Cunningham & Peter Candler (eds.), *Transcendence and Phenomenology* (London: SCM/Veritas, 2007), pp.1-20; pp.18-19.

<sup>40</sup> « Il faut peu lire les *Miettes*, en effet, pour constater une absence, et une absence majeure, celle de toute eschatologie. De même que le « dieu dans le temps », prend la forme du serviteur, mais ne connaît ni la croix ni la résurrection, de même le disciple ne reçoit-il autre d’autre promesse que celle du maintenant de la vie vraiment digne d’être vécue. Entendu comme relation amoureuse du maître divin et du disciple humain, l’événement de salut épuise sa réalité dans le présent vivant de cette relation qui ne tend vers aucun avenir absolu. Celui qui a reconnu le dieu sous la forme du serviteur n’a rien d’autre à espérer que d’aimer et d’être aimé. Et si l’instant où l’homme accède à la condition de disciple mérite le nom de « plénitude du temps », ce n’est pas lire le texte à contresens que d’y voir aussi une certaine fin des temps. » ‘One actually need only read the *Fragments* a little to notice an absence – and a major one at that – that of any eschatology. Even though “the god in time” took the form of a servant, but knows neither the cross nor the Resurrection, so does his disciple receive nothing more than the promise here and now of a life truly worthy to be lived. Understood as the loving relationship between a divine master and a human disciple, the event of salvation exhausts its reality in the lifetime of this relationship which does not hint toward any absolute future. Those who have recognized the god in the form of a servant have nothing to hope for except to love and be loved. And if the moment when the man reaches discipleship deserves the name of the “fullness of time”, this is not to read the text incorrectly than to see there also a specific end to time.’ *La phénoménalité de Dieu*, p.25.

<sup>41</sup> *La phénoménalité de Dieu*, p.213.

<sup>42</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) p.121.

<sup>43</sup> Christopher Ben Simpson, ‘The Subjectivity of Truth and the Grandeur of Reason’ in Conor

ingenious formation' that humiliates human being honours God its creator as 'the artist who weaves the carpet of the field and produces the beauty of the lilies' of whom 'it holds true that the wonder increases the closer one comes' and 'that the distance and worship increases the closer one comes to him.'<sup>44</sup> Thus we learn from the birds and the lilies the reasonable and loving will behind them: 'all nature is like the great staff of servants who remind the human being...about worshipping God.'<sup>45</sup>

'If human beings want to resemble God by ruling, they have forgotten God'.<sup>46</sup> The 'most grievous thing' about paganism, according to Kierkegaard, 'is that it could not worship'; man 'could be silent in wonder but he could not worship'.<sup>47</sup> However, 'the ability to worship is no visible glory, it cannot be seen'; 'nature's visible glory sighs' and 'incessantly reminds the human being that whatever he does he absolutely must not forget – to worship.'<sup>48</sup> The world is reasonably ordered to direct human beings toward God as our own good and fulfilment: 'the power that governs human life is love and God's governance of the world is a 'Loving Governance'.<sup>49</sup> God's logos is both evident from the things created and beneficent – a logic of love.<sup>50</sup>

Liturgical knowledge is not necessarily knowledge gained in and through the explicit celebration of liturgy or the retreat of the communicant into 'the sacred sphere of the

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Cunningham & Peter Candler (eds.), *The Grandeur of Reason: Religion, Tradition and Universalism* (London: SCM/Veritas, 2010), pp.218-232; p.220.

<sup>44</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, 'To Be Contented with Being a Human Being', *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p.164.

<sup>45</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, 'How Glorious It Is to Be a Human Being', *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p.193.

<sup>46</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, 'How Glorious It Is to Be a Human Being', *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p.193.

<sup>47</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, 'How Glorious It Is to Be a Human Being', *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p.193.

<sup>48</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, 'How Glorious It Is to Be a Human Being', *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p.194.

<sup>49</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p.194.

<sup>50</sup> As the *Upbuilding Discourses* of 1843-44 recall, it is therefore 'incumbent upon us to explain both the what and the whence'. (EUD, 129).

church'<sup>51</sup>, but an understanding gained through a liturgical disposition, *coram deo*. It is worship in its broadest sense. 'All knowledge involves feeling. And when the words of the liturgy are vocalised in song, then we stumble upon a paradoxical and fruitful phenomenon: the truth can be *felt*.'<sup>52</sup> We commonly define the truth – or rather it is defined for us – in propositional terms: a semantic theory of truth has the disadvantage of being meagre, but the advantage of not being deceitful.<sup>53</sup> Taking his cue from the radical Christianity of Kierkegaard Lacoste is prepared to ask that our knowledge performs – perhaps even to risk – a little more than that.

