

Religious Education as a Liturgical Threshold: Pedagogy of Mystery

Educación religiosa como umbral litúrgico: Pedagogía del Misterio

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes an understanding of religious education as a liturgical threshold from a phenomenological perspective, based on the proposals of Jean-Yves Lacoste and Jean-Luc Marion. Instead of reducing faith education to a doctrinal or merely experiential model, it puts forward a pedagogy of mystery that integrates symbols, community, and temporality as formative mediations. It argues that family, catechesis, and school can be configured as mystagogical spaces, where faith is welcomed as a gift that transforms existence. In this sense, religious education is presented as an integral itinerary capable of cultivating availability, hospitality, and wonder. Furthermore, concrete implications are highlighted for educators, catechists, and families, offering criteria to address the challenges of secularization and contemporary pluralism.

Keywords: religious education, phenomenology, liturgy, pedagogy of mystery, donation

RESUMEN

Este artículo propone comprender la educación religiosa como un umbral litúrgico desde la fenomenología, a partir de las propuestas de Jean-Yves Lacoste y Jean-Luc Marion. En lugar de reducir la enseñanza de la fe a un modelo doctrinal o meramente experiencial, se plantea una pedagogía del Misterio que articula símbolos, comunidad y temporalidad como mediaciones formativas. Se argumenta que la familia, la catequesis y la escuela pueden configurarse como espacios mistagógicos en los cuales la fe se hospeda como don que transforma la existencia. En este sentido, la educación religiosa se presenta como un itinerario integral capaz de cultivar la disponibilidad, la hospitalidad y el asombro. Asimismo, se presentan implicancias concretas para educadores, catequistas y familias, ofreciendo criterios para enfrentar los desafíos de la secularización y del pluralismo contemporáneo.

Palabras clave: educación religiosa, fenomenología, liturgia, pedagogía del misterio, donación.

1. Introduction

Speaking of religious education (RE) in today's context requires, above all, acknowledging the breadth of its mediations. RE unfolds across three fundamental spheres: the family, catechesis, and the school. Each contributes, with its own language and rhythm, to the transmission of faith and to the formation of life projects capable of integrating interiority, transcendence, and communal commitment. Within the family, as a domestic church, the Mystery dwells in small gestures of blessing, forgiveness, and grateful remembrance; in catechesis, faith is initiated and matures through ritual and celebratory experience; and in the school, the Christian tradition engages in dialogue with culture, offering keys of meaning for personal and social life (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013). Recognizing this threefold scope helps avoid reducing RE to mere doctrinal instruction or to simple affective animation, since its true purpose lies in introducing the Mystery and accompanying lives open to the gift.

The risk lies precisely here: oscillating between two poles without managing to integrate them. On the one hand, there is a doctrinal model that ensures continuity with tradition but often disconnects faith from concrete life. On the other, there is an experiential model that exalts subjective authenticity and immediacy, recovering the existential dimension but risking a form of intimism lacking theological or communal depth. Ochoa et al. (2021) show that an experiential pedagogy in catechesis can revitalize the transmission of faith by linking it to everyday life, though they warn that, if not articulated within the ecclesial community, it risks dissolving into fragmented and rootless practices. This doctrinal-experiential tension also appears at the structural level in Latin America, where models

of religious education coexist ranging from exclusive confessional approaches to more intercultural and non-confessional perspectives. As Martínez (2022) notes, this variety of models reveals the difficulty of balancing fidelity to tradition with openness to pluralism, which at times reduces religious education to a dispute between doctrinal orthodoxy and secular neutrality. Thus, the pendulum between conceptual clarity and affective spontaneity reproduces itself in various contexts, leaving faith perceived more as an object of control—cognitive or emotional—than as a gift that exceeds all appropriation. Secularization fragments belief systems, religious pluralism demands dialogue without dissolution, and new generations often find themselves facing a religious language disconnected from their search for meaning (Martínez, 2025; Muenia & Fernández, 2024). In this context, two reductive temptations arise: to justify religious education solely by its civic utility, or to retreat exclusively into the transmission of content. Both paths close off the possibility of experiencing faith as a transformative event.

