

# 'The Hidden Present': Time and Eschatology in Jean-Yves Lacoste

Nicolae Turcan <sup>1,2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Research Institute of the University of Bucharest, University of Bucharest, 030018 Bucharest, Romania; nicolaeturcan@gmail.com or nicolae.turcan@ubbcluj.ro

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Babeş-Bolyai University, 400347 Cluj-Napoca, Romania

**Abstract:** This article explores the phenomenology of time and eschatology in the thought of Jean-Yves Lacoste, including his recent book on the philosophy of history. Lacoste's idea of "the hidden present" is examined within the context of his broader theological and philosophical framework, with a particular focus on the way it addresses the intersection of temporality and eternity. Human temporality is characterized by finitude and death, which are interpreted both philosophically—under the influence of Heidegger's philosophy—and theologically. Using Husserlian and Heideggerian concepts, Lacoste proposes a theologically inspired conceptual network: phenomenological reduction versus theological reduction, world versus creation, death versus resurrection, care (*Sorge*) versus eschatological restlessness, and time versus eschaton. All of these describe the liturgical experience of man before God and the possibility of an eternity which, from the point of view of the world and of our experience in the world, can only take on the ever-provisional figure of anticipation. The present article argues for the existence of a theological paradox of eschatology in the writings of the French phenomenologist: even if eschatology is only anticipated, the liturgical man, situated before God (*coram Deo*), experiences it in an incomplete and apophatic manner.

**Keywords:** Jean-Yves Lacoste; phenomenology of time; phenomenological theology; eschatology; theology; eternity



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## 1. Introduction: Phenomenology and Theology

Jean-Yves Lacoste, a representative of the theological turn of French phenomenology, has discussed the phenomenological issue of time starting with his first book (Lacoste 1990), has brought it up in various other texts, and has tackled it once again, from the perspective of the philosophy of history, in his most recent book (Lacoste 2024). His ideas related to time are in response to Martin Heidegger—by whom he is "strongly influenced" (Gschwandtner 2013, p. 163)—and to the phenomenology of *Dasein* (Heidegger 1996). Lacoste offers a theological phenomenology that describes the structures of a consciousness that believes in God. In the following pages, I will argue for the existence of a theological paradox of eschatology in the writings of the French phenomenologist: even if eschatology is only anticipated, the liturgical man, situated before God (*coram Deo*), experiences it in an incomplete and apophatic manner. To better understand how Lacoste develops a phenomenology of time and the eschaton, we must first clarify some of his concepts: the relationship between phenomenology and theology, theological reduction, and liturgy.

### 1.1. Phenomenology and Theology

But how is it possible for philosophy and theology to meet without excluding each other? In line with the theological turn of phenomenology, Lacoste offers his own solution. He uses the method and concepts of phenomenology to describe the experience of man before God. Starting from the role of prayer, contemporary phenomenology has described the relationship between the two disciplines in different ways (see, for instance, Turcan 2023), and Lacoste is a good example of this. He believes that philosophy is a thought at a distance from the eschaton (Lacoste 2012, p. 184), situated on the horizon of the

world; thus, it remains an unfinished experience that, in a way, requires theology. In the encounter between them, there is an overlap in which one cannot determine what it is about, as in Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*. It is difficult to ascertain to what extent it is still philosophy or theology, because the two are not separated (Schrijvers 2012, p. 1). If Jean-Luc Marion rigorously separates phenomenology from theology, Lacoste states that theology and philosophy meet and overlap in a "marchland where neighbors meet" (Lacoste 2018, p. x).

Moreover, when philosophy is understood as a way of life, the overlap between theology and philosophy becomes even more visible. In this case, philosophy validates itself in the same way as theology and presupposes the same mutual grounding—from life to conceptual discourse and from conceptual discourse to life. One could say that, to this day, theology has preserved this primary dimension of philosophy, a dimension that can be seen in the way of life of the Desert Fathers (Lacoste 2018, p. 9). Taking Anselm as an example, Lacoste argues that argumentative discourse and prayer are synonymous within the field of theology. Since metaphysics also speaks about God, "nothing forbids the philosopher to pray" (Lacoste 2024, p. 205). "On the one hand, Anselm 'proves' God by means of concepts in texts that are composed like prayers, and on the other, he uses words in these prayers that do indeed speak of God. The two are inseparable" (Lacoste 2024, p. 207). The meeting area between philosophy and theology expresses our inability to delimit what is philosophical. To the French phenomenologist, this might be an advantage: at the margins of philosophy and theology, there is the chance to learn the ultimate stakes of both (Lacoste 2018, p. 18).