### **Incarnation and Rumour**

'Apostolic speech,' observed Kierkegaard, 'is essentially different in content from all human speech...it is also...different in form'<sup>54</sup> and although 'always as impatient as that of a woman in labour'<sup>55</sup> it is not 'deceitful' or 'poetic' but 'faithful' and a 'valid witness'<sup>56</sup> and possessed of a proper eschatology that is tempered by love.<sup>57</sup> Not every truth, avers Lacoste, 'reaches us through the mediation of a witness who places himself at the service of his words; a rumour can also tell you the truth; it is, after all, in the same language as our everyday speech'. Now, this is not to encourage anonymous discourse (that which no one claims as their own – at least at

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<sup>51</sup> George Pattison, *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses: Philosophy, Literature and Theology* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.210.

<sup>52</sup> «« Toute connaissance implique le sentir. Et lorsque les paroles de la liturgie sont portées par le chant, nous butons sur un phénomène paradoxal et fructueux : le vrai peut être senti. » *La phénoménalité de Dieu*, p.223.

<sup>53</sup> « Nous définissons communément la vérité, on la définit plutôt, en termes propositionnels, et l'on n'a pas pleinement tort: la théorie sémantique de la vérité a l'inconvénient d'être pauvre, mais l'avantage de ne pas tromper. » *La phénoménalité de Dieu*, p.223.

<sup>54</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, 'Love Will Hide a Multitude of Sins', *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p.69.

<sup>55</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, 'Love Will Hide a Multitude of Sins', *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p.69.

<sup>56</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, 'Love Will Hide a Multitude of Sins', *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p.59.

<sup>57</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, 'Love Will Hide a Multitude of Sins', *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp.69-70.

first glance anyway) that implies something without also declaring its intentions (again at first glance), or that of a crowd of interchangeable “selves”. It simply accedes to ‘the *a priori* of a common language that is content merely to be common – intelligible to all – and useful’. ‘The love of commitment is not a sin, and there are many things about which we can only make sense [speak well] if they engage us: by admitting that, when we talk about them, we make their cause our own.’ The ‘benefit of “they say...” is often to make something nameable, whether one is speaking about pipes, physical laws or about a certain Jesus, called “ of Nazareth”...’<sup>58</sup> Jesus does not appear in history by virtue of either having been born or of having lived, but because we have spoken about him.<sup>59</sup> Even pseudonymous works have an author, and perhaps all that phenomenology offers theology is – rather than a fundamental ontology<sup>60</sup> – ‘a cipher for greater openness to and experience of what is given.’<sup>61</sup> History records that ‘men can and have talked about God, and spoken of him with sufficient accuracy before he showed himself definitively.’ Lacoste finds it useful to recall that “Clement of Alexandria, who of all theologians was most committed to stating that there is no last word without a first and penultimate word, admitted the existence of three Testaments - the Old, the philosophical and the New - and placed on a roughly equal

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<sup>58</sup> Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Philosophie, théologie et vérité. Remarques frontalières’, *Recherches de science religieuse* 89:4 (2001), p. 487-510; p.503. Lacoste here acknowledges his debt for the idea of a beneficial role for “rumour” to Joseph Moingt, *L’homme qui venait de Dieu* (Paris: Cerf, 1993), pp.21-69.

<sup>59</sup> « Le Christ des *Miettes* est certes un Christ qui n’en porte pas le nom (et il n’est même pas vraiment un christ, puisque toute théologie trinitaire est absente du texte, et qu’incarnation et salut sont l’œuvre d’un dieu qui ne confère l’onction messianique à personne et qui n’assigne de mission qu’à lui-même). » ; ‘The Christ of the *Fragments* is indeed a Christ who does not bear the name (and it is not even really a Christ, since all Trinitarian theology is absent from the text, and the incarnation and salvation are the work of a god who anointed the messianic function on anyone and who only assigns the task to himself).’, *La phénoménalité de Dieu*, p.16.

