

ISSN 1918-7351
Volume 4 (2012)

Bodies, Communities, Faith: Christian Legacies in Jean-Luc Nancy

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Christianity designed nothing other, essentially (that is to say simply, infinitely simply: through an inaccessible simplicity), than the demand to open in this world an alterity or an unconditional alienation . . . Christianity assumes, in the most radical and explicit fashion, what is at stake in the *alolon*.¹

I find myself in a liminal position approaching ‘Continental Philosophy of Religion,’ straddling a fence between philosophy and religion, calling from one enclosure into another, invading each with a word from the other side. Most often, I find myself stealthily maneuvering the site of American Christianity, squatting by their fires and speaking their language in new ways, dodging blows as best I can. Jean-Luc Nancy’s work as a whole—on community, on globalization, on the body, on Christianity—is work that speaks prophetically to multiple audiences, that carries forth an inscription that many need to read, and to be read into. I often find myself using Nancy’s work to speak from this border crossing, ‘bringing a good word’ as my preacher friends might say, to both campuses. In this particular essay, I explore both how the legacy of Christian dogma traces through Nancy’s corpus, and articulate why this tracing needs to be witnessed by both secular philosophers, and by those who claim membership in Christianity today.

The necessity of such border-crossing may be captured by Nancy’s insistence, in *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, that a crisis is looming: we face a philosophical void left by those humanists/scientists who have privileged the understanding (as a Kantian term) over reason², and a possible religious ‘surrection’

¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans. Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant, Michael B. Smith (New York: Fordham University Press 2008), 10. Nancy defines *alolon* as “the extreme, excessive, and necessary dimension of the *logos*” and references the mathematical use of the term, which is the diagonal of the square, an ‘incommensurable’ (10). This ‘extreme’ dimension of *logos*, or reason, directs our attention to where reason exceeds itself, spills over its boundaries. Reason brings with it its own boundary—and that which exceeds it. Likewise, Christianity opens in the world an alienation that is other than, while never being outside of, the world.

² He scans this quickly, and I develop this a bit later in the essay; the short version is that “modes of rationality are stuck in understanding (rationalities, or sometimes the ratiocinations of technologies,

that threatens to overtake secular democracies.³ We may be arriving at a moment where we are limited to two possibilities, Nancy argues: either the emergence of new theocracies, or a new use of reason that argues for and allows for ‘overflow’, an understanding of community that exceeds definitions provided by the understanding and requires a “reinvention, perhaps, of what ‘secularity’ means.”⁴ Speaking across the border, exposing the traces of Christian thought that provide possibilities for overflow, excessive community, and a new thinking of the body, takes on greater urgency if we take his prophetic voice seriously.

However, one can predict initial protestations from the field(s) of philosophy: while it has become more acceptable to move along the edges of religion in recent years, Nancy himself notes that there is still an attitude of disdain or outright condemnation of religion, particularly Christianity, by philosophers. He writes in *Dis-Enclosure*, “The ever-rehashed condemnation of Christianity by philosophers . . . can only leave us perplexed, once we have understood and recognized without reservation all its excellent motifs.”⁵ Philosophy has “never ceased, underhandedly, to draw nourishment” from Christianity, and yet continues, in rather adolescent fashion, to deny its parentage. Not only daring to take Christianity seriously, but implying or stating outright that the motifs or tropes of Christianity—particularly that of the incarnation—are perhaps *necessary* in order to address an ontology that escapes foundationalism and/or an endless return to ‘substance’ seems outrageous, silly, or dangerous. Various traditions and methods of philosophy, over the past 100 years, have been able to stomach a philosophized Judaism, in which ‘God’ is wholly Other, remains transcendent, and thus is safely *a/theologized* ‘elsewhere.’ But Christianity has the absent god walking around enfleshed. Therefore, arranging the body of Christ philosophically (from a ‘secular’, rather than theological, perspective) is not a simple task; however, to ignore the implications is to deny the provenance of Western thought.

What is more surprising, however, is that Nancy’s work is also largely ignored by the few American theologians who take post-modern thought seriously. A quick survey of such work finds ample space devoted to Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas, and in later years to Jean-Luc Marion, but not Nancy.⁶ It

rights, economies, ethics and policies)—in other words, in categories, definitions, measurements, and objects. Pushing reason to its limit, thinking along its edge, thinking as worthwhile for its own sake, has dropped away in favor of instrumentalization.

³ Rather than the death of religion, we have witnessed its revival in new and violent forms. The surge of Islamic fervor, particularly in the Middle East, is matched by the uptick in conservative Christianity in the United States. Ultra-Orthodox Judaism, while in terms of numbers a tiny minority, has developed an outsized influence on world affairs via its influence on Israeli politics via settlement development.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, 9.

⁶ For example, *Explorations in Contemporary Continental Philosophy of Religion* (2003) makes no reference to Nancy; neither does *Continental Philosophy and Philosophy of Religion* (2010). Turning to the post-modern theology texts, one finds no exploration of Nancy in works such as *God and the Other: Ethics and Politics after the Theological Turn* (2011), which covers many continental philosophers thoroughly. Of course, there are texts that focus upon Nancy’s later writings almost exclusively (*Re-treating Religion, Jean-Luc Nancy and Plural Thinking*), but it is odd that more general anthologies or studies of continental philosophy of religion fail to include Nancy.

remains an open question why this is so. Thus, in this essay, multiple audiences are kept in mind: not only the secular⁷ philosophical audience, for whom Nancy's reliance and return to Christological imagery may be uncomfortable, but also a Christian audience for whom Nancy would be an outrage precisely because he takes Christian creedal statements very seriously, while remaining, in their terms, an unbeliever. The creeds of Christianity—the audacious claims of the incarnation—are a stumbling block and foolishness for many. Nancy is a shock for those who find them silly as well as for those who claim to believe them.

