

The phenomenon of the Trinity: Jean-Luc Marion on Revelation¹

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Abstract

The essay outlines Jean-Luc Marion's approach to trinitarian theology in *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*. Overall, Marion critiques metaphysical and epistemological models and prioritises divine givenness within his theory of revelational disclosure. Utilising the phenomenological method and inflected by his account of saturated phenomena, Marion challenges the supremacy of *conceptualism*, arguing that revelation is not just a transfer of knowledge, but an event of divine self-donation that is received as a gift, exceeding any epistemic pre-containment or capture. Through a reading of scripture as well as patristic and medieval sources, he traces the historical development of revelation in Christian thought and proposes an account of trinitarian experience whereby believers are taken into the phenomenal circulation of the Trinity. Through a transformative action or *anamorphosis* of the Spirit, human perception and desire are reshaped, enabling believers to participate in the divine life by perceiving the Father in the Son through the Spirit. Hereby, Marion modulates a Christian account of revelation from theoretical speculation to a lived, practical experience of the Trinity, a form of spiritual knowledge afforded by love. In the final section, I argue for a greater emphasis on hermeneutics and on the spiritual training of perception, insofar as this cultivates a discernment of phenomena, thereby enculturating believers to receive and interpret the normativity of revelation.

Keywords

Jean-Luc Marion, phenomenology, Trinity, metaphysics, revelation

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1. Introduction

It is probably not venturing too much to say that Jean-Luc Marion is one of the most important philosophers of religion in the twentieth century. His contribution is multi-faceted and intellectually dextrous: on one level, he evinces a remarkable hermeneutical sensitivity to the history of philosophy, especially in his critical engagements with metaphysics, but also in his appropriation of phenomenology. On another level, he is also recognised for his own distinctive approach to phenomenological method, grouped within the so-called “theological turn”, of which he is probably the most well-known exponent. Moreover, Marion is a gifted Catholic theologian, writing within that tradition of twentieth-century *ressourcement*, characteristic of Henri de Lubac and Jean Daniélou – as seen in his positive preference for scriptural and patristic sources. His reception, especially within the English-speaking context, is quite extensive, with most of his books (here with few exceptions) being translated into English. The body of his reception, especially as regards his impact in the philosophy of religion, is therefore already quite developed. My task here, to say upfront, is therefore quite modest: for the sake of this essay, I will seek to outline some of the conceptual contributions Marion brings in his recent turn towards trinitarian theology, particularly his book, originally published in French as *D’ailleurs, la révélation* (2020),² and published in English as *Revelation Comes From Elsewhere* (2024).³ This work – much like his published Gifford Lectures on the same theme⁴ – is a work of unabashed theology, here in distinction from his other publications in the history of philosophy and phenomenology, where he purports to bracket his own theological commitments. Thus, I will not attempt to expatiate much on his more philosophical texts and will largely bring these into the discussion when they illuminate this theologically oriented work.

2 Jean-Luc Marion, *D’ailleurs, la révélation: contribution à une histoire critique et à un concept phénoménal de la révélation* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 2020).

3 Jean-Luc Marion, *Revelation Comes From Elsewhere: A Contribution to a Critical History and a Phenomenal Concept of Revelation*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis and Stephanie Rumpza (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2024).

4 Jean-Luc Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

At this stage, it would be clarifying to add something of a personal orientation. Here I should disclose how I ‘see’ this aspect of Marion’s theology within the angularity of my entrance; that is, disclosing the kind of questions I bring to him, which will hopefully illuminate the vantage-point of this entry. The reason I am focusing on this aspect of Marion’s phenomenological theology is that it provides both a stimulus and a challenge to the theological approach that I am trying to develop – what I am calling a *practical metaphysic of the Trinity* (here echoing the language of Theo Kobusch⁵). That is, more specifically, I am focusing on how metaphysical attunement may be entwined with our perceptual habitation more generally, and moreover, am concerned with the manner in which such attunement (or “sensing”) may be inflected or altered through the transformation of our perceptual grids of valuation – chiefly through how we *desire* and how we *love*. For as Max Scheler already argued, our perceptual engagements with objects of various kinds are bound up with our *interests* and with our *loves*, and the degree to which our desires and loves are expanded or contracted, so there is a proportional increase or decrease in our attention to and our perception of objects.⁶ Now I said Marion serves as a challenge and a stimulus for this project. He is a challenge because Marion is resistant to any ontotheological rendering: in phenomenology because metaphysics, to his mind, predetermines the way that anything may *give itself and show itself* within the phenomenological reduction. By the ‘reduction’, Marion is referring to the phenomenological dictum of ‘returning to things themselves’, and the method of bracketing our ordinary and natural engagement with the world, in order to allow the specific phenomenon under consideration to appear. Marion takes this ‘reduction’ in specific and controversial directions by reducing