<sup>60</sup> This is George Pattison’s criticism of phenomenological readings of Kierkegaard. See George Pattison, *Kierkegaard’s Upbuilding Discourses: Philosophy, Literature and Theology* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.??.

<sup>61</sup> Cyril O’Regan, ‘Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Unwelcoming of Heidegger’, in Conor Cunningham & Peter Candler (eds.), *The Grandeur of Reason: Religion, Tradition and Universalism* (London: SCM/Veritas, 2010), pp.264-298; p.273.

footing religious preparation and rational preparation for the recognition of God as present in Jesus Christ”<sup>62</sup>.

### **Theology and liturgical recognition**

Lacoste has made explicit a phenomenological interest in salvation, with respect to the fragility of theological language on the subject.<sup>63</sup> Acutely aware of the frailty and thus the necessary humility and patience of theological language: ‘It takes time to find the right words, whether minting our own vocabulary and terminology, or taking over others’ coinage. We should be in no hurry to speak, for hurry is more likely to produce a babble than coherent speech. If a philosopher lacks words to say just how things are, it is no disgrace to say nothing. Speech is most true to itself when it goes carefully; thought is most true to itself when it takes time.’<sup>64</sup> Lacoste warns us not to ‘expect a God’s-eye view which would enable us to do away with discourses that have always taken place in the history of words and concepts, even with discourses that have always occurred in the history of our relationship with the world. However, we can expect that theological language ‘represents our *needs*<sup>65</sup>: insofar as they themselves speak in all our questions, insofar as they perceive that our whole being is a question, insofar as they also allow us to give or discern answers. To recognize these needs is not a trivial matter. The theologian will doubtless add that their appearance and their bearing upon the concept lead into the realms of a theory of

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<sup>62</sup> Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Dieu connaissable comme aimable : Par delà « foi et raison »’ *Recherches de science religieuse* 95:2 (2007), pp.177-197; p.188. Lacoste here echoes the strategy of *ressourcement* of his late friend Henri de Lubac with an interest in patristic authors rather than the theological Aristotelianism which dominated modern Catholic theology.

<sup>63</sup> The question ‘can the truth be learned?’ has its correlate in Balthasar’s own question ‘dare we hope that all men be saved?’ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope “That All Men Be Saved”?* with *A Short Discourse on Hell*, trans. David Kipp and Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988).

<sup>64</sup> Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘More Haste, Less Speed in Theology’, trans. Oliver O’Donovan, *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9:3 (2007), pp. 263-282; p.264.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. EUD p.425 where Kierkegaard refers to our ‘needs of the moment’.

salvation.<sup>66</sup> Put otherwise, our yearning (or at least our *curiosity*) about salvation is phenomenally concerned about the validity (or otherwise) of our theological statements and the capacity of theology, as a minimal discipline, for truth-saying, speaking responsibly and truthfully about God [the Absolute]. The claim made by Jesus “of Nazareth to be “the truth” [« *C'est moi la vérité* »]<sup>67</sup> raises questions about both truth and transcendence, and their relation to the aesthetic. Kierkegaard's own aesthetic attitude is, of course, crucial to both his work and its proper understanding – his literary activity often described as a form of seduction, commensurate with the phenomenological relationship between love, faith and reason proposed by Lacoste, who himself reminds us that ‘it remains true that the manifestation of God in the history of Israel, and in the history of Jesus of Nazareth, holds a deep manifestation for all artistic creation’,<sup>68</sup> and thereby echoing the theme of the theological aesthetic offered by Balthasar (himself deeply influenced by Kierkegaard):

Only love, if one is to believe Kierkegaard, pierces the disguise of this god present as a servant. But if that is the case, love does not succeed faith, as if we first recognize god in the flesh and then find him to be lovable, instead it is purely and simply simultaneous. We have no immemorial knowledge of God. We have probably forgotten those occasions where we heard his name, and spoke it ourselves, for the first time. “They” may have talked to us about God as if transmitting information without using those words which have allowed that God is revealed to us. But how is it that we can speak about God, or what the texts tell us about him, such that God can be allowed to appear to us unedited, in flesh and bone and as large as life? The answer which is advanced is clear: it is due to the perception of kindness that we can perceive at all. [...] Common sense tells us that we perceive firstly and then love, and that is not completely wrong. If there was nothing to perceive, then there would be nothing to love. What is there, however, to perceive? On this point, Kierkegaard is right, and Balthasar borrowed from him more than he admitted: only love is to be perceived.<sup>69</sup>

As Lacoste notes, ‘It is not clear, however, that the visible must owe its being

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<sup>66</sup> Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Philosophie, théologie et vérité. Remarques frontalières’, *Recherches de science religieuse* 89:4 (2001), p. 487-510; p.510.