Even as far back as *Corpus* (1990-92), Nancy's work has drawn from the legacy of Christian thought for its motifs and maneuvers. Recognizing this trajectory strengthens his claim that Western thought is riddled with Christianity. A more subtle point is that this 'riddling' is not something to be erased, jettisoned, denied, or overcome, but rather deconstructed. Deconstruction is a tracing of that which goes against the grain of the overt meta-discourse. In tracing Christian tropes of flesh, community and faith through Nancy's corpus, and recognizing them as Christian, we face a thread of the West that reads *against* the Western hegemonies of globalization, onto-theology, and universalism. We open spaces to be and to think, and we do so via traces that are, finally, Christian. Nancy's work provides a corrective to Christianity as it is practiced as well as a necessary reminder to philosophers too quick to dismiss Christianity as the ranting of right-wing American politicians and Church ladies, rather than perhaps the wellspring or eddy of their own complex work.⁸

My tracing the thread of Christology begins with Nancy's work on the body in general, and the body of Christ in particular as incarnated. Following this filament allows the link between the 'ontology of the body' hinted at in his early work, *Corpus*,⁹ and its subtle reliance upon Christological motifs to become clearer. Turning to Nancy's work on both Christian love and on community, reading them together as an examination of community as prefigured by the impossibility of Christian love as modeled by *kenosis*, reveals again the mark of Christian thought upon notions of community working to exceed or overcome identity boundaries. Finally, examining Nancy's essays on faith provides both a critique of what could be labeled 'Christendom' (by which is meant current, practiced Christian religion¹⁰) and a tentative outline of what faith *could* be in a desacralized, atheized world.

⁷ I use this word, loosely, to indicate a philosophical audience for whom the turn to religion, particularly Christianity, seems unseemly or inappropriate.

⁸ As stated, I do so with multiple audiences in mind, and perhaps my interior audience is not the audience of this journal, but ones who will likely never read this in the first place. The audience I carry with me remains the audience of the 'faithful', who need to read the body of Christ differently, as well as their own bodies; ones who need to recognize, perhaps, that 'faith in a void of sense' is not a *lack* of faith but the only faith worth living out.

⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand (New York: Fordham University Press 2008).

¹⁰ This is obviously a gross generalization; my only justification is that Nancy himself makes such generalizations about practiced monotheistic religion throughout his work. In my defense, as I do spend quite a bit of time in the camp of American Protestant Christianity, I witness firsthand the reliance upon ontotheological tropes and universalizing discourse that characterizes both Nancy's critique and my own.

The Body

In his early essay, “Corpus,”¹¹ Nancy deconstructs and destabilizes both the too-convenient narratives of scientism and religion as applied to flesh. Beginning with God’s body—with “Here is my body”¹²—Nancy quickly moves beyond any explicit reference to Christian dogma, but keeps before the reader the ‘hard strangeness’ of the body, the incorporated flesh from which the reader reads, holds the book, writes upon the keyboard. He draws our attention to our own discomfort with the body, going so far as to claim that we both invented the body, and now hate it: the body is something strange to us even as we are nothing more than bodies. We seek to make of the body a sign, a signifier pointing to a meaning beyond itself, and yet all the while, as we contort our thoughts in this direction, the body goes on living. Nancy sees the root of this distortion, both of the body itself and our own torture of it, in the natality of Western thought. In the expression “Here is my body,” Nancy hears the “unconditional certainty of a THIS IS,” that wonderful philosophical phrase that answers the philosophical question “What is . . . ?” so beguilingly, such that it can generate, over the years, whole discourses on the body, a “General Encyclopedia of Western Sciences, Arts, and Ideas.”¹³

Nothing is this simple. Rather, we could only hope that bodies were so complex, so fecund as sources of categories and signifiers. However, ‘*This is*’ quickly degenerates, as the ‘object’ signified begins to appear less certain, less knowable. The seeming clarity of ‘thingness’ dissolves into the “chaos, a storm where all senses run wild.”¹⁴ The body, the ‘thing’ par excellence, announced as the locus for the invisible (the self, God, et cetera), refuses these categories of Western thought—it is not intelligent in the way we want to use that term; it does not have a self, an ‘autos’; it is silent and lacks sense, the making-sense that we ascribe to subjects. It is mute and closed—but not stupid. The body, as best we can say it, is ‘being-thrown-there.’ Bodies are thus open in that they do not have a place of their own, yet they make space possible. This is an odd claim, but a thought experiment about one’s own experiences of one’s body makes it clearer. ‘I’ am exposed to the world only via my body; without it as a holder-of-place, space is a meaningless concept to me, for I cannot live ‘in’ space without my body. My body makes the world available to me, makes space *real* for me. Nancy is uninterested in writing another phenomenology of the body, however, so explorations of sense experience can only take us so far. Instead, he is trying to circumscribe or ex-scribe the language of the West that requires the body to become object or subject, describable, containable or lived-in, in order for us to speak and write it. He writes, “The body is the ob-jected matter of the sub-ject.”¹⁵ I objectify my body just as others do—

¹¹ In *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand (New York: Fordham University Press 2008).

¹² In Latin *Hoc est enim corpus meum*: part of the liturgy of the Eucharist and an echo of the Last Supper, where Jesus offers the bread to his disciples, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” (Luke 22:19).

¹³ Nancy, *Corpus*, 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

someone is always objectifying the body. I cannot write about my body without both writing from my body and addressing my body as object of which I write. “An other is a body because only a body is an other.”¹⁶ As soon as I try to think the body, I realize that my modes of thought—my tendency to categorize, assign motive, meaning, or agency—fail before the body’s strangeness. At no point can I point to where the body is and I am not; yet at the same time I find myself unable to articulate the body in a way that honors its exteriority. The language of otherness fails, as well, because this other-ness, the otherness of the body, *touches*. We cannot pretend that the body is a transcendent Other; rather, this is a hot, sticky other that very specifically *touches* in explicit ways.