To overcome this possible dilemma, we propose to reinterpret religious education in the light of *evential* phenomenology¹. Jean-Luc Marion describes

1 As Roggero (2024, pp. 1–2) states, the expression “*evential phenomenology*” seeks to account for the change in status of the notion of phenomenon—as Hans-Dieter Gondek and László Tengelyi point out, following what had previously been proposed by Jean-Luc Marion and Carla Canullo—that has taken place within French phenomenology over the past fifty years. This transformation begins with the elaborations on the phenomenon of the “symbol” in Paul Ricoeur, of “spontaneous sense” and “the invisible” in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, of the “face” in Emmanuel Levinas, and of “affectivity” in Michel Henry. Yet it can be traced even earlier, in the work of Martin Heidegger and his proposal of a “phenomenology of the unapparent,” with the thematization of the *Ereignis* as “the most unapparent of the unapparent,” and in that of Edmund Husserl himself, when he refers to the “proto-occurrence” (*Urgeschehen*) of transcendental subjectivity or when he includes under the category of phenomenon “every kind of feeling, desire, and willing, together with their immanent comportment.”

the saturated phenomenon as an appearing that exceeds subjective constitution and, therefore, can only be received as a gift. Jean-Yves Lacoste, for his part, understands liturgy as a regime of appearing that suspends utilitarian logic and places the subject *before God* (*coram Deo*), in a *nonplace* where existence opens itself to the eternal (Lacoste, 2010). Both intuitions converge in leading religious education toward a pedagogy of receptivity that opens onto what we shall call a pedagogy of Mystery. The aim is not to possess the religious phenomenon but to allow oneself to be transformed by it. In this way, faith is no longer transmitted as an object nor reduced to emotion; it is instead recognized as an eventual gift that calls and constitutes. From an educational perspective, this approach makes it possible to understand religious teaching—in the family, ecclesial communities, and the school—as a genuine liturgical threshold, a liminal space in which the human is exposed to the Mystery without any claim to closure.

The hypothesis guiding this study is clear: religious education conceived as a liturgical threshold constitutes one of the most adequate ways to respond to the current conditions of faith. This is not a mere methodological update but a hermeneutical transformation of pedagogical grammar. Such a shift implies moving from the doctrinal-experiential binomial to hospitality and care; from an emphasis on performance standards to the welcoming of gratuity; from utilitarian chronology (*chronos*) to the qualitative temporality of the gift (*kairós*). Within this horizon, family, catechesis, and school are reconfigured as spaces of symbolic hospitality in which the Mystery is inhabited through gestures, rituals, silences, and communities that educate in the disposition to receive the gift.

The article will therefore unfold in three movements. First, it will delve into the phenomenology of the threshold through the contributions of Lacoste and Marion, showing how categories such as *nonplace*, *saturated phenomenon*, and *givenness* provide decisive keys for understanding the experience of faith. Second, it will propose an architecture of the threshold that articulates the symbolic, communal, and temporal dimensions of pedagogical practice, integrating insights on spiritual intelligence (Torralba, 2010; Gómez Villalba, 2014). Methodologically, this work presents itself as a theoretical-hermeneutical essay that adopts a phenomenological approach. It relies on the work of Lacoste and Marion to interpret religious education as a liturgical threshold and seeks to connect this conceptual key with practical implications for the contexts of family, catechesis, and school.

2. Phenomenology of the Threshold

2.1. Lacoste: Liturgy as nonplace and hidden present

Jean-Yves Lacoste is one of the most original voices within French phenomenology. His reflection does not aim to do theology from philosophy, nor philosophy from theology, but rather to open a common horizon in which phenomenology can describe the appearance of the divine without abandoning its method, and theology can articulate faith without reducing it to conceptual categories. As he himself states, liturgy is not just one experience among others, but the condition that interrupts the familiarity of the world and places us before God (Lacoste, 2010, p. 136). From this perspective, Lacoste understands liturgy as a fundamental space of revelation, not because it explains God, but because it makes God appear

in a regime different from ordinary experience. In liturgy, the human is experienced *coram Deo*, in a mode of being before God that radically transforms the subject's relationship with oneself, with others, and with the world.