### 1.2. Theological Reduction

To the phenomenological reduction, Lacoste adds a theological reduction, defined as the unfolding of the logic of man's relationship with God, which does not cancel out what it brackets: "It screens out, without abolishing" (Lacoste 2018, p. 15). Lacoste differentiates between the beginning of creation and its end (eschaton) and thinks of time with the help of the theological reduction, which is defined as "the paradox of reason which grasps the non-obvious and the unavailable, brackets the unmediated evidence of the world and substitutes only the light (and dialectics) of theological interpretations" (Lacoste 1990, p. 122). For example, memory, through its intentionality that ignores the realities of the present, "does the work of theological reduction" (Lacoste 1990, p. 149), and brings an additional richness into the present.

A thought inaugurated by the theological reduction is a thought that does not belong to the world and does not intend to emphasize the phenomena of the world, except in their relation to God. Since the evidence we seek is not given according to the measure of the world, we are entitled to speak "in spite of everything". "In spite of everything says first of all a refusal of totalization" (Lacoste 2024, p. 203).

By comparison with the Husserlian transcendental–phenomenological reduction, Lacoste's theological reduction is, in fact, a counter-reduction, due to its acceptance of religious belief (see Turcan 2020, pp. 4–5). Their aim, however, remains similar: an attempt to highlight phenomena starting from themselves, a struggle to "expand or dilate the horizon of experience with the Christian mood of faith" (Rivera 2022, p. 173, orig. emphasis). For Lacoste, the purpose of the theological reduction, whose species are the "liturgical reduction" and the "eschatological reduction" (Lacoste 1990, p. 201), is to enable us to think about time and the world in terms of their religious origin and their eschatological destiny.

### 1.3. Liturgy

This theological reduction characterizes the liturgical man. But what is liturgy? Lacoste's definition of the liturgy is broader than the Eucharistic liturgy: the liturgy is essentially the placing of man before God in order to serve Him. In fact, liturgy designates, by convention, "the logic that presides over the encounter between man and God" (Lacoste 2004, p. 2). Man's liturgical positioning exceeds his positioning in the

world, going from being-here, which is characterized by place, to being-about, which is defined by a relationship—in this case, by man’s relationship with God (Lacoste 2004, p. 25). Symbolically speaking, the liturgy “institutes what we have been calling ‘nonplaces’” (*non-lieux*) (Lacoste 2004, p. 47; 1994, section 12), which, given their relationship with the Absolute, acquire new meanings and new purposes. The liturgy also institutes a nontime (Lacoste 2004, p. 83) according to which the moment (*kairos*) goes beyond the unfolding of historical time (*chronos*) (Schrijvers 2005, p. 319).

## 2. The Phenomenology of Time

### 2.1. Present and Presence

Aristotle thought of time starting from the present moment, from the now (*nyn*), and viewed the present as a discontinuous succession of moments, whereas the future and the past were two nothingnesses. Aristotle’s interpretation of time is ontological, which is why continuity is ensured by the present moment, which represents an end of the past and a beginning of the future. From the point of view of Aristotelian physics, the reality of time consists in the now, and the continuity of time is realized through a succession of discontinuous nows (see Aristotle 2018, 218a–20a). “Time is a number belonging to movement with respect to the before and after” (Aristotle 2018, 220a). As a phenomenologist, Lacoste criticizes this “non-dimensionality” of time (Lacoste 1990, p. 14). He shows that, phenomenologically, the stream of consciousness perceives time as a continuum in which the present is deprived of any ontological privilege. Rather than being concerned with the measured movements of time, with its objective sequences, phenomenology tackles time starting from the consciousness that measures it. Thus, the objective present is distinguished from the presence of phenomenological consciousness (Lacoste 1990, pp. 13–15). “Time, eternity and history are also what we can reduce to the logos of a metaphysical discipline. They are, however, what we can also allow to appear without this reduction being implemented” (Lacoste 2024, p. 224).

From a phenomenological point of view, therefore, man is inevitably caught within the horizon of time: “And if we take the phenomenological path, we can easily make it clear that the human being, if it exists in the mode of the event, say, of what adverts [*l’advenue*], certainly ‘is’, but that its ‘being’ is within the horizon of time” (Lacoste 2023, p. 443).