Another Western tendency, one that has its roots as well in the contradictory dogmas of Christian thought, is to unify and universalize, to make of the ‘body’ a single category, a mass. We universalize or homogenize the body in medical discourse; in body counts; in media coverage of poverty, suffering, or uprisings. However, the sense of the body itself resists this tendency. Rather than masses, or mere examples of a single Substance, *actual* bodies are fragmented, multiple, touching each other and touching themselves. There is never a single, singular foundation or substance the farther ‘down’ one goes in one’s analysis of bodies—instead, there is a multiplication, an increase of parts, cells, atoms, subatomic particles. Instead of a continuum, bodies are singular multiplicities, bumping into each other, even melding, while never becoming one. This kind of discourse, this ontology of the body, is a new way of thinking the world, or a new way of incorporating the world, understanding the world. Nancy briefly traces the history of Western thought regarding ‘the world’: first, we thought it as a cosmos fashioned by gods, then as a *res extensa* fashioned by modernity. Now we have arrived at a *modus corpus*: “the world as a proliferating peopling of (the) body(’s) places.”¹⁷ From universality and a closed system, to a system that recognizes things only as carriers of meaning and signification, we now find ourselves thinking a world, *in* a world that exists only in the flourishing multiple beginnings and endings of real bodies. We have a world-wide multiplicity of singularities. “What is coming to us is a dense and serious world, a world-wide world, one that doesn’t refer to another world, or to an other-world, that is no longer ‘international’ but already something else, and that is no longer a world of appearances or aspirations.”¹⁸

This ontology of the body resonates with a later project in *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity* addressing the work of Gérard Granel and the ontology of the void (being cognizant, of course, that the phrase ‘ontology of the void’ is ridiculous). A consistent theme in both works is the ‘open’: bodies as sites of openness that make space possible while themselves having no place, and the opening of the world, which of itself is no place, no site. Reading Nancy’s work on the body alongside his ongoing deconstructing of Christianity puts these openings in correspondence, enabling us a glimpse of how the body of Christ in or as incarnation

¹⁶ Ibid., 31.

¹⁷ Ibid., 39.

¹⁸ Ibid., 41.

/resurrection *works*, perhaps poetically, as a writing of the ontology of the body yet-to-be-thought. Oscillating between the radical intimacy of flesh and the radical abstraction of the open, Nancy is poised to make a connection between the two. The site of touch, a place made by bodies that often feels claustrophobic and cloying, is also the site of the opening of the world, precisely because this openness does not come from without, but happens *here*. The opening of the world, which makes the world possible, is also and at the same time the openness of the body, which makes space possible. The body is not a mass or a fullness, taking up space and signifying meaning. Rather, the body is “open space,” that which indicates existence itself. This existence is multiple, various, extended, open, an event of ex-isting rather than a substance that happens to exist. This understanding or thinking of the body, perhaps not yet possible, is nevertheless prefigured, introduced, like a parasite come to devour its host in time, in Christian dogma regarding the body of God.¹⁹ This is, in Nancy’s analysis, *Christological* (or, if we wish to be clever, Christo-alogical). Yet “the ontological body has yet to be thought.”²⁰ Nevertheless, the deconstructing of certain creeds of Christianity and passages of Scripture reveals how an articulation of the possibility of the ontological body gets started: *this* body, the body of Christ, multiple in its singularity, making god absent by its very existence, is at the same time that which articulates the being of our bodies, together. It becomes clear that much of this current Western dilemma concerning the body (which we hate, which is multiple and everywhere, which is the open when we wish it to be the solid signifier) owes its provenance to contradictions and claims made within Christian doctrine.

This reference of Christian dogma may seem off-putting. Perhaps the world as we understand it is now multiple, divided, and non-linear; claiming that the ‘cause’ of this notion is our Christian legacy may seem like over-reaching, or giving credit where it is not due. What doctrine or dogma, exactly, smuggles into our systems of universality the notion of defiant fleshly bodies that open the world? Nancy writes:

In truth, the body of God was the body of man himself: man’s flesh was the body God gave himself. (Man is the body, absolutely, or he’s not: the body of God, or the world of bodies, but nothing else. *Which is why the ‘man’ of humanism, dedicated to signifying, oversignifying, unsignifying his body, has slowly dissolved this body along with himself.*) . . . Bodies are the exposition of God and there is no other—to the extent that God exposes himself.²¹

Nancy suggests here that the Christian dogma of God becoming man gets ‘dissolved’ in later thinking into a kind of universal humanism; the singularity of the incarnational event mutates into the single mass of Being. Nancy’s internal reliance

¹⁹ We will see that Nancy’s thinking regarding the body will also come to touch upon his thinking of community—for community, too, is multiple, non-continual, various, and fragmentary; and community, too, this sort of thinking of community, may owe a debt to Christianity.

²⁰ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, 5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 61, italics added.

upon Christian creeds, doctrines, and Scriptures can be frustrating for one not raised in the tradition. Nancy states, “the body of God was the body of man.” Keeping this in mind, we can read the Nicene Creed, which contains the following:

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: *by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.* For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.²²

Thus, the provenance of Nancy’s mysterious phrase, “Man’s flesh was the body God gave himself,” becomes clearer. Likewise, passages such as Luke 1:35 describe ‘God becoming man’: “The angel said to her [Mary], ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.’” While the language of the Nicene Creed, as well as the passage from Luke, certainly contain onto-theological language (God and Christ as one *Being*, for example), they also carry with them a notion incommensurable with a stable, rational monotheism: that this ‘Being’ is human.²³

In “Corpus,” Nancy is critical of this onto-theological language, and thus treats the incarnation rather dismissively as a possible avenue of further thought regarding the body. The interpretation of incarnation we receive from the opening passages of the Gospel of John, in particular, bothers him: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. . . . And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory.”²⁴ This passage indicates that the “word gives rise to the true presence and sense of flesh.”²⁵ The Gospel of John begins with the Word, the principle, the spirit, and then enlivens flesh as a second order of business. Having the spirit or principle precede the body makes the body simply a sign for what is truly real—the word. It reduces the body to a signifier, a place-holder rather than that which makes place possible. Western systems of knowledge formation do the same thing—bodies are

²² Book of Common Prayer, italics mine.

²³ Certainly, Christianity did not ‘invent’ the idea of the divine becoming human; polytheism is rife with demi-gods, and the politics of Rome had emperors assuming divinity. The difference, of course, is that Christianity claims that an infinite, eternal, limitless ‘God’ *becomes* a finite, limited, temporal single human being. It’s hard to make that align well with logical categories, not that folks haven’t been trying for centuries.