One of the most suggestive concepts Lacoste introduces is that of the *nonplace* (Lacoste, 2010, §22). Unlike mundane space, in which existence unfolds in continuity with what is useful, functional, or appropriable, liturgical space suspends these coordinates to place the believer in a stripped-open openness, where familiarity with the world is interrupted. The *nonplace* does not refer to an escape or a void, but to a different topology: that of the event of the Mystery that breaks in without being possessed. There, the subject does not constitute meaning but receives it overwhelmingly from a presence that exceeds them. This is why Lacoste speaks of liturgy as a form of *non-experience*—not because nothing happens, but because what happens cannot be reduced to the intentional structure of consciousness (Lacoste, 2010, p. 71).

The *nonplace* is better understood when considering Lacoste's critique of Heidegger. While Heidegger describes life as a *being-in-the-world* oriented toward death, Lacoste proposes another way of dwelling: a *being-before-God* sustained not by anxiety but by the promise of an absolute meaning. In this way, death is not the final word, because liturgy anticipates the *eschaton* in the present (Lacoste, 2010, §16). Liturgy does not deny finitude but illuminates it with resurrection and hope.

Here, the category of time is decisive. Lacoste distinguishes between *chronos*, the successive time that organizes productive life, and *kairós*, the qualitative time in which eternity is anticipated. The *hidden present* of liturgy does not belong to

chronological time but to eschatological time (Lacoste, 2019, p. 251). As Turcan (2024) explains, Lacoste's phenomenology of liturgical time juxtaposes *world/creation*, *death/resurrection*, and *care/eschatological* agitation, showing that the eschatological is not a distant future but a reality celebrated in the present. Within this horizon, liturgy is experienced as a gifted time that educates in waiting, hope, and gratuity.

This vision is connected to Lacoste's *theological reduction*, comparable to Husserl's phenomenological reduction. Whereas the latter suspends the natural belief to describe phenomena, Lacoste proposes to render the world transparent in the light of creation and resurrection (2010, §3). Reality is not denied, but it is seen from God: death in the light of resurrection, time from the perspective of the *eschaton*, and existence as promise.

These intuitions are not limited to liturgy but illuminate RE directly. The *nonplace* can be applied to the family, where simple gestures of faith (prayers, blessings) interrupt the everyday; to the ecclesial community, where the gathered community lives *coram Deo*; and to the school, where religious education opens students to the logic of gift and wonder. In all cases, educating means cultivating availability, hospitality, and receptivity, rather than mastery or certainty.

Liturgy is also not reducible to an individual act of piety. It forms a *we coram Deo*. As Manchon (2023) notes, the liturgical creates community not through utility or consensus, but through shared hospitality before the Mystery. In this way, Lacoste's phenomenology points to a collective body, a fraternity united by the sacred. This communal dimension underpins RE across all its domains.

Affectivity is also crucial. For Lacoste, what opens one to the Mystery is not merely the concept nor fleeting emotion, but attitudes such as listening silence, patient waiting, and receptive admiration. Liturgy educates affectivity as a disposition of openness. Therefore, school, catechesis, and family are called to cultivate wonder, gratitude, and availability, so that faith is not a closed system, but an event of givenness.

This proposal has received criticism. Černý (2019) warns that Lacoste's eschatological emphasis could detach liturgy from concrete history and its social demands. Yet this observation complements his vision, reminding us that liturgy must transform history. Thus, RE cannot be solely mystagogical or contemplative; it must also engage with justice, ecology, and social life.

Conceiving liturgy as a *nonplace* and *hidden present* means that RE is not the transmission of content, but formation in availability. Family, catechesis, and school must open spaces of silence, waiting, and hospitality, where one learns to receive the unexpected. The classroom, parish, and home become liturgical thresholds that cultivate patience and awaken wonder.

In this way, Lacoste's phenomenology redefines the relationship between faith, education, and community: liturgy as *nonplace* opens onto the Mystery; *hidden present* teaches how to live time as gift; the *theological reduction* reveals creation in the light of the *eschaton*; affectivity prepares for hospitality; and community anticipates the Kingdom. Applied to RE, these categories configure a pedagogy of givenness and availability, enabling the recognition in family, school, and ecclesial community of authentic thresholds where the human opens to the Mystery of God.

2.2. Marion: Saturated phenomenon, excess and gift

Jean-Luc Marion critiques the "intoxication with constitutions" (Marion, 2010b, p. 142) he finds in Husserl—that is, the tendency to reduce phenomena solely to what can be conceptually defined. In contrast, he proposes recognizing *saturated phenomena*: realities that dazzle by their excess and overflow the limits of our comprehension (Schrijvers, 2023). These phenomena are not constituted by consciousness; rather, they impose themselves as gift. Thus, the experience of God appears not as an object, but as an event that exceeds any attempt at explanation.