John Milbank objected that the ability to speak about time involves being situated outside of it to a certain extent. The present moment would stand outside of time, as in Plato and Kierkegaard, and this exteriority, which is particularly visible in the liturgy, would turn us into beings situated on both sides of time: “. . .we are all of us both within and beyond space and time, at once because of our individual conscious transcendence of them (as for Bergson) and because of our shared cultural symbolic transcendence of them (as for Wittgenstein)” (Milbank 2023, p. 120).

For Lacoste, however, this objection does not affect the fundamental fact that time cannot be evaded and that the experience of our finitude is marked by the ineluctable passage of time. Hence, he is not interested in the objective present of the sciences, but in presence as an experience of the self in time. To describe the intimate consciousness of time is to analyze our becoming in time, which presupposes that we must describe: “. . . the constitution of a living present, the continuity of the self in the flux of presents, but also the reality of the self as becoming, and of the common experience when, remembering ‘our’ past, we observe also that we ourselves have indeed been, and that we partly are no longer” (Lacoste 2023, p. 443). From this point of view, all self-knowledge is linked with time and eschatology.

### 2.2. Temporalization

As we can see, the temporal ecstasies, the past, the present, and the future, which phenomenology has already talked about, are all at stake. The synthesis that present consciousness makes between its past and its future is the condition of the coherence of our experience in time. Lacoste calls it “temporalization” (*temporalisation*) (Lacoste

1990, p. 16) and sees it as a “transcendental activity” of the transcendental ego both in the Kantian sense—as “a condition of possibility of any possible experience”—and in the Husserlian sense, as a constitution of a world that is primarily “my world” (Lacoste 1990, pp. 17–18). Naturally, given the reality of this world and the evidence that we are not its origin, any objection that this might be solipsism can be dismissed (Lacoste 1990, p. 18). The objective time of the world becomes the subjective time (temporality) through the process of temporalization (Lacoste 2024, pp. 13–14).

Given that the present bears traces of the past and the future, Lacoste agrees with the definition of St. Augustine: the aporetic present is *distensio animae*, an extension into the past and the future. The synthesis of temporalization shows that our identity is an identification with the experiences of the past and with the anticipations of the future (Lacoste 2018, pp. 159–61).

### 2.3. Body, Death, and the Necessity of an Eschatology

Since we are in time as embodied, and, therefore, mortal beings, the experience of temporalization must take into account both our finite status and the “tragic identity” (Lacoste 2018, p. 155) that defines us. “‘Our’ time is always linked to our bodies” (Lacoste 2024, p. 17). The horizon of death and the continual contingency in which we find ourselves through our unfulfillment and becoming reveal an unhappy consciousness that is situated in a continual beginning (Lacoste 1990, p. 61). On the one hand, the phenomena of easiness (*aise*) and entertainment (*divertissement*) can make us forget death (Lacoste 2024, pp. 32, 51), although the attempt to forget death through entertainment represents “an (impossible) closure by man on his present” (Lacoste 1990, p. 39). On the other hand, death is anticipated by the phenomenon of sickness (*malaise*), which Lacoste regards as more fundamental than Heidegger’s existential anxiety (Lacoste 2024, p. 34). Since it cannot be a mere consciousness of the instantaneity of the moment, our consciousness ensures its continuity by remembering the past and anticipating the future. Given that neither death nor the promises of the eschaton are part of the immediacy of consciousness, we “exist in the mode of deferral” (Lacoste 1990, p. 38).

According to Lacoste, Husserl did not think of time and death as being together. Instead, he favored the paradox of the separation between them (Lacoste 1990, p. 23), which justified Heidegger’s reaction and the highlighting of *Dasein* as being-toward-death (Lacoste 1990, p. 21). Lacoste is, at this point, Heideggerian, asserting that “The name of *mortals* is our first philosophical name” (Lacoste 1990, p. 36, orig. emphasis) and that “The only future that is *necessarily* mine is my death” (Lacoste 1990, p. 34, orig. emphasis). But the experience of the self is inevitably embodied, as a self in a particular place and time.

For Heidegger, one’s own death represents the “eschatology of meaning” (Lacoste 1990, p. 41), but this understanding is questionable from the perspective of the death of the other, which is “an abyss of meaning” (Lacoste 1990, p. 58). For Lacoste, however, this is not a solution insofar as death, though it might have the right to be an end and a completeness, does not have the right to be an eschatology. Where Heidegger sees, phenomenologically, the end in relation to which we construct our authenticity, Lacoste sees, theologically, the possibility of a beginning; and this beginning is eschatological, but not in the sense of Heidegger’s and Hegel’s “eschatologies”. “Death is not the last secret of time” (Lacoste 1990, p. 202), he writes; and similarly to Jean-Luc Marion’s discourse of praise (see Marion 1977, p. 232; 2008, p. 391), Lacoste asserts that death no longer has any power over the logic of liturgical praise (Lacoste 2004, pp. 58–59). The logic of the eschaton is in dialogue with Heidegger’s logic of being-toward-death (Wardley 2014, p. 168), to which it is offered as a theological response.