²⁴ John 1:1-2, 14. Wayne A. Meeks, ed., *The Harper-Collins Study Bible New Revised Standard Version* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers 1993).

²⁵ Nancy, *Corpus*, 65.

cadavers, dead objects that lock down ideas for us.²⁶ They simply help us make sense of things—they are tools to be utilized, without meaning in themselves, but only carriers of meaning like an insect carries disease. Incarnation, in this sense, is actually a disembodiment—it reduces bodies to means to philosophical ends. Thus, the body cannot be the body, but must be the body *of* the spirit. (Nancy’s alternative order of priority is that the “flesh gives rise to the word’s glory and true coming.”²⁷) But perhaps something sneaks even into John’s rendering of this Christian dogma. Christian doctrine certainly presents a theology of the Holy Spirit, where what is truly ‘real’ is the breath of life, the spirit breathed into flesh, the word propping up the flesh, the breath escaping the flesh and the flesh collapsing in death. Nevertheless, we are still left with the *body*, a wounded, opened body, a body that then is resurrected. Perhaps what dies, in this death, is the idea—the dis-embodied departed breath itself. Its death throes take thousands of years—and these throes are the ceaseless deconstructing of Christianity.

What we witness here is a deconstructive moment: this very notion of the body as placeholder begins to die here, even at the beginning of Christianity. In turning to the resurrection of the singular body of Christ, we see that the body rises *after* the Spirit (idea, breath) leaves. Nancy returns to the incarnation and resurrection in later works, finding more to work with than he did during the writing of “Corpus.” The body rises, Nancy argues in *Noli Me Tangere* as well as in his work on Blanchot, as a *dead* body, as death, as the death that is our future. The body is a corpse, not a return of the breath.²⁸ The spirit has fled. The flesh remains, in resurrection. Again, Nancy utilizes both Scripture and the Christian tradition, this time via painting of the “Noli me Tangere”—the resurrection scene in which Jesus tells Mary Magdalene not to touch him—in order to draw our attention to the singularity of the body, its locus as a threshold to nowhere (death), and therefore its tenuous, fragile vibration that makes being possible.²⁹ The body itself is the miracle—but perhaps we do not yet understand *why* it is a miracle. What remains, *the* remains, makes possible the death of a single sense, of unity, of monolithic thought, of spirit triumphing over flesh, of the Idea triumphing over matter. We receive, in return, the world of bodies. This is Christianity’s legacy to our world—Christ’s death and resurrection, ceaselessly thought, open this to the world. His

²⁶ Readers may find resonance between this and Jacques Derrida’s *Voice and Phenomenon*.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ See Nancy’s work on Blanchot and *Noli Me Tangere* for his full work on resurrection.

²⁹ Luke 20:11-18: But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” Saying this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rab-bo’ni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” Mary Mag’dalene went and said to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her. HarperCollins Study Bible.

absence in resurrection, his flesh appearing, his wounds that do not heal, creates the possibility for deconstruction, and for both a coming ontology of the body and a community without universal foundation.

In “*Verbum caro factum*,” a brief essay in *Dis-Enclosure*, Nancy continues to move beyond the Gospel of John and reads the incarnation against the historical trend that interprets it as possession, as spirit entering flesh, penetrating and inhabiting it. Here, Nancy suggests that the Christian creed claiming God-made-flesh does not claim ‘spirit entered flesh’ but God *made flesh*, God turned into flesh. Nancy intimates that this is a *transfiguration* of substance rather than a penetration of one substance by another leaving both essentially intact. “If the verb [in the proposition of Christianity] *was made* flesh, or if (in Greek) it *became* flesh, or it *was engendered* or *engendered itself* as flesh, it is surely the case that it had no need to penetrate the inside of that flesh that was initially given outside it: it became flesh itself.”³⁰ This phrase ‘made flesh’ suggests that the body is the site of ‘spirit’ (God) abandoning God’s nature, God’s substance or identity, in order to become a man. “In itself, the Christian divine spirit is already outside itself . . . he is already, himself, essentially a god who puts himself outside himself by and in a ‘creation.’”³¹ In the heart of the most basic creed of Christianity, a creed adhered to and recited by all denominations and branches, then, is the absent God, a God who “atheizes Himself.” God does not ‘possess’ the flesh like a spirit animating matter, but rather *becomes* flesh rather than God. This is *kenosis*³², the *self-emptying* of God in Christ, articulated mostly strongly by Paul in Philippians 2 (“Christ Jesus . . . who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.”). God empties himself and becomes truly human, becomes a truly human body. By presenting this possibility, Christianity introduces an opening at the heart of God: it introduces the absence of God in His self-emptying, the locus instead becoming a singular, multi-celled body that will die and be resurrected *as* a singular body. Nancy’s later writings echo the terms of *Corpus*, exposing the body of God as “extension, spacing.”³³ By moving more deeply into Christian doctrine, Nancy finds fecund material to articulate an ontology of the body in spite of Christianity’s universalist and ‘spiritual’ tendencies. Spacing and extension are world-making activities, but they make a world grounded not upon some other world, nor dependent upon some outer Being, but born *here*, out of nothing, as body. Christian dogma regarding the body of God thus opens the

³⁰ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, 82.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² The concept of *kenosis* has been taken up by continental philosophers of religion, particularly Gianni Vattimo; but traces of ‘self-emptying’ are found in Levinas and Heidegger as well. For a sustained examination of *kenosis* in ‘Continental Philosophy’ (broadly speaking), see J. Aaron Simmons, *God and the Other: Ethics and Politics After the Theological Turn* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press 2011).

³³ *Ibid.*, 83.

world to itself alone, and makes absent the very God who was to be present, to be presence, and to bring salvation.