This approach has educational resonances. Gary (2019) explains that Marion describes wonder as the capacity to recognize saturated phenomena, which surpass us and constitute us. In contrast, education tends to organize learning into lists of standards, which can obscure the richness of what truly fascinates students and teachers. Therefore, religious education must cultivate wonder and openness to the gift, avoiding the reduction of faith to mere content.

The notion of a *liturgical threshold* helps apply these ideas to religious education. Liturgy, the ritual expression of the paschal mystery, becomes the place where teaching ceases to be mere transmission and is transformed into *mistagogy*, that is, a gradual initiation into the Mystery (Barbosa-Neto, 2022). As Codina (2009) explains, this initiation involves rupture, trials, and rebirth. Its aim is not to master concepts but to be disposed toward the gift received in sacramental experience. Thus, Barbosa-Neto (2022) affirms that mistagogy "aims to help people progressively insert themselves into the life of the Church and into everyday Christian life" (p. 530).

Within this horizon, availability is key, for it is not passivity, but active openness that recognizes the limits of knowledge and awaits the gift (Santasilia, 2024). Religious education can cultivate this receptivity through inner silence, contemplation, and attentiveness to the everyday. Loyola (2019) expresses it as follows: true learning arises “from within, not only from external stimuli” (p. 30).

The logic of the gift, central to Marion, transforms pedagogical foundations. Against the merit-reward scheme, religious education must learn to operate within gratuity, whereby what is received always surpasses what is expected (Murga, 2022). This does not annul responsibility but situates it as a grateful response to a prior gift. The educator, therefore, bears witness that faith is not a human conquest, but divine gift (Barbosa-Neto, 2022).

The Mystery, in this vision, is not a limit of knowledge, but the horizon that gives meaning to learning. As Adetou (2024) notes, it manifests precisely as that which exceeds all understanding. Educating in this key involves the *docta ignorantia*, a humility that recognizes that even Jesus “had to discern how to adhere to the will of God and carry out his mission at life’s crossroads” (Crespo de los Bueis, 2015, p. 35).

Liturgy serves as the paradigm of this integral pedagogy, as it engages body, mind, affect, and spirit. It is not limited to words, but integrates gestures, songs, silences, and community as mediations of the encounter with the sacred (Villarreal de Alba, 2013). This reflects the very structure of the saturated phenomenon, which overflows all categories (Murga, 2022). As Leikam (2015) argues, liturgy is simultaneously an epiphany of Christ’s priesthood

before the Father and a real participation of the Church in that action (p. 431).

Hence, the rite is not an empty routine, but an opening to Someone who gives himself in each celebration. The religious educator must avoid both automatism and rationalism that impoverish the experience. In this way, liturgical pedagogy and the pedagogy of saturation converge: both start from the premise that the event of faith cannot be reduced, only received as gift.

3. Threshold architecture: Pedagogical practices and mediations

The conception of RE as a liturgical threshold allows us to recognize the fecundity of articulating phenomenology with the concrete instances in which faith formation unfolds: family, school, and catechesis. Each of these, with its particularities, can be understood as a formative space in which interiority, transcendence, and the construction of meaning are cultivated, following what Francesc Torralba (2010) calls spiritual intelligence—understood as the capacity to confront the ultimate questions of existence beyond any technocratic or pragmatic reduction. Far from being a mere motivational resource, this intelligence constitutes a transversal competence that fosters resilience, enhances emotional self-regulation, and promotes ecological awareness, directly impacting both personal well-being and the integral formation of those participating in these processes (Alarcón & Novoa, 2025).

The liturgical threshold not only reinforces this perspective but deepens it phenomenologically. Liturgy can be described, following Marion (2016), as a *saturated* place of gift, where what is given

is offered with a gratuity and excess that exceed any attempt at conceptual thematization. For Marion, the logic of givenness replaces the logic of constitution, as the phenomenon does not depend on the activity of consciousness, but imposes itself as excess and gratuity that unsettles, surprises, and transforms. From Lacoste's reading (2010), liturgy is experienced as a *nonplace*, a space in which the utilitarian and functional coordinates of ordinary existence are suspended to situate the subject *coram Deo*, exposed to the Absolute in a regime of appearance that deactivates all claims of control or mastery. With Marion, the emphasis falls on the eruption of the given as excess that exceeds the frames of consciousness; with Lacoste, on the precarious condition of human existence which, sustained by grace, learns to recognize its vulnerability and live it as an opening to the Mystery. Hence, what is called the pedagogy of meaning (Alarcón & Novoa, 2025) finds in the pedagogy of mystery its deepest horizon, understanding the process of teaching faith as a mode of appearance in which the finite opens to the Infinite, and learning above all means receiving.