### 2.4. World and Care

We are, inevitably, in the world. As existential, the world is “the intranscendable par excellence” (Lacoste 2004, p. 9), the transcendental condition “under which being [*l’étant*] is given” (Lacoste 2004, p. 10). The concern and care for ourselves is articulated, starting

from temporalization, precisely on the fact that the past and the future do not belong to us, rendering us fragile. “We have no past and no future at our disposal—this is the problem of care” (Lacoste 1990, p. 26). So, because we do not really belong to ourselves, the fragility arising from this danger justifies the existential of care, an existential which is fundamental to Heidegger.

However, through memory and project, we do not surrender the issue of our time to complete passivity. To consciousness, the past is not entirely irrevocable from the perspective of the existential attitude that uses the past to reconstruct the project (Lacoste 1990, pp. 28–29). Lacoste is not interested in the possibility that one of the ecstasies of time—the past, the present, or the future—might be emphasized to the detriment of the others. He contrasts the Heideggerian existential of care with two theological phenomena: filial care and restlessness, the latter being eschatologically oriented (see *infra* 3.4).

### 2.5. Eternity

Lacoste is particularly careful to avoid using an uncritical concept of eternity. Consciousness is neither prior, nor a master of its time. The topology of the experience of the self encompasses time, body, and death, emphasizing the importance of becoming to our own being; not in the sense of a loss, but according to the continuous opening toward more or less. But although finitude “defines our being”, in the world and in time it harbors “a requirement of infinity” (Lacoste 1990, p. 53). We are beings of becoming, characterized by “non-totality” (Lacoste 1990, p. 55). There is no definitive fulfillment in time; neither of man, nor of history (Lacoste 2024, p. 49). Because we are in the world, we are projected into a future that we can decide to make a reality. At the same time, in the world in which we are temporally situated, we can find the promises of a future eternity, understood as the “absolute future” (Lacoste 2024, p. 68). “Neither experience, nor the ‘system’ can totalize the infinite here and now” (Lacoste 2024, p. 228). The eschaton is present only as anticipation and promise (see Lacoste 1990, p. 205; 2018, pp. 112–33; 2000, Étude I, IV, para. 4; DeLay 2019, pp. 104, 107). Moreover, if the eschaton were fully realized in history, then ethics would be accomplished, because there would be no decision-making power: “Whoever speaks of ethics speaks of tasks to be accomplished (there is a tautology here)” (Lacoste 2024, p. 155). This is why we need to make a distinction between presence and parousia (Lacoste 2024, p. 181).

The promises of eternity are offered in time and the two (time and eternity) meet in Kierkegaard’s concept of the instant, in man’s free decision to believe. For Kierkegaard, “Man is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short it is a synthesis” (Kierkegaard 1941, p. 17). However, Lacoste rejects Kierkegaard’s thesis that man is a synthesis of time and eternity. He argues that one cannot construct a diachrony without considering that time is not univocal—an idea held since Plotinus and Augustine. The objective reality of time (the time of the world) is doubled by its subjective reality (the time of consciousness). Given that we exist at the intersection of these two realities, to think of such a synthesis would be to overlook precisely the equivocality of time (Lacoste 1990, pp. 66–67). Lacoste’s hypothesis about the instant is that it is not only a synthetic opening of time toward eternity, but that it also opens up the realm of history “to be seen and made” (Lacoste 2024, p. 159).

### 2.6. The Philosophical Aporia of Time

To sum up this first part, let us note that the question of time is transcendental for Jean-Yves Lacoste: it has to do with a condition of all experience, not a region of experience. Nevertheless, it can only appear within the conditions of an experience that it makes possible. The outline of a logic of experience is related to that of a logic of meaning; but, according to Lacoste, man’s existential meaning can be contrary to facts. Now, the hermeneutic place of the philosophy of time lies precisely in this dialectic of understanding man as a spirit (*esprit*) and body (*corps*) on the horizon of death. The spirit that interprets time cannot be separated from the body: without the spirit, man’s time would be reduced

to a problem of physics, and without the spirit, man would cease to inhabit the world in his time. The humanity of man can only be understood on the horizon of a future shadowed by death; a future that human beings do not control, but on which the meaning of their present depends. There is no philosophical answer to the question of whether man lives in the interval between birth and death, between the memory of the beginning and the project, accompanied by care, of the end. However, man inhabits this aporia of time, the solution to which is theological, or rather Christological: through Christ, time finds its fulfillment not in death, but in its overcoming (Lacoste 1990, p. 82). Philosophical thought cannot conceive history from the end of history unless it abandons its own territory and “occupies theological ground” (Lacoste 2024, p. 50).