The body, for Christian doctrines of salvation, becomes a scandal. For Western ontology, it is no less scandalous, remaining stubbornly material and multiple in the face of systems that seek universality and abstraction. Ironically, Christianity makes this scandalous body possible via its own impossible faith. In *Noli me Tangere*, Nancy asks:

Why a body? Because only a body can be cut down or raised up, because only a body can touch or not touch. A spirit can do nothing of the sort. . . A body opens this presence, it presents it, it puts presence outside of itself; it moves presence away from itself, and by that very fact it brings others along with it.³⁴

The body is a creation of the West, of Western Christianity, a product of a monolithic making of sense that undoes itself and collapses into multiplicities. The body is the creation of the West, creates Western thought by its opened natality and death without transcendence. While the body is the site of a freedom borne out of a crushing spirit breathed in, then out, and abandoning the body on the cross, the body remains as the spirit flees and its existence as *not* a thing undoes Western thought even as it grounds it. Christ's body, in being the divine body, the site of divinity, the site of god entering the world, the site of impossibility, the end of logic and reason, becomes the possibility of atheism, of a place without god, a place where god is not simply elsewhere but nowhere. Leaving us now here.

There is no other place to be for Nancy: he desperately wants to stay *here*. He wants to stay here, now, be here, now, and write what is here, now. He resists the capitalization of the 'this' into a category or essence or otherness. No "Strange as Being", no "Other," no "Essence," no other "World" than this, no "Body" but only bodies; no single unity but only plurality, multiples, but multiples *that share*. Bodies are what we share, and we share bodies in that we are each a body, discrete, unknowable, only traceable, vulnerable, here, now. We share these qualities by virtue of each of us, singly, living them. The trickiness of language beguiles us into believing our categories are real, when the only real is this plurality, this community of bodies. "It goes without saying that failure is part of the intention."³⁵ Even as Nancy states that a body is inviolable, a 'vestal virgin,' that we fail both to speak and to keep silent about bodies, he also refuses to allow this to become *mysticism*. A non-mystic, all too human Christianity—this is where Nancy draws his motifs and tropes. The body of God is a body absent of God, and a singular body, wounded, opened, dead and resurrected. This indelible site sets forth a possibility for thought that leads us to a (not-yet) ontology of the body, of the present that is bereft of Presence, and of a world outside of which there is truly nothing. To suggest that this is Christian is indeed scandalous; to deny that this is Christian may be blasphemous.

³⁴ Nancy, *Noli me Tangere*, 48.

³⁵ Nancy, *Corpus*, 57.

These bodies must live together, in their difference and their multiplicity, without common ground. Here, too, Nancy finds a way open that has its origins in Christianity. ‘Christian love’ or ‘the good life’ is a life that holds to this impossible place, that holds to this space opened by a divine body taking its leave and leaving nothing behind, the emptiness of which gives us space to be together in our difference, a community of singularities. The irony must feel almost crushing: that Christianity, the thinking of Christianity, carries this with it is at odds with much of what we see those practicing the Christian religion do and seek and try. Christian dogma carries with it an empty tomb and the openness of difference; all too often, Christian practice seeks monolithic sameness and a suffocating unity in dogma. Christianity carries with it an absent God; Christian practice produces almost pornographic tributes to a penetrating deity who lives in one’s heart. Yet this open, this space, gapes obviously in every creed: flesh is divine; flesh is abandoned; flesh is risen; flesh is absent. It is absent in a doubled way; it is both absent in the sense Nancy means here—as a crucial element of Christology, a key to Christian monotheism. But it is absent in a more troubling way in that for the religion of Christianity, the body is not only absent but forgotten, signified into a corpse. Nancy’s body, if you will, is a body laid open, a body that refuses to be a signifier and thus retains a limber aspect, is able to escape our categorizations. The body in Christian practice—in the monotheism Nancy warns us about—is entombed more thoroughly than any saintly relic. It is so thoroughly ignored, codified, sexualized, and moralized that it cannot move for all the meanings attached to its limbs. (This is due, as Nancy notes, to the glorification and prioritization of the Spirit.) The *body* of God, the distinctive of Christianity, hanging on crosses in Catholic and Orthodox churches and dwelling in hearts throughout Protestantism, is *absent*.

Community: In Debt to Christianity

Equality is the condition of bodies. What’s more common than bodies? Before anything else, ‘community’ means the naked display of equivalent and banal evidence, suffering, trembling, and joyous.³⁶

In “Corpus,” Nancy elaborates upon the ‘we world,’ the world without a grand narrative of ‘body-of-sense’ in common, without a universal foundation or outward guarantee, that exposes us, each to the other. We no longer have the sense of a singular humanity, a generic being, but rather we have billions of bodies. There will not be a singular coherence available to us—change, the constant change of birth and death, is the only thing left. “The world of bodies has neither a transcendent nor an immanent sense,” he writes, and thus we live in proximity to one another, brushing against one another without forming a single mass.³⁷ Together, we are exposed. Likewise, Nancy writes in *Noli me tangere*:

³⁶ Ibid., 49.

³⁷ Ibid., 89.

The ‘good life’ is not a life that conforms to good morals, but is that which, in this very life and in this world, keeps itself in close proximity to what is not of this world: to this outside of the world that is the emptiness of the tomb and the emptiness of god, the emptiness opened up with god or as ‘God’ by the birth of man, by the birth of the world.³⁸

In Christianity in particular, the divine is neither in the world nor outside the world. There is no other world outside this one, so the divine cannot simply be relocated elsewhere. In Christ, the divine became flesh—and died, and rose, and *left*. The divine is not here, but nor is it ‘there’; and what is left is “the opening in the world, the separation, the parting and the raising.”³⁹ This leave-taking is marked out, made possible, opened as space, only by there being a body—because as Nancy argues in “Corpus,” bodies make space, make leaving possible, opening possible, space possible.

The earlier theological term, *kenosis*, enables us to move from body to community in this analysis. *Kenosis*, in an exposition on the body, connotes the God-emptying body of Christ. In Paul’s evocation of the term, however, it becomes more than simply a claim regarding incarnation: it becomes an exemplar or model of Christian love and community. As God abandoned Godself in becoming man, so too are Christians to abandon themselves in loving others. ‘We’ are to give ourselves away—but, as Nancy notes, not as objects formerly possessed, but as ‘non-things’ we never laid hold of in the first place. We are to ‘give up.’ As theologian Craig Keen puts it, “The love of God that empties itself and moves into what God is not, into God’s other, is precisely the love to which *we* are called.”⁴⁰ The *kenosis* of God as Christ, which atheologizes God and opens up the locus of the body as the site of the world, is also the *kenosis* of Christian love, whereby one is to do the impossible—give the self one does not possess as a gift to the other, to every other.

