

Theology after Christianity

Grappling with Finitude, the Body, and the World

Project Scope

What does it mean to practice theology after the philosophical return to religion? This project aims to establish the concept of finitude as the critical revision of fundamental theological grammar, and to revisit and systematically explore the concepts of the world and the body as primal theological *loci*. During the last few decades, the renewal of theology has been much discussed in light of philosophical re-lectures that have revisited fundamental Christian concepts. However, from the theological perspective, the crucial issues continue to be unresolved: What should the proper propaedeutic framework for theological work be in a secular context? How to formulate theologically valid as well as contextually plausible truth-claims? What kind of grammar should be employed in theology to create not only a rational but also credible discourse? The working hypothesis of this project is that the phenomenological engagements with theological concepts, transform the fundamental theological practice, revisit its rigor, and provide the possibility of developing an intelligible grammar for articulating normative theological claims. The perspective is, nevertheless, not restricted to the analysis of renewed theological language. The intersection of a theologically oriented phenomenology and the secular philosophy of Christianity unfolds pertinent implications for the structural reinterpretation of theological concepts and methods. Hence, the unique contribution of this research consists not only in revisiting systematic-theological reasoning but also stimulates the dialogue regarding the position of Christian religion in a culture which certainly not-Christian but not yet entirely non-Christian.

Objectives and Aims

The general background hypothesis of the present project is that the theological questions of yesterday remain not only interesting but also important questions of this present time. The categories of, for example, the creation, the incarnation, the resurrection, etc. must be reinterpreted in dialogue with contemporary intellectual tools such as the reflection on nature and the world, the body and the flesh, and finitude. The theological concepts are embedded in history; Augustine re-appropriated Platonism, Thomas Aquinas repeated the gesture with Aristotelianism, and, for example, Blondel was recuperated by the *ressourcement* movement and *nouvelle théologie*; certain trends of Heidegger were accepted in the Protestant-Existential theologies. Today, a joint practice of philosophy and theology suggests engaging with, for example, phenomenology, analytic philosophy of religion, epistemology, media theory, the reflection on technology and neuroscience. This project will lay down methodological foundations for a theological grammar based on the concepts of finitude, the body and the world. I will defend the hypothesis that the recent philosophical reinterpretations of Christianity, and particularly phenomenology, can serve as a proper tool for not only rational and argumentatively solid but also credible and rigorous fundamental theology. The goal is to use a proper methodological apparatus for developing a viable theological account on and response to the present time challenges. Hence, the

nature of this project and its key objective must be understood as theological.

The main interlocutors of this project are Jean-Luc Nancy and Emmanuel Falque. Nancy's questioning Christianity is about making sense of contemporary culture. Falque's interest in theology is motivated by researching the backlash of the religious thought on the philosophical one. What is new and challenging about this project is, therefore, the application of 'the reverse perspective.' How do philosophical reflections, inspired by the engagement with Christianity, fall back onto theological practice? If Christian theology provides a widely accepted impetus for philosophical reflections on the human condition, shall not theology open up to interruptions coming from the field of these creative reinterpretations? Philosophy is not only as the reservoir of inspiration and conceptual equipment for the rigorous practice of theological discipline, but also as the force of transformation of the fundamental-theological concepts as such.

This project will therefore defend theology as a systematic-theoretical reflection of the concepts (*theória*); however, the concepts here do not stand for the same as it is the case in mathematics or natural sciences (*theory*). The theological concept does not appear simply as objective; it is revealed from within the human condition on the background of faith that is manifested and carried out in the experience. Nevertheless, the intention is to turn the descriptive phenomenological method and philosophical heuristic into a prescriptive practice of theology. In this sense, the project will advance a theology which does not fall prey to sheer verticality of thought, the spiritualization of being, the asymmetry between the finite and the infinite; the subject rendered passive vis-à-vis overwhelming transcendence, but will renew the rational account on faith outside technical rationalism and disregarding fideism. To reiterate, the main concern is not believable rationality but rational credibility.

Research Questions

This project will be divided into 3 interconnected research axes that in turn investigate the concepts of: (1) finitude; (2) the body; and (3) the world as theological problems. The predominant view from the side of philosophers is that the religious and theological concepts such as otherness, revelation, prayer, incarnation, etc., contain a useful archive and intellectual memory which is of great importance for philosophical inquiry. In this respect, theological concepts are not only delocalized but also detheologized and serve the purpose of interpreting the texture of existence and general structures of experience. One common thing of all these approaches is that the questions are asked from a philosophical perspective; the theological is taken as a reservoir of inspiration but not as a historical, continual stream of thought struggling with the appearances processed by experience. The alternative we will establish emancipates the debate from an ever-returning question on the legitimacy of introducing the theological sources to philosophical inquiries, a rather formal debate. The issue at stake is developing a philosophical theology, or to be more precise, revising the theological grammar which takes experience as its source (Falque) and the embodied existence in the world as its place (Nancy).