<sup>67</sup> One should note here the work of the late Michel Henry for whom this phrase provided the title of one of his most famous books and who was himself influenced by Kierkegaard and interested in issues of divine phenomenality.

<sup>68</sup> Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Anonymous Theology and Pseudonymous Christology’, *Chronicle of the Oxford University CS Lewis Society* 4:1 (2007), pp.4-17; p.14.

<sup>69</sup> « Sur ce point, Kierkegaard a raison, et Balthasar lui empruntera plus qu’il ne l’avouera : n’est à percevoir qu’un amour. » Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Dieu connaissable comme aimable : Par delà « foi et raison »’ *Recherches de science religieuse* 95:2 (2007), pp.177-197; p.182 (my translation).

to an invisible first cause. And even when we have done our best to prove it, that proof, unlike a logical-mathematical proof, does not bind us. [...] No “proof” has however been able to generate intersubjective agreement as clear as the agreement generated by a mathematical proof, this is a mere “fact”, but a significant fact.’<sup>70</sup> The history of Christianity, especially that of Christian theology and its debates offers more than enough evidence of this difficult trajectory: ‘one can, in the first analysis, call on the Christian experience and its language. The salient points are obvious, and not all are those of this single experience, or of this single language.’ They are the facts ‘of an experience lived in the plural, of which the subject is an “us”, a community or people... a common language of which we ask that it be fair – *orthos*... [and] common behaviours on which weigh the same requirement of righteousness.’ And these three ‘weave into a fourth, that of a premise of universality. And all in all, it must be said, are organized around an axiom: such experience is controlled by a primordial act of speech which was initiated by God.’<sup>71</sup> Lacoste thus finds in Kierkegaard’s *Upbuilding Discourses* and their implicit phenomenology of religious language a hermeneutical clue to ethical theological language:

The discourse will speak of God (it generally takes the form of a scriptural commentary), but it will do so only after having spoken to God. The rules are immediately established: we cannot say how it is that the author speaks about God and (thus) forget in which horizon [register] it is that he speaks about him, and so forget that a well-trained theological language speaks to God before talking about God, and is only able to speak well about God by being capable of speaking to God beforehand.<sup>72</sup>

Crucially, each of the *Discourses* has a preface<sup>73</sup> that enables Lacoste to answer his question, ‘What words, therefore, avoid treating God as the supreme object? We have

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<sup>70</sup> Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Dieu connaissable comme aimable : Par delà « foi et raison »’ *Recherches de science religieuse* 95:2 (2007), pp.177-197; p.193 (my translation).

<sup>71</sup> Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Philosophie, théologie et vérité. Remarques frontalières’, *Recherches de science religieuse* 89:4 (2001), pp. 487-510, p.493.

<sup>72</sup> Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Étude IX: « Resurrectio carnis » » Du savoir théologique à la connaissance liturgique’, *La phénoménalité de Dieu: neuf études* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2008), pp.214-215.

<sup>73</sup> A similar understanding can be found in the work of Arne Grøn who observes that ‘the forewords point to the role of the reader’. p.48. Kierkegaard himself acknowledges that they inaugurate a

already said that this will be words that *flirt*. Each edifying discourse by Kierkegaard opens with a simple prayer.’<sup>74</sup> If one accepts that the modern subject is extenuated<sup>75</sup> by the fact that that which it wills and desires or what it anticipates intentionally (in the case of liturgical experience, the absolute eschatological future of God’s Kingdom) does not present itself *an sich* then this compounds the sense of angst that has defined the human condition. By themselves, human intentionality and consciousness cannot make sense of this experience; the believer will finally have to renounce the autonomy of modern subjectivity (*Sinngebung*) in order to deliver their being into God’s hands.<sup>76</sup> Lacoste conceives of the religious person as someone who exists in a liturgical (non)place where they can only receive – or must wait *patiently* to receive – a gift, and thereby promotes the passivity and powerlessness of the believer during the liturgical experience<sup>77</sup> into an active refusal of the active and powerful modern subject.<sup>78</sup> Such passivity may be manifested in the bodily movements of prayer<sup>79</sup>: ‘it is as men of flesh and blood that we approach the Absolute. As men of flesh and blood, it is our body, praying with hands crossed, kneeling down or with the palms of the hand wide open to receive the *sancta*, that

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‘conversation’.