Further linking the body to the site of community, Nancy writes:

The impossibility of Christian love could be of the same order as the impossibility of the ‘resurrection’ . . . It is a matter of holding oneself in the place of the impossible, without making it possible but also without converting its necessity into a speculative or mystical resource. . . . This place can only be a place of vertigo or of scandal, the place of the intolerable at the same time as that of the impossible. This violent paradox is not to be resolved.⁴¹

In the previously mentioned round-table discussion at the European Graduate School, Nancy elaborates on the impossibility of Christian love, how it opens the

³⁸ Nancy, *Noli me Tangere*, 39-40.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁴⁰ Craig Keen, *The Transgression of the Integrity of God: Essays and Addresses*, ed. Thomas J. Bridges and Nathan R. Kerr (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books Press 2012), 31. Again, we find *kenosis* as a central theme or concept.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

possibility of community without foundation. He argues that Christianity has “opened up a space to let us see something,” and that one can articulate the impossible love that Christianity sets forth, as Jacques Lacan argues, by the phrase, “to give what one does not have.”⁴² However, against Lacan, Nancy argues that this giving of what one does not possess is indicative of neither a ‘lack’ nor a nihilism of the common sort, but rather that such giving “consists in giving something which is no-thing.”⁴³ The impossible love set up by Christian ethics calls for a giving that gives no-thing, or gives that which is not a thing. This idea, Nancy states, “still did organize something in Western thinking.” It opens up the possibility of community not as a totality, a closed system or a common body, but rather as that “which shares the absence of common being.”⁴⁴ The impossibility of loving everyone, absolutely everyone, as your neighbor seems to smack of universalism, yet the commonality, the shared trait that makes everyone one’s neighbor, is that “everyone shares with me the same impossibility of being or becoming the fixed enunciation of a certain position.”

We share only our thrownness, only our non-thingliness (please forgive the horrid neologism). We share that we are *not* things; we share our inability to be fixed places, our movability and changeability—our bodies-as-spacing. Nancy finds roots and tendrils of this in Christianity itself, in its teachings, doctrines, contradictions and failures. Christian love calls for love without ‘predilection’ or preference or shared identity or group. It calls for the violation of such boundaries in recognition of our shared different situated-ness. All we have in common is our singularity, our multiplicity without end, our ‘here and now’ that can be shared without becoming massive and unified.

Community, Christendom, and Faith

There’s a crack in everything/That’s how the light gets in.⁴⁵

One can recognize that openness and possibility lurk within Christianity itself. At the same moment, one recognizes that, as it is practiced, Christianity manifests, and indeed helped initiate, the dangers of Western thought—the unification, the spiritualization, the solidifying into mass. As Nancy notes, in Christendom⁴⁶ today “that which in faith could previously open the world in itself to its own outside (and not to some world-behind-the-worlds, to some heaven or hell) closes up and shrivels into a self-serving management of the world.”⁴⁷ In fact, what drives the writing of

⁴² Nancy, “Love and Community.”

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Those familiar with Nancy’s earlier works will hear the echo of his essay on Bataille, “The Inoperative Community.” In this work, Nancy variously describes community as “space itself” (19), that which “assumes the impossibility of its own immanence,” (15), and as a sharing of “the mortal truth that we share and that shares us,” (26). Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1991).

⁴⁵ Leonard Cohen, “Anthem,” from *The Future*, Sony Music 1992.

⁴⁶ My shorthand in this section for typical Christian practice.

⁴⁷ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, 2.

Dis-Enclosure is this sense of coming catastrophe at the hands of monotheists; Nancy has no interest, as he states plainly, in “reviving” or “saving” or “returning to” religion.⁴⁸ Religion is dangerous and possibly annihilating to real human life. Thus, Nancy’s exposure of the deconstruction of Christianity is performed not to bring Christianity back from the brink or correct it, but rather to reveal its empty heart. Nancy is perfectly comfortable with Christianity being empty (it is assumed that Christian believers will not be). However, one cannot simply blame the ‘monotheists’ for the critical state of our world. In this time of radical change—Nancy states that “the so-called civilization of humanism is . . . in its death-throes”—‘secular’ humanists have abandoned ‘higher reason’ in favor of facticity: data, objects and understanding.⁴⁹

What response can we provide to these accusations? Rather, what correctives can philosophical thought pursue such that we are no longer ceding ontology to global monotheism? Nancy has already gestured to several areas in which we can push beyond the understanding and approach the extreme limits of reason, even surpass them: the body and community. Turning toward thinking itself, Nancy performs a surrection of his own and calls forth the word ‘faith’ as a means of expressing the receptivity of the thinker to that excess of reason that may be necessary in order to move toward a new way of being together.

We stand accused of having abandoned reason “to hand itself over to understanding”—that is, we have abandoned higher thought, a thought that *stretches itself*—in order to remain at the level of instrumentation, of the understanding of something. Nancy utilizes this description to refer to the dying secular worldview that cannot admit of ‘transcendence’ (even as Nancy, for different reasons, rejects the premise of transcendence). Nancy notes that Christianity offers a “powerful confirmation of metaphysics” and thus “merely comforts the closure and makes it more stifling.”⁵⁰ Clinging to a metaphysic of presence, modern Christian practice seeks most often to close boundaries, circle the wagons, and argue ever more loudly for onto-theology. Yet the teachings of Christianity (for those who have ears) also offer something else, something other, perhaps: faith.⁵¹ Nancy writes:

Belief is in no way proper to religion. There are many profane beliefs; there are even beliefs among scholars and philosophers. But faith?...Should it not form the necessary relation to the *nothing*: in such a way that we understand that there are no buffers, no halting points, no markers, no indeconstructible terms, and that dis-enclosure never stops opening what it opens?⁵²

⁴⁸ Ibid., 1.