### 3. The Theology of Time and Eschatology

#### 3.1. In the Age of Nihilism

But can the relationship between time and eternity still be conceived in the age of contemporary nihilism? Nihilism makes the world appear on the horizon of time in the most obvious and autonomous way—a world that is nothing but a world, unrelated to God. Lacoste believes that our time is the least capable and, at the same time, the most capable of hearing the promises of eternity. On the one hand, the least capable because “the pre-understandings of eternity are poor”, as the new secular values cancel out the expectation of God in an equalizing world. On the other hand, it is the time most capable of hearing God’s promises because nihilism itself, by definition, “promises nothing” and because overcoming nihilism can be expressed much more rigorously than exiting metaphysics (Lacoste 2024, pp. 88–89).

The time of nihilism opens up two paradoxes: (1) the only good reason for belonging to the city of men is precisely belonging to the city of God; (2) since nihilism is the time in which beings (*ens*) are delivered to technique, and the philosopher is left with nothing but the attention to Being (*Sein/Seyn*), then nihilism is the time that makes the Christian believer responsible for the being he recognizes as *ens creatum* and for the good that remains to be done (Lacoste 2024, p. 138).

#### 3.2. Theology and Time

Unlike philosophy, which views the time of our experience as being limited by death, theology speaks from beyond death. Theology implies a decision of faith, the only one capable of “winning the reality of *kairos*”, the only one through which human existence is constituted as *esse coram Deo* (Lacoste 2024, p. 71). “Owing to its kairological content, this time structures itself by subverting the logic of any purely worldly temporalization” (Wardley 2014, p. 167). There are two justifications for a theological discourse: (1) the arrival in time of the Absolute itself, through the Incarnation of Christ; and (2) the establishment of a temporality that escapes the logic of being toward death (Lacoste 1990, p. 75).

Alongside theology, eternity, understood in a Christian sense, enters the scene as a promise of the past visible in the “words of eternal life” (John 6: 68) (Lacoste 2024, p. 69). Of course, the promises of eternal life are excessive, so their truth is possible only insofar as they are uttered by a faithful God (Lacoste 2024, pp. 84–85). However, from a phenomenological point of view, eternity is given in the experience of eschatological anticipation.

Lacoste analyzes the phenomenon of anticipation (Lacoste 2018, pp. 112–33) and considers that it, before having religious relevance, is found in any sketch of a project and in any future promise, in its words, in any “pre-experience” and “pre-donation”. Given that the future phenomenon has not yet occurred but has its own importance in relation to the present, there is a “primacy of inexperience” that must be taken into account. However, this primacy does not cancel the present when it comes to the phenomenon of enjoyment, a phenomenon that is “self-sufficient and unimpaired” (Lacoste 2018, p. 120). For the fullness of enjoyment, nothing else matters, neither past nor future. Any other simultaneous phenomenon is marginalized in this present of plenitude. The problem that arises is that enjoyment is episodic and, although desired, cannot be repeated under the

same conditions. To overcome the suffering of the absence of enjoyment, we need fidelity and hope, two phenomena that anticipate the future. But this anticipation is not complete: “The anticipation appears to us in a ‘non-parousial’ way” (Lacoste 2018, p. 125). This restrictive conclusion also applies to eschatological anticipation, which is also incomplete and incipient in relation to the future promise of the eschaton. The phenomenon of the eschaton is the model for understanding anticipation: incompleteness, pre-donation, and pre-experience are linked to the eschatological promise: “without eschatological promise eschatological anticipation cannot arise” (Lacoste 2018, p. 133).

Through eschatological anticipation, liturgical time refers to eschatology. As K. J. Wardley points out, “Liturgical time—a time of inoperativity, of time given over—thus critiques *Dasein*’s temporality by offering an alternative, a temporality neither imposed upon the world through consciousness nor determined by practical considerations, a temporality that rather than being determined by mortality, merely stretched between birth and death, looks instead towards eternity and asks what is mankind’s vocation” (Wardley 2014, pp. 174–75). The opposite of the present is the parousia, the time of the final fulfillment, a time to come; however, compared to the parousia, we are in a penultimate situation (see Lacoste 2012, pp. 7–10).