Based on this foundation, the architecture of the threshold can be configured as an inseparable web of symbolic, communal, and temporal dimensions that reframe RE practice in a new horizon. The symbolic dimension is expressed through gestures, songs, silences, and rites that are not mere ornamental additions but authentic pedagogical languages of the Mystery, mediating the ineffable. Their function is not to illustrate concepts but to make appear that which always exceeds conceptual comprehension, so that, in a Marionian key, these languages act as icons of the *saturated* and elicit a response of wonder that suspends the utilitarian economy of the classroom and everyday life. The communal dimension, in turn,

prevents spirituality from being reduced to intimism or subjective refuge and relocates it as an experience of hospitality, dialogue, and communion. In the school context, for instance, understanding RE as a threshold means transforming the classroom into a space of reciprocal openness, in which cultural and religious diversity is mutually recognized and participates in a shared climate of trust—a trend already emerging in the regulations and curricular orientations of Chilean school religious education (Mueña, 2024). Thus, community is not defined by utility or consensus but by shared hospitality before a Mystery that summons and overflows all equally. Finally, the temporal dimension introduces into the formative space the logic of *kairós*, the experience of a qualitative present that breaks into chronology and anticipates the future as gift, reshaping time in terms of waiting, contemplation, and gratitude (Lacoste, 2010; Turcan, 2024). This is not a purely symbolic or rhetorical time, but a temporality that forms the subject in the disposition of desire and openness to that which cannot be controlled or anticipated.

Spiritual intelligence and the liturgical threshold mutually clarify each other when their statuses are distinguished. The former designates the subjective capacity for openness to meaning and for engagement with the radical questions of life, while the latter names the objective space where that openness is exercised, tested, and educated. In liturgy, understood both as a *saturated* event and as a *no place* of exposure *coram Deo*, ultimate questions find their most fertile pedagogical setting. From this perspective, RE is deepened as a mistagogical pedagogy: the student or catechumen is not simply informed about religious content, but gradually and responsibly introduced to inhabit the

celebrated Mystery and discern its resonances in their own biography.

This horizon has direct consequences for the figure of the educator, who ceases to be conceived as a transmitter of content or facilitator of affective experiences, assuming instead the role of *mistagogue*: one who introduces the Mystery through symbols, stories, and gestures that do not enclose truth but open to it. Such a role requires dual competence: on the one hand, personal familiarity with the prayerful experience, granting an existential authority not reducible to titles or methodologies; on the other, the ability to generate mediations that respect the gratuity of the gift without manipulating or instrumentalizing it. Hence, spiritual intelligence can be articulated with students' life projects and their openness to others and to the Mystery, as Pocasangre (2024) notes, preventing RE from being reduced to mere doctrinal instruction or simple emotional animation.

The pedagogical mediations that make passage through the threshold possible are not decorative resources but true places of formation. Silence, both interior and exterior, ceases to be an emotional hygiene technique and becomes a school of radical availability, in which the person learns to be affected by that which exceeds their categories (Santasilia, 2024). Prayer and contemplation, far from being secondary exercises, reconfigure perception and reinstate a regime of attention that contemporary hyperactivity constantly erodes. Art and music, similarly, do not function as ephemeral motivators but as iconic languages of the saturated, capable of hosting the unspeakable and activating spiritual imagination (Marion, 2010a). Even service projects can acquire sacramental density, insofar as the givenness received in liturgy extends into a

communal *ethos* of care and shared responsibility. All this constitutes a daily liturgy in formative spaces, turning learning into event and into gift.