⁴⁹ Again, Nancy uses the term ‘understanding’ in the Kantian sense.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 7.

⁵¹ This is not to imply that other religions do not offer ‘faith.’ The unique parameters of what Christian faith calls for or how it is described in the Bible is an area of focus for Nancy; thus I am bracketing, as does he, a meta-religious analysis of faith in general. The parenthetical is an allusion to a phrase repeated by Jesus in the Gospels: “Those who have ears, let them hear.”

⁵² Ibid., 12. For a similar articulation, see Derrida’s “Faith and Knowledge” in *Religion*, trans. Samuel Weber, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press 1996). In

Philosophically speaking, exploring what Nancy calls ‘faith’ (and recognizing again that he is not arguing for a turn, return, or revival of ‘religion’) exposes the limit to which he draws thinking or reason. It gestures to the overflow.

Nancy’s work on Gérard Granel is particularly poignant on this topic: Granel’s membership in the body of Christ (via the Roman Catholic Church) and his subsequent abandonment of that body portray in both philosophical and existential terms the consequences of the abandonment of *kenosis* by the Church in favor of invisible Presence.⁵³ Not only religion but philosophy, according to Granel, has failed to go beyond Being, to “seek the very root of the ‘stubbornness of Substance,’” (Nancy here quotes Granel directly).⁵⁴ Granel claims that “the hollow always gathers up the seen,” that what grounds all being is itself groundless un-being, a site unable to be located that nevertheless allows spacing, location, to happen. Nancy summarizes, “Either God empties himself of himself in the opening of the world, or God sustains himself as being, by himself, subject and substance of the world.”⁵⁵ Nancy points out that these are *not at all* the same thing. The former echoes and affirms the Christian creed (if we are to take seriously that Christ is ‘God’); the latter is onto-theology, and reflects Christendom’s current attitude toward creation (and results, again, in globalization, unity, monolithism, and mass). Nancy calls the latter the “God of religious representation”—and we should take seriously this label, that God here is re-presented as Presence, Substance, as unavoidable thickness and weight. By way of contrast, the God of *kenosis* is absence and void, the light that streams in when Substance finally gets out of the way. Granel changes his loyalty from theological *kenosis* to philosophical *kenosis*, from the *kenosis* of Christ to the *kenosis* of Being—yet he retains Paul’s term, a term unnecessary to connote the emptying-out he wishes to articulate.

The opening of the world that Granel seeks to expose is not ‘outside’ the world, but neither is it ‘inside.’ It is a ‘threshold’ that indicates something happening to the world that had not happened before, an *event*. Granel calls this opening “the divine.”⁵⁶ Nancy asks:

How do we recognize ‘the ungraspability of being’? How do we touch, or let ourselves be touched by, the opening of the world/to the world? How, if not by a gesture that lays down . . . that passes outside of knowledge without unreason, by a precise reason attuned to the ‘*manifestly*’ divine aspect of the manifestation itself and its division? . . . Must we not call it ‘faith’? . . . A faith that, in sum, is nothing—nothing but this tiny extreme touch of thought laid upon that nothing.⁵⁷

particular, Derrida’s use of *chora* echoes here.

⁵³ Ibid., 64-74.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 66.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 70.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 72.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 73.

If one takes the concept of *kenosis* seriously, it becomes difficult to build a belief system upon the Substance of God-as-Being, a seamless Being without interruption. Thus, Christendom as it is practiced and lived institutionally, is an onto-theology, one that ignores part of its own creeds in favor of a comforting sameness. Yet, one may find in multiple places and spaces those who confess to the tiny extreme touch of faith, who call themselves ‘Christians,’ and yet who at the same time profess and confess *kenosis*, transgression, emptiness, a/theism. These confessors, it must be admitted, are not terribly popular and rarely found in pulpits. Subsisting on honey and locusts, dressing inappropriately, one nevertheless can find them within Christendom, or at least sitting outside on the steps. If there are those, like Granel, who could not stomach the dissonance between the courageous discovery of the void and the pious mumblings of the body of Christ as the church, there are also those who push through the nausea and vertigo and hold on. In any case, however, there can be no theology of *kenosis*, no “kenology”. There is no *logos* that can speak *kenos* and hold it as a category. This is the trouble, of course—Christendom requires theology to be systematic (or, at least, practical), and *kenosis* is as a-systemic as it is a-substantial. Nevertheless, Nancy’s analysis of Granel’s refusal opens the door to a conversation so far resisted: the conversation with one who can be accused, *unlike* Granel, of ‘piety’, who, in the same spacing and timing, may also be *laying down* in faith. As Nancy writes in response to Jacques Derrida in a later chapter of *Dis-Enclosure*, “Faith never consists in making oneself believe something in the way that one might convince oneself that tomorrow one will be happy. Faith can only consist, by definition, in addressing what comes to pass, and it annihilates every belief, every reckoning, every economy, and any salvation.”⁵⁸ Faith “consists in the address or in *being addressed* to the other *of the world*.”⁵⁹

It is worthwhile to note the passivity of the language Nancy uses, or borrows from Granel. Laying down, he implies, is a painting term, but laying down is also a posture of submission, of giving up. He uses this same language—that of ‘giving up’—in the round-table discussion on Christian love. Love, in giving that which one does not have, gives up. One, in loving without preference, gives up oneself (an impossible gift, as one does not possess oneself and therefore does not have the self to give). Likewise, Nancy writes of ‘being addressed,’ as well as of ‘addressing,’ emphasizing again a shift in agency, a subjected-ness without redress, a submission or vulnerability to the other. The ‘other’ is not one from outside, but the alterity of the world itself. He asks, “How do we . . . let ourselves be touched by the opening of the world/to the world?” He calls this letting-be the tiny extreme touch, faith. In love, we lay down. In faith, we lay down. We allow a touching, a brushing, tiny and fleeting, to skim our surface. We allow ourselves to be written upon. By what? This becomes a very modern, metaphysical question to ask, and seems beside the point. A ‘what’, a ‘thing’, an ‘object’, a ‘god’? By no means. We give that which is not a thing, *to* that which is not a thing; we are touched by that which is not a thing. We are opened by that which is not a thing.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 101.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 102.