The liturgical nontime reveals an eschatological vigil for the one who prays to God as if God were present in the mode of parousia. But this closeness is always accompanied by the awareness of an even greater distance, because the eschaton is not definitively established. Lacoste thus opposes the Heideggerian being-in-the-world to the being-before-God and argues that there are two different kinds of temporalization: the first, in accordance with the logic of the world, and the second, in accordance with the logic of the liturgy. To Lacoste, “the time of liturgy is one of ‘disinterestedness’ in the world” (Gschwandtner 2013, p. 172). The Absolute rejoices us liturgically in the time leading up to death, and “liturgy is the power to accept such a gift” (Lacoste 2004, pp. 84–86). However, “Liturgy always remains ambiguous in its manifestation because the reality that is promised in it never becomes fully present” (Gschwandtner 2013, p. 172). Therefore, the time of the liturgy, which “is far from being ‘inauthentic’ and ‘improper’” (Schrijvers 2012, p. 7), does not forever suspend the time of the world; instead, it offers itself within it.

Lacoste expresses the same idea of the penultimate and the pre-eschatological when he talks about the present of tradition (*paradosis*, in Greek). Tradition, understood both as transmission and content transmitted, can be thought of under the spectrum of four phenomena. To begin with, tradition expresses the new and eternal alliance between God and humankind, expressed in the words that have been transmitted. Secondly, tradition permits a present, which unites the promise of the past with the present of faith and with future hope. We note that Lacoste, although he does not use the term temporalization, refers to what we might call theological temporalization—a synthesis of the three temporal ecstasies, but this time within the horizon of faith. The present time of faith is a penultimate time, not the eschaton. Thirdly, tradition is also a happy memory, being at the service of the Church. Finally, tradition is qualified theologically as communion (*koinonia*) and associated with the saints. In the case of the saints, the intersection between history and eschaton becomes visible in a phenomenon that Lacoste describes as “the pre-eschatological phenomenon par excellence” (Lacoste 2024, pp. 119–22).

Through the Resurrection of Christ, God inaugurates an “eschatological way of life” (Lacoste 1990, p. 76), in which the body transcends its role as merely a sign of worldly existence. In this context, theology emerges as “the science of the definitive”, which both contradicts the provisional and, paradoxically, is anticipated by it (Lacoste 1990, p. 78).

Through the hypostatic union of the two natures, human and divine, in the divine-human person of Christ, time enters into relation with eternity, and they must be viewed as non-contradictory. Here is how this new logic is described: “On the one hand, temporality in its integral dimensions (the bodily relation to death included) does not exclude in Jesus of Nazareth a rigorously ecstatic relation with God (i.e., a relation in which ipseity is totally subordinate to, or revealed in, being-toward-death). And, on the other hand, the

eternity of God, whatever we are to think under this concept, does not exclude a divine experience of temporality both because the human time of Jesus of Nazareth is wholly the human time of God, and because the Christological relation of God and man affects the form of temporalization and history, in which before and after find their meaning in God Himself—because for man, as well as for God, there was a ‘time’ in which God did not take the human condition. The Christological alliance of time and eternity establishes, less than it restores, the mutual non-contradiction of man’s temporality and God’s eternity” (Lacoste 1990, p. 80).

### 3.3. *Creation vs. the World*

Lacoste distinguishes between creation and the world: creation is pure from sin and should be understood as the origin, whereas the world, altered by sin and by man’s free choices, constitutes the reality in which we live (Lacoste 1990, pp. 89–90). Creation could reveal eternity, which is not given to us in an experience; the world gives us time. Eternity could be viewed starting from time just as creation, as an origin, reveals itself starting from the world: “It must therefore be said both that man’s time contradicts his possible eternity and that it inaugurates it” (Lacoste 1990, p. 107).

### 3.4. *Restlessness and Exposition*

Consciousness is concerned with the future through care. “The future is the perpetual questioning of every present; that which does not exist exerts a surprising influence on that which is” (Lacoste 1990, p. 169). Care is not the last word, however, because through eschatological hope, “the future ceases to press upon the present as a threat, and appears as a field of promise” (Lacoste 1990, p. 205).