At the heart of this proposal is wonder, recognized by Aristotle as the origin of philosophizing and here assumed as a pedagogical threshold of RE. Wonder awakens ultimate questions and opens to transcendence (Gómez Villalba, 2014), constitutes the appropriate response to the phenomenon given in excess (Marion, 2010a), and intensifies as a consciousness of exposure *coram Deo*, in which the subject learns to sustain the eruption of what cannot be possessed (Lacoste, 2010). Educating in wonder, then, means forming in the logic of the gift that overflows and in the ethics of exposure that decenters: learning to see without mastering, to receive without absorbing, to wait without despairing. Alongside wonder, the recognition of fragility acquires a *mistagogical* depth that induces inhabiting finitude not as a condemnation but as an opening to eschatological hope. With Marion, this fragility is understood as openness to the gift, while with Lacoste it is experienced as existence exposed to a grace that reveals in vulnerability a privileged place of manifestation of the Mystery.

The formative fruits of this architecture are not limited to resilience or personal interiority but extend toward an ethical consciousness and ecological sensitivity rooted in the experience of creation as gift, as well as a communal commitment emerging from hospitality and shared care. What the pedagogy of meaning describes as significant life projects and solidarity practices (Alarcón & Novoa, 2025) gains, here, theological density: caring for others and for the "common home" is not reduced to values but lived as sacramental anticipations of a celebrated and awaited Kingdom.

In this sense, evaluating RE cannot be reduced to cognitive standards or quantitative performance metrics. What is required are qualitative criteria that allow recognition of meaningful itineraries, experiences of wonder, maturation of interiority, and community openness. Evaluation, in this context, does not mean objectifying the ineffable, but bearing witness to the fruits of a pedagogy that accompanies availability and hospitality. Here, evaluation becomes discernment, a hermeneutical reading of gestures, words, and processes through which the Mystery has been received and begun to transform lives.

Conceiving RE as a liturgical threshold does not imply adding pious language to an already given speech, but reconfiguring from its foundations the very grammar of pedagogy: the symbol as real mediation of the Mystery (Berzosa Martínez, 2019), the community as participatory hospitality (Muena & Fernández, 2024), time as formative *kairós* (Lacoste, 2010), the educator as mistagogue, and the practices of silence, contemplation, art, and service as instances in which spiritual intelligence reaches its fullness (Gómez Villalba, 2014; Santasilia, 2024). In this horizon, pedagogy can rightly be described as a pedagogy of Mystery: it is not only about cultivating spiritual intelligence but letting it be inhabited by the gift that exceeds it, so that family, ecclesial community, and school spaces effectively become thresholds in which the human opens to God.

4. Religious education as pedagogy of Mystery

Understanding RE as a pedagogy of Mystery requires, with conceptual rigor and practical prudence, moving along the double movement thematized by evental phenomenology: on the one

hand, suspending the logic of mastery to allow the phenomenon to offer itself as gift (Murga, 2022), an excess that cannot be contained within prior categories; on the other, experiencing a qualitative time in which life opens to gratuity. In Marionian terms, speaking of a *saturated* phenomenon means recognizing that its appearance exceeds all thematization and demands reception rather than control (Santasilia, 2024); in Lacostian terms, liturgy as *nonplace* and *hidden present* introduces a regime of experience that interrupts the familiarity of the world and enables living *coram Deo* (Gschwandtner, 2024). Pedagogically translated, this *gift-kairós* binomial reorders the formative grammar in family, catechesis, and school; the pedagogy of Mystery seeks to cultivate stable dispositions of attention, hospitality, and discernment that make possible the reception of what is given.

In the family, first threshold of RE, the Mystery is hosted in ordinary gestures—blessing, memory, forgiveness, gratitude—that interrupt the utilitarian economy of the day and cultivate a distinct form of attentiveness to reality. However, this horizon faces today the destabilization of family bonds and the growing difficulty many families experience in meeting, dialoguing, and sharing the essential questions of existence and faith. The phenomenology of *kairós* helps understand that these gestures are not mere customs but constitute a borrowed time that expands perception and trains availability, making family bonds function as a genuine school of hospitality. The Church's magisterium has emphasized that liturgical life is not limited to the temple but shapes a domestic style of prayer, listening, and care with verifiable communal and ethical reach (Martínez, 2024). From this perspective, Saint John Paul II stressed that the family is a *domestic church*,

where faith is transmitted vitally through communal prayer, moral education, and daily testimony of charity, becoming the first place of evangelization and Christian initiation (*Familiaris consortio*, #21).