The language of gift and opening continue in Nancy's analysis of the letter of James. He writes, "This faith must come from the other, this faith must come from outside, it is the outside opening in itself a passage toward the inside."⁶⁰ Faith, in his reading, becomes not a 'belief' in the order of reason or *logos*, but rather something given in the asking for the gift, an abandonment of self to the gift.⁶¹ It exceeds any conceptual analysis and is found only in works: "It *is* in works, it *makes* them, and the works *make* it."⁶² Faith is not a belief in a postulate or proof, nor is it guaranteed by a presence other than the one whom one serves in acts of faith. In being addressed or given to from outside, one sees that there is no outside, no Source or Presence grounding the gift, cementing the significance of the act of faith, guaranteeing the acknowledgment of the activity and securing one for eternity. Instead, in a Nietzschean sense, one is suspended over an abyss—the reception of the gift and the act of faith, co-terminal, have placed one in a spacing without ground or foundation. Acting in faith, or faith only in action, is directed to and emptied out before the other (the human other) one serves. It terminates there. The work of the understanding,⁶³ that seeks to produce explanations and clarifications, categories and structures, is brought up short in acts of faith. It is "the *acting* of the word and truth, rather than the 'logistical' *doing* of representation and meaning."⁶⁴

Faith, then, this tiny extreme touch, this gift of action that exceeds itself and dies without guarantee, is deeply connected to both the ontology yet-to-be-thought of the body, to the stretching out of reason, and to the articulation of community that no longer relies upon identity, universality, or sameness as a foundation. A thinking without guarantee or end; a spacing not pre-determined and defined by an act of understanding; a body standing up in death as its own-most possibility, yet pulsating, vibrating, excessively *alive* in its constant change and multiplicity. This is the hope to which Nancy draws us, and it is a hope that constructs itself out of the deconstruction of Christianity. Is a crisis looming? Must we find a way to be together, to have being in common without common being, lest the ecstasies of religious revival throw us into a new dark age? If so, is it not imperative that whoever can think this, whoever can draw near with faith to this articulation of community, do so and be encouraged to do so? In our too-quick condemnation of the religious, are we perhaps failing to find allies under our noses? Again, Craig Keen writes:

God does not cease here to be Wholly Other in relation to the flesh and yet this God *dwells* with us *as* the flesh that is Jesus Christ. The movement here is a descent from above to below, from the sufficient to

⁶⁰ Ibid., 54.

⁶¹ One thinks of the debate between Jean-Luc Marion and Derrida regarding the phenomenological possibility of the gift. See *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, ed. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press 1999).

⁶² Ibid., 52.

⁶³ By this, Nancy is referring more to the Kantian notion of the understanding than to any phenomenological or existential notion.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 55.

the insufficient, from the immortal to the mortal, from the ‘to be’ to ‘not to be.’ Yet this movement does not lead simply to a kind of external relation in which the integrity of opposing poles remains intact. God and flesh touch—explosively. . . . Things do not stay in their place in or about this Jesus. There is a concurrence of what cannot concur. What cannot touch, touch.⁶⁵

Regarding the resurrection of Christ, Keen writes, “He has not gotten better. He has not been resuscitated. His stripes are not healed. His body yet carries the cross. His life ended when he breathed out his last prayer.”⁶⁶ Finally, regarding the Trinity and community, Keen notes, “God is one as a complexity, as an outgoing, an othering, a movement the extremes of which are woven together without ceasing to be extremes, that is, without the neutrality of integrity and identity.”⁶⁷ These are mere examples, ripped from a work that exposes the transgressive acts of God in Christ. The resonance with Nancy is unmistakable.⁶⁸ A communiqué has yet to be written.

Nancy calls us toward this naked community, grounded in a difference that goes all the way down. He insists that we acknowledge the difference we share as the *only* possibility of community that saves bodies from becoming masses and groups from becoming mobs. He finds traces of this in the legacy of Christianity. We find traces of this in current Christian thought, as exemplified here in the work of one theologian. We are quick to condemn religious uprisings and the insistence of believers that their way is the only way—and rightly so. We may need to execute care, however, that in our condemnation we do not create masses and mobs of our own, if only conceptually. Accepting the universalist narrative presented by religious fanatics as their own self-definition is to cede them too much ground. While not recovering or saving ‘religion’, we still need to become open to our neighbor, our ancestor, our *modus communus*. In Nancy’s estimation, our neighbor is Christian.

We are called to think bodies, their ‘hard strangeness,’ their exteriority that spaces us. We are called to not only think community but to act it and enact it. If the death-throes of secular humanism are not to send us spiraling toward a new closure that presses down upon us a suffocating Eternal Presence and exacts from us an awful price, then it seems crucial⁶⁹—and I use this word with its etymology quite deliberately—that we turn our gaze toward the incessant deconstruction of Christianity, as well as toward those who participate actively in its deconstruction from *within*. To assume, as so many secular⁷⁰ philosophers seem to do, that current Christian thought is metaphysically locked into a monotheism of presence is to fail

⁶⁵ Keen, *Transgression*, 9.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶⁸ Yet Craig Keen has not read Jean-Luc Nancy. I’ve asked.

⁶⁹ “Of the form of the cross.” “That which finally decides.” Lesley Brown, ed., *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1993).

⁷⁰ Again, by ‘secular’, I do not mean ‘non-religious’ v. ‘religious.’ I use the term here, with trepidation, to indicate those who dismiss too quickly all religious thought as antiquated, backward, or even dangerous. I mean the thinkers Nancy addresses impersonally in his introduction to *Dis-Enclosure*.

to read Christian dogma, Scripture, and theology carefully. Nancy's work exposing the destabilizing *doxa* of Christianity is essential work if it merely encourages us to face squarely the monolith of Presence from which we avert our eyes in disgust or disdain. His work may cast wider irruptive circles as it intersects and finds resonance with work in Christian theology. The monolith of universal onto-theology stands—but it is cracked. As we all know: that is how the light gets in.