<sup>74</sup> « Quels mots, donc, éviteront de traiter Dieu comme objet suprême? Nous l’avons déjà dit : ce seront les mots qui tutoient. Chaque discours édifiant, chez Kierkegaard, s’ouvre par une prière n’a rien d’ornemental. » *La phénoménalité de Dieu*, p.214.

<sup>75</sup> Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man*, trans. Mark Raftery-Skehan (Fordham: Fordham University Press, 2004), p.188.

<sup>76</sup> Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man*, trans. Mark Raftery-Skehan (Fordham: Fordham University Press, 2004), p.156.

<sup>77</sup> Kierkegaard is also fascinated by the antithesis of indirect communication: the possibility of a direct, wordless encounter with God, freed from the babble of language – therefore the discussion of Abraham in *Fear and Trembling* might be linked with the idea of being ‘transparent’ to God in texts such as *The Sickness Unto Death*.

<sup>78</sup> For a critique of this position see Joeri Schrijvers, ‘Ontotheological Turnings? Marion, Lacoste and Levinas on the Decentering of the Subject’, *Modern Theology*, (22:2 (2006), pp.221-253.

<sup>79</sup> Pattison notes, ‘...the work of praising love is a labour that any human being may undertake... Praising love is at one and the same time a willing of the eschatological restitution of broken relationships, an affirmation that for God all things are possible, *and* in and through testifying in writing to all hopeful willing, building up the contemporary community of love.’ George Pattison, *Kierkegaard’s Upbuilding Discourses: Philosophy, Literature and Theology* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.213..

phenomenalises the *coram* relation'<sup>80</sup>. It is, moreover, as men of flesh and blood that we *flirt* with the Absolute in our speech, in a relationship established by the originary appearance of God in love<sup>81</sup>, to be loved, a relationship conducted liturgically:

There is no doubt that God provides food for thought, and gives himself to be thought. And if liturgy comes after the “cognitive delay” without which we would not know what the name of God means, one would readily concede to Hegel that knowledge has a certain privilege. Even when the fundamental theses of Hegelian eschatology find themselves denied in favour of a logic of “next to last,” which includes within it a logic of “inexperience,” it is still a question of knowledge enabling man to calmly live this inexperience by allowing him to decipher it as a specific mode of experience.<sup>82</sup>

Merold Westphal wrote that Kierkegaard’s phenomenology of faith ‘tells the existing individual that it is always too soon to rest’.<sup>83</sup> Lacoste – whose pilgrim ultimately has a place to go<sup>84</sup> – is a self-proclaimed follower of John of the Cross<sup>85</sup>, a theologian with whom Kierkegaard displayed ‘a mutual taste for the analogy of maternal withdrawal as descriptive of the God-relationship.’<sup>86</sup> It is worth, at this point, noting that this recurrent use of maternal metaphor is not unproblematic. Although Balthasar writes about the ontological connection between human –

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<sup>80</sup> Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘La connaissance silencieuse. Des évidences antéprédicatives à une critique de l’apophasé’, *Laval théologique et philosophique* 58 (2002), pp. 137–153; p.147. Joeri Schrijvers’ translation.

<sup>81</sup> George Pattison makes a similar point when he observes that for Kierkegaard ‘divine love underwrites human love’. George Pattison, *Kierkegaard’s Upbuilding Discourses: Philosophy, Literature and Theology* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.204.

<sup>82</sup> « De ce que Dieu donne à penser et se donne à penser, ou ne doutera certes pas. Et si la liturgie vient après « le délai cognitif » sans lequel nous saurions pas ce que le nom de Dieu veut dire, on concédera de bonne grâce à Hegel un certain privilège du savoir – et même lorsque les thèses faïtières de l’eschatologie hégélienne se trouvent niées au profit d’une logique des « avant-dernières choses », qui abrite une logique de l’« inexpérience », il revient encore au savoir de permettre que l’homme vive sans drame cette inexpérience, en lui permettant de la déchiffrer comme un mode précis de l’expérience. »

<sup>83</sup> Merold Westphal, ‘Kierkegaard’s Phenomenology of Faith as Suffering’, in Hugh J. Silverman, ed., *Writing the Politics of Difference* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), p.70.