Thus, home-based education does not pursue immediate results but accompanies processes, notes small epiphanies, and transforms habits—piety, daily service, reconciliation—which, precisely by their repetition, establish a mistagogical foundation capable of sustaining life as a whole. In family experience, one learns to integrate faith and life so that prayer and celebration become sources of unity and mission, and even the simplest gestures acquire a sacramental value that opens to the Mystery of God and ecclesial communion (*FC*, #60–61).

In catechesis, conceived as the second threshold, the translation of Mystery takes an explicitly initial form. Initiation does not mean instructing or emotionally stimulating but guiding toward the sign that points beyond itself, rehearsing passages, trials, rhythms, and communal mediations (Codina, 2009). Hence the centrality of the catechist as mistagogue: one who introduces the symbol and shared narrative without closing its meaning, linking Word, rite, and life, and avoiding both ritual automatism and reductive explanations that empty the experience. This vision aligns with *the Guidelines for renewing Christian initiation catechesis in Chile*, which emphasize the need for a gradual, communal process in which liturgical and celebratory experience progressively introduces the Mystery of Christ and ecclesial life (CECh, 2025).

From a phenomenological standpoint, this initiation rests on the primacy of gift: faith is not *produced*, but the heart is disposed to receive it; the sign is not exhausted, but inhabited; the Mystery is not

reduced, but accompanied. The *General Directory for Catechesis* confirms this horizon, stating that the ultimate goal of catechesis is to bring the person into communion with Jesus Christ, and for this, it must articulate a mistagogical pedagogy integrating Word, celebration, and life (DC, 2020, #80). From this perspective, catechesis is understood as a faith process assessed by the quality of testimonies, free decisions, and habits of Christian life, rather than mere memorization, without losing rigor or objectivity of criteria (Codina, 2009).

The school, third threshold of RE, is configured as a singular pedagogical space where interiority, transcendence, and dialogue between faith, culture, and life converge (CECh, 2020, pp. 18–21). This proposal surpasses a purely instructive logic, conveying the conviction that the spiritual dimension constitutes a central axis of the student's integral formation. In this sense, the Religion class is not only a space for content transmission but an existential accompaniment, where students explore their ultimate questions, develop a life project, and open to transcendent experience. The pedagogical challenge lies in designing strategies that welcome this search and promote an authentic formative experience, integrating reason, emotion, and faith in a unified vision of existence.

Explicit incorporation of spiritual intelligence reinforces this perspective, understood as the capacity to articulate meaning, discernment, and openness to the Mystery, offering resources to face personal and collective challenges (Alarcón & Novoa, 2025). Religion class can thus become a mistagogical laboratory, where students not only acquire knowledge of the Christian tradition but also find resources to inhabit a plural and complex world with hope and responsibility. This

vision simultaneously responds to the need for a humanizing pedagogy that transcends the cognitive and opens to horizons of full life.

Such a proposal must take objections seriously. The accusation of eschatological escapism has been raised strongly in phenomenological discussion: if everything is played out in anticipation of the *eschaton*, what place remains for historical transformation? The most fruitful response is not defensive but integrative: the phenomenology of gift does not deny history but illuminates it from heightened responsibility—the *kairós* opens time for care. Various studies have articulated phenomenology and liberating commitment to avoid spiritualist retreat (Restrepo, 2010). Against the critique of the *theologization of phenomenology* (Janicaud, 2000), contemporary discussion has shown that both the category of gift and the status of the saturated phenomenon can be argued philosophically without appealing to confessional premises (Murga, 2022; Moreno-Márquez, 2024), and even the most rigorous readings of the Eucharistic phenomenon have been nuanced to situate it in its communal depth (Gschwandtner, 2024). Likewise, concern about ritualism is dispelled when sacramental celebration is distinguished from symbolic literacy: the former pertains to the believing community, the latter to a school of signs, silence, and narrative accessible to anyone.

In this context, a pedagogy of Mystery firmly anchored in phenomenology enables an integral understanding of RE: family hosts the gift in ordinary life—cultivating habits of attention, memory, and care; catechesis initiates and matures—guiding symbols and narratives toward life and consolidating a readiness that integrates rite and ethics; school

exercises transferable competencies—qualitative time, symbolic literacy, informed dialogue, and narrative evaluation. This synergy does not dilute identities but organizes them around the very appearing, ensuring that excess is not neutralized by technicism nor dissolved into intimism. Marion's phenomenology of givenness and Lacoste's liturgy provide the grammar for this care. The outcome of the pedagogy of Mystery can be a formative itinerary in which the gift may appear, *kairós* finds its rhythm, and communal life—at home, in the community, and at school—becomes a threshold where the human learns to open to the Other.

