

RECONFIGURED FINITUDE AND CHRISTIAN BELONGING IN THE
THOUGHT OF EMMANUEL FALQUE – SELECTED SESSION

- Topic: Reconfigured Finitude and Christian Belonging in the Thought of Emmanuel Falque
- Convener: Anthony Godzieba, Villanova University
- Moderator: Colby Dickinson, Loyola University Chicago
- Speakers: Rohan Abraham, KU Leuven
Trevor B. Williams, Villanova University
Colby Dickinson, Loyola University Chicago

This panel explored the theological and phenomenological implications of finitude, sacramentality, and identity in the work of Emmanuel Falque. Each paper engaged Falque’s project of methodological crossing—between philosophy and theology, anthropology and Christology, doctrine and existential experience—through distinct but intersecting themes. The conversation developed around how Falque reconfigures finitude not simply as a limit to be accepted, but as a site of metamorphosis that reshapes what it means to belong, believe, and be transformed.

In his paper, Rohan Abraham explored Falque’s philosophical anthropology through the sacramental lens of baptism. Moving beyond ecclesial boundary markers, he reimagined baptism not as a completed rite but as an existential and ongoing “crossing”—a site of vulnerability, transformation, and exposure to others. Drawing from *The Metamorphosis of Finitude*, *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb*, and *Crossing the Rubicon*, Abraham argued that Falque’s method of phenomenological theology opens baptism to new anthropological possibilities. He underscored the asymmetry of finitude (birth vs. death), the Eucharistic logic of incorporation, and the need to recognize not only *ad intra* (internal) transformation but also *ad extra* alterity—those outside Christian confession. Abraham critiqued Falque’s lack of attention to pedagogical formation and ritual deferral, suggesting that baptism marks not mastery but the beginning of shared interpretive vulnerability. Referencing thinkers like Paul Ricœur, Jean-François Lyotard, and Viktor Frankl, he concluded that baptismal existence is a journey of continual metamorphosis shaped by others, rather than a sealed sacramental identity.

In his paper, Colby Dickinson argued that Falque routinely explores how unconscious dimensions converge with conscious doctrinal positions, thus providing a fuller depiction of our human being. His theological method of bricolage initiates the reader into a collage of images, words and associations that subvert traditional forms and dualities (e.g. word and image, conscious and unconscious, animal and human). Dickinson contended that, in the context of Falque’s redefining of baptism and Eucharist, these unique associative juxtapositions between theory, image and doctrine present us with a theology of profound psychological depth. He further proposed that Falque’s work illuminates a previously undisclosed psychology of theology.

Finally, in his paper, Trevor Williams argued that Falque frequently appeals to Søren Kierkegaard and Blaise Pascal as two Christian thinkers who embody his methodology. His recent book *La chair de Dieu* (2023) advances his distinction between the anxiety of sin and the anxiety of death, which in his 1999 book *The Guide to Gethsemane*, proved to be useful when grappling with Martin Heidegger’s critique

that Christianity cannot authentically face death. Falque often associates sin with despair, but very quickly, brackets the topic. This practice extends to other areas, notably in *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb*, where he brackets bestiality—the potentially disordered or sinful aspects of human embodiment—to better speak of animality. Falque rarely returns to describe sin after setting it aside, but in *La chair de Dieu*, he offers a slight correction. He argues that Christians are not just capable of reckoning with death but that they bear their own doubled sense of anxiety because of sin. He cites Kierkegaard and Pascal to describe an anxiety peculiar to the believer in that sin can rupture the baptismal alliance with God. Christians do not just experience the anxiety of death, they can also experience its intensification.

The question-and-answer discussion began with a question about the continuity between *Crossing the Rubicon* and Falque's later works, particularly *The Flesh of God*. The concern was whether Falque's methodological reflections remain stable or are reconfigured in light of his engagement with trauma and Christological descent. Williams emphasized *The Loving Struggle* as the most revealing of Falque's method, describing it as a practice of mutual transformation rather than fixed doctrinal stance. Abraham added that in later works, particularly *La Chair de Dieu*, theology begins to intervene directly in the space of philosophical finitude—Christ enters suffering to transform it—raising concerns about a possible slide into ontotheology.

Another question addressed the use of “metaphysics” in Falque's thought. Abraham responded that Falque reworks metaphysical categories phenomenologically, passing through them (*metaphusis*) rather than asserting them. His concern is with transformation through flesh, not abstract systems. Dickinson noted that Falque's method resembles a collage or bricolage: images, experiences, and citations form a composite vision of embodiment, which itself constitutes a new kind of metaphysical operation. Williams added that Falque bypasses classical debates in order to reclaim certain theological terms (like “pure nature”) in radically reinterpreted ways rooted in finitude and vulnerability.

A third set of reflections turned to whether Falque's emphasis on the body might be read as a reconfiguration of the Kantian transcendental turn. Abraham suggested that Falque is best understood not as a transcendental thinker but as operating in a post-subjective mode akin to Jean-Luc Nancy's work on community and being-with. Dickinson compared Falque's project to Slavoj Žižek's “transcendental materialism,” noting how both thinkers reframe subjectivity through the carnal body. Williams acknowledged that Falque's work is intentionally ambiguous, open to neo-scholastic, mystical, and postmodern readings alike.

The final question focused on baptism. Specifically, whether Falque's Eucharistic logic of incorporation could inform a phenomenology of baptism. Williams affirmed that Falque's language of unconscious receptivity resonates with infant baptism, even though the topic is underdeveloped in his work. Abraham, however, emphasized the importance of preserving baptism as an open, pedagogical event rather than a closed sacramental incorporation. Baptism, he argued, names not just belonging, but the beginning of a vulnerable journey shaped by others across confessional lines.

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