Lacoste provides a theological critique of the Heideggerian existential of care (*Sorge*); firstly, “filial non-care” (Lacoste 1990, p. 207) and, secondly, eschatological restlessness. Restlessness, which relates to man’s religious destiny (Lacoste 2004, p. 82), is the fundamental theological existential, which is not oriented ontologically and historically, but eschatologically (Lacoste 1990, p. 97).

From the perspective of temporality, then, we would have the time of care, which passes toward death, and the time of restlessness, which aims at the Absolute. The two are in a dialectical relationship, because neither can definitively replace the other in this life. I disagree with the idea that, in Lacoste, there is a “rigid separation between the liturgical being [...] and the worldly *Besorgen*” (Marren 2020, p. 328). In my view, worldly care and eschatological restlessness do not cancel each other out definitively. The time of care and the time of restlessness both propose themselves, both intersect and return, in a never-ending dialectic (Lacoste 1990, p. 100). But for the man who exposes himself to the Absolute, the man who has been called to an absolute future, the affection of restlessness is more fundamental than that of care, even if he recognizes himself as “caught up in the game of care” (Lacoste 1990, p. 127). Man remains a prisoner of the world, but nothing can stop him from worrying about his absolute destiny and recognizing the anarchic power of eschatology toward the world (Manoussakis 2009, p. 71).

The past becomes essential precisely in that God has already spoken in history. Tradition is the essential past. In this way, the three temporal ecstasies each have their own moment: the past has Tradition; the present has ethics; and the future has the project and the eschatological call (Lacoste 1990, pp. 117–19). Restlessness targets the future that comes from beyond death.

Joeri Schrijvers has argued that restlessness still characterizes being-in-the-world, even though it is oriented outside the world, but without knowing the direction. “Restlessness—Lacoste writes—is that mark of the humanity of man which removes man from every satisfaction to which world and earth hold the key, and grants to man the eschatological satisfaction that, by definition, the Absolute alone promises. The restless man can thus become bored with world and earth. He can dream of a beyond to world and earth. It is important in any case to emphasize that restlessness does not as such possess any



knowledge. It is immemorially present” (Lacoste 2004, pp. 198–99, n. 20). Still having an existential–ontological grounding—such as the Heideggerian care that it does not cancel, but disqualifies—restlessness merely opens up liturgical experience, orienting the human toward something other than the world: “restlessness as such is that mode of our being in which our boredom and dissatisfaction with being awakens a desire for an as yet undetermined ‘otherwise than being’” (Schrijvers 2012, p. 59). It is not yet liturgical, but it has an ambiguous character and positions itself between the Heideggerian care and the Lacostian exposition, a new concept proposed by Lacoste. To clarify the ambiguous character of restlessness and given that it is eschatologically oriented, I have chosen to interpret it as being in opposition to the Heideggerian care, while the exposition would be Lacoste’s theological proposal in the face of the Heideggerian existential of openness. Thus, alongside intentionality, Lacoste adds a new theological concept: exposition. Husserl showed that the transcendental ego receives phenomena through intentionality, whereas Heidegger spoke of the openness (*Erschlossenheit*) of *Dasein* toward the world, a more primordial openness. Lacoste proposes a new determination of the ego and adds, alongside the transcendental ego, *Dasein*, and the empirical I, an “eschatological I”, which he defines as follows: “the figure of the ego in which the relation to the Absolute is his lifeblood and suffices to define man” (Lacoste 2004, pp. 57–58).

In his opinion, for the “eschatological I”, exposition plays the same role as intentionality, but the former is more adequate to explain the liturgical positioning of man. Although all three—intentionality, openness, and exposition—offer the phenomena they address, exposition, which has an ascetic charge of self-denial, can show God, even if not fully, but only in glimpses (Lacoste 2004, pp. 41–42).

### 3.5. Liturgy as a Non-Event and Inexperience

The definitive is accessible through the provisional, i.e., on the horizon of the world (Lacoste 1990, pp. 129–30). The liturgy transgresses history, it “makes diversion”, but only in anticipation, because the world and history are not transcended (Lacoste 2004, p. 72). Liturgy could be thought of as a “nonevent”, insofar as the Absolute does not offer itself with evidence to the human being who manages the time of possibility (Lacoste 2004, pp. 46–47). Since liturgical gestures are eschatologically oriented, Lacoste criticizes the term “religious experience” and proposes the term “inexperience” to emphasize the difference from phenomenological experience (Lacoste 2004, pp. 46–49). Even if the eschatological I allows for the hermeneutic of the empirical I, there is no apodictic verification of God’s inexperience.