5. Conclusions

The reflection developed allows us to affirm that the category of *liturgical threshold* constitutes a prolific hermeneutical key for rethinking RE. Against the risks of reducing it to a school function or a mere accumulation of content, faith education appears here as an integral process involving the totality of existence and unfolding in several fundamental areas: family, catechesis, and school. Far from being secondary, these spaces constitute irreplaceable mediations for encountering the Christian Mystery and offer formative horizons where phenomenology provides indispensable interpretive depth.

In the family, the first and most decisive threshold occurs. Recognized by the Church's magisterium as a domestic church, it is the place where faith is transmitted through simple yet meaningful gestures: shared prayer, bedtime blessing, remembrance of the deceased, and daily acts of charity. As *Familiaris consortio* reminds us, the family is the place from which the Gospel is transmitted and radiates (FC, #52). From a phenomenological perspective, these gestures can be understood as moments of *hidden*

present (Lacoste, 2010), in which the eternal breaks into the everyday and transforms domestic routine into a genuine liturgical threshold.

Catechesis constitutes a second threshold, where faith matures through a mistagogical initiation process. The *General Directory for Catechesis* (2020) emphasizes that this process must lead from signs toward the Mystery, progressively introducing the Christian life. Barbosa-Neto (2022) explains that its purpose is to help individuals integrate both into the life of the Church and everyday existence. In this way, the ecclesial community becomes a privileged space of fraternity and hospitality, where catechesis prolongs liturgy into concrete life, teaching how to live *coram Deo* and anticipating eschatological communion.

The school, finally, represents the most challenging threshold, developing in contexts of secularization and pluralism. Here, faith cannot remain an abstract knowledge or a set of vague values; it must open to dialogue between faith and reason, tradition and culture, revelation and innovation. Understood as a liturgical threshold, Religion class can become a space of wonder and contemplation, where students practice listening, silence, and inquiry into life's ultimate meaning. As Torralba (2010) notes, this involves cultivating spiritual intelligence, a transversal competence that allows recognizing what is essential, opening to the other, and facing life's challenges with hope.

These three mediations demonstrate that RE reaches its fullness when understood as an integral itinerary accompanying personal growth and opening to the Mystery of God. They are not isolated processes but complementary thresholds that allow faith to be transmitted, celebrated, and reflected upon in all its

richness. Phenomenology illuminates this task with decisive categories; with Marion (2010a), it reminds us that the gift exceeds all pretension of control, correcting pedagogies focused solely on standards; with Lacoste (Turcan, 2024), it recognizes that educational time must open to *kairós*, where eternity anticipates itself in the present.

In practical terms, this proposal offers concrete guidance. For families: rediscover simple gestures as everyday liturgy that hosts the gift in ordinary life. For catechists: prioritize mistagogical processes that integrate Word, rituality, and life, avoiding reductionisms. For educators: transform the classroom into a mistagogical laboratory where silence, wonder, and dialogue are cultivated.

RE, conceived as a liturgical threshold, is thus defined as a pedagogy of Mystery, gift, and wonder. It does not merely transmit content or evoke emotions but forms fundamental attitudes: the availability to receive what exceeds, the hospitality to open to the other, and the interiority that allows oneself to be affected by silence.

This proposal also has its limits. So far, the focus has been on a theoretical-hermeneutical analysis, but this limitation offers the opportunity to consider future research that could study how these categories are applied in concrete experiences of school-based religious education. For instance, it would be relevant to explore the reception of mistagogical pedagogy in ecclesial communities and families or to connect this approach with interdisciplinary research in pedagogy, psychology, and related fields.

In summary, the liturgical threshold presents itself as an indispensable category. It reminds us that RE is not measured solely by what it teaches but

by what it hosts—the gratuity, communion, and transcendence. In this way, faith education retains its deepest vocation: to be a space of givenness and encounter, a place where the human opens to the Mystery of God and responds with wonder, openness, and hope.

6. References

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