<sup>84</sup> Joeri Schrijvers, ‘Le destin de la non-expérience de Dieu : Espoir et eschatologie selon Jean-Yves Lacoste’, *Lumière et Vie* 279 (2008) pp.43-53; p.53

<sup>85</sup> ‘To John of the Cross and his followers (myself included), though, we may nonetheless object that we have no right to forbid the Absolute from appearing to us, and from doing so in the realm of affection.’ Jean-Yves Lacoste, trans. Aaron Patrick Riches, ‘Perception, Transcendence and the Experience of God’, in Conor Cunningham & Peter Candler (eds.), *Transcendence and Phenomenology* (London: SCM/Veritas, 2007), pp.1-20; p14.

<sup>86</sup> Simon D. Podmore, ‘The Dark Night of Suffering and the Darkness of God: God-Forsakenness or Forsaking God in “The Gospel of Sufferings”’, in Robert L. Perkins, ed., *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Volume 15 - Uplifting Discourses in Various Spirits* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2005), pp.229-256; p.231.

particularly maternal – and divine love<sup>87</sup> (something which Pattison also notes<sup>88</sup>) Kierkegaard’s ‘love takes everything’<sup>89</sup> an exertion akin to that of the woman in labour, which evokes ‘tears of repentance’ before it evokes ‘tears of adoration’<sup>90</sup>.

But while the *maieutic* method might be analogous to midwifery, in the end Socrates cannot save us<sup>91</sup>, as the example of the *Fragments*<sup>92</sup> demonstrates; as Simon Podmore has suggested the mystical reading remains unavoidable, since for Kierkegaard, ‘the only authentic decision is to be in the wrong. God is love, but emphatically, ‘if God is love, then he is also love in everything, love in what you can understand and love in what you cannot understand.’<sup>93, 94</sup> Even if a “Kierkegaardian phenomenology” might not, in the end, be understood as either an ‘existential and theological ontology’<sup>95</sup> then it is certainly a demanding one.

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<sup>87</sup> ‘After a mother has smiled at her child for many days and weeks, she finally receives her child’s smile in response. She has awakened love in the heart of her child, and as the child awakens to love, it also awakens to knowledge: the initially empty-sense impressions gather meaningfully around the core of the Thou. [...] the primal foundation of being smiles at us as a mother and as a father.’ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible*, trans. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), p.76.

<sup>88</sup> ‘Kierkegaard could, perhaps, not state more clearly that the love with which Christ beholds her [the woman at the house of the Pharisee] is of essentially the same kind as the love that is at work in her. If human love ultimately needs to be underwritten by divine love, both that need and the divine love that corresponds to it are understandable on the basis of our human experience. Nothing that is said here, of course, suggests that we can somehow compel that divine love and, certainly there remains for Kierkegaard (as for Christian doctrine generally) an indissoluble mystery of grace.

<sup>89</sup> EUD, p.74.

<sup>90</sup> EUD, pp.75; 76.

<sup>91</sup> Lacoste’s assessment of Kierkegaard’s conclusion is similar to that of George Pattison, ‘Socrates’ dialectic does not lead to illumination, but...brings the whole edifice of thought crashing down.’ There is instead a ‘religious resolution of the crisis of the divided self.’ George Pattison, *Kierkegaard’s Upbuilding Discourses: Philosophy, Literature and Theology* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.69.

<sup>92</sup> Lacoste is particularly interested the possibility of an unsystematic, fragmentary theology. Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Théologie réduite au silence et théologie asystématique’, *Présence et parousie* (Geneva : Ad Solem, 2006), pp.169-191.

<sup>93</sup> *Uplifting Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.268, quoted in Podmore, p.234.

<sup>94</sup> This God of love, ‘understood by that belief which surrenders its doubts in the face of the incomprehensible, is thus apparently Kierkegaard’s ultimate response to any personal theodicy problem. Kierkegaard’s inscrutable God of love brings questioning to an abrupt conclusion.’ Podmore, p.235.

<sup>95</sup> George Pattison, *Kierkegaard’s Upbuilding Discourses: Philosophy, Literature and Theology* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.76.