Lacoste does not view mystical experience as an eschatology already fulfilled in history. Any form of rest is rest ‘of something’ or ‘in view of something’; therefore, not eternal rest. “Experiences of peace and joy have the potential to overwhelm the *Daseinanalytik*; although this being a phenomenologically grounded theology it is all too grounded in the plurality and diversity of our experiences, the possible ‘liturgical consummation’ of philosophy remains a possibility rather than a given” (Wardley 2014, p. 192). Likewise, the experience of the definitive in time is not an available fulness, but only a pre-taste (*praegustatio*), that is, a pre-experience (*préexpérience*) (Lacoste 2024, pp. 73–77).

## 4. Conclusions: The Theological Paradox

To conclude, with regard to time and eternity, or rather temporality and eschatology, Lacoste constructs and maintains a theological paradox that we find throughout his work and which could be formulated as follows: although the eschatological experience is partial and unfulfilled in history, it is nevertheless offered to a certain extent in prayer and liturgy. “We are not without God in time”, but, existing “in a prepaschal way”, we seek the plenitude that is still unattainable, yet partially accessible in the ecclesial and sacramental experience. “The eschaton stands arched above the time of history” (Lacoste 1990, p. 215).

Lacoste builds a phenomenology of anticipation that emphasizes a primacy of inexperience (Lacoste 2018, p. 117) and, at the same time, the fact that the present phenomenon

is partial, though not in the manner of parousia—of a definitive appearance without rest. The phenomenality of anticipation is incomplete and temporary (Lacoste 2018, pp. 50–55).

Through Christ, human time is analogous to divine eternity; not to an abstract eternity of divine *ousia*, but to an eternity “as the Son lives it” (Lacoste 1990, p. 184). When the present abolishes temporal distances, in the privileged moment (*kairos*) in which we hear the word of God, we remain nevertheless at a distance from the eschaton, in a pre-eschatology. “The *kairos* is not the *eschaton*, for it does not unfold its logic except within a history; and the act of possessing any kind of last word does not belong to this history” (Lacoste 1990, p. 188, orig. emphasis). Also, “The continuous imminence of the eschaton does not destroy the temporal coherence of our acts” (Lacoste 2000, “Étude V”, II, para. 3). We remain, therefore, in time, although, in relation to the Absolute, we are in the pre-eschatological, which Lacoste sees as the boundary between the temporal and the eschatological (Lacoste 1990, p. 175). Eschatology proposes a kind of infinite event, never-ending—here, the French phenomenologist borrows St. Gregory of Nyssa’s idea of continuous progress (*epektasis*); but we are not yet in eschatology, we are in history (see Lewis 2023, pp. 387–92).

The Church, therefore, remains the “place of a fragile anticipation” of the eschaton (Lacoste 2004, p. 37). The presence of God cannot be conceived according to definitions of presence that look at things on the horizon of the world. Although he “makes his place in the world”, in the Incarnation and in the Holy Sacraments, God’s presence remains unthinkable according to the logic of the mundane. The liturgy teaches us that we must think of this presence as “an eschatological reality or event” (Lacoste 2004, p. 45). “We will therefore first qualify liturgy as *the expectation or desire for Parousia in the certitude of the nonparousiacal presence of God*” (Lacoste 2004, p. 45, orig. emphasis). He who prays in the presence of God asks for the coming of the God who is already present in the obscurity of the world; that is, he prays for a plenitude which is not given here.

It is no less true, however, that a phenomenology of prayer emphasizes the hidden presence (non-present according to the logic of the world), an anticipated and unfulfilled presence of the eschaton: “the *eschaton* is not the horizon in which the man who prays lives, but already the hidden *present* [*le secret present*] of our prayers” (Lacoste 2004, p. 61, orig. emphasis). Just like icons reveal themselves to the eyes of faith rather than to the physical eyes, the pre-eschatological (*le pré-eschatologique*) offers itself as a mysterious present only to faith, remaining inconspicuous outside of it (Lacoste 2024, p. 192).

The liturgy has been interpreted from the perspective of apophatic theology (see Turcan 2021) and Lacoste suggests a similar interpretation of his theological paradox. It is in this game of anticipation and of the secret present that our temporalization open to the eschaton is accomplished, as to its ultimate possibility, not fully realizable in its present here and now. In Lacoste’s paradoxical phenomenology of time, eschatological eternity is not given in time as eternity, but only as an anticipation, as an incompleteness, as an expectation, which inhabits, though incompletely and apophatically, the logic of praise that transcends death.

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