5 Theo Kobusch, “Metaphysik als Lebensform zur Idee einer Praktischen Metaphysik,” in Wouter Goris (ed.), *Die Metaphysik und das Gute: Aufsätze zu ihrem Verhältnis in Antike und Mittelalter*: Jan A. Aertsen zu Ehren (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 26–56.

6 Max Scheler, “Love and Knowledge,” in *On Feeling, Knowing, and Valuing: Selected Writings* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 147–165. Also see Mark K. Spencer, ‘Value Perception and Spiritual Perception in Max Scheler’, in Fredrick D. Aquino and Paul L. Gavrilyuk, (eds.), *Perceiving Things Divine: Towards a Constructive Account of Spiritual Perception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 51–66.

phenomenon to their *givenness*.⁷ According to his principle: “so much reduction, so much givenness”.⁸ In his account, for anything whatsoever to appear as an object or thing within the world, there is always a prior *givenness* by which anything appears or is given to what he calls *l’adonné*, that is, to the phenomenological recipient of donation (or “adonation”). If this is received or accepted within the fold of givenness, then this givenness is taken as a *gift*, a phenomenological donation.⁹ According to Marion, metaphysics (largely) is an enterprise which restricts givenness in a range of conceptual constraints, whether this be the ego, the horizon, being, causality, and so on. For the sake of this argument, I propose the term *conceptualism* as a shorthand for this approach, that is an approach to phenomena that is primarily *epistemological*. This is not to say that Marion rejects conceptuality as such: no rational argument or knowledge happen without them. For him, it is the priority placed on the conceptual and the epistemological that should be questioned, as we will see in his account of saturated phenomena. Conceptualism in metaphysics is any philosophical definition which seeks to foresee or contain the givenness of phenomena. And if this is the case for worldly objects, then this also poses a challenge theologically, because it means that divine givenness, to an infinitely greater degree, should not be contained within ontic categories, which end up, idolatrously, capturing the divine within predefined and hardened definitions. In line with the platonic and patristic traditions of apophatic theology, Marion proposes that God is not an object within the great chain of being, but rather that God is named as the Good beyond Being, the One who gives and loves beings into being.¹⁰

7 A move which Marion nominates as *the third reduction* to givenness that transcends the reduction to the “object” in Husserl and to “being” or “the event” in Heidegger; Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 19–70.

8 Cf. *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 205, but this is repeated liberally throughout his phenomenological work.

9 Marion, *Being Given*, 71–118. Such a gift in its pure *givability* remains gift even when it is not received or when the giver remains hidden or unknown. In this way, Marion is trying to avoid, in the wake of Derrida, the negation of the gift in an economy of reciprocity, a move which ultimately for them leads to the cancellation of the gift as gift.

10 Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being: Hors-Texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (2nd ed., Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 53–107.

So any metaphysical project which takes Marion as a guiding inspiration in some fashion will probably have to address his concerns with metaphysics as such, insofar as it may help to modulate or clarify the aspirations of a theologically-inspired metaphysics. Space however does not permit here an extensive metaphysical critique of Marion, which has been attempted by others (e.g., John Milbank,¹¹ Catherine Pickstock¹²). However, in regard to trinitarian theology, which will be the focus of this presentation, I aim to unpack something of how his phenomenological theology may positively buttress a practical approach to the Trinity. I will show that Marion advocates a Spirit-centred or Spirit-led approach to trinitarian experience in which the believer is led into a trinitarian circulation of manifestation. Through the anamorphosis of the Spirit, that is through the direction of the will, desire and love, the believing subject is positioned to perceive the mystery of the Godhead in the iconicity of the Son through the regard of the Father. Human beings are unable to see God, but through the icon of Christ and divinisation of the Spirit, the human perspective is taken up into the perspective of the God-man, who alone is able to perceive the Father. Hereby, through the spiritual directing of creaturely desire and love, the giftee experiences the trinitarian elsewhere of revelation, the gift of charity, which is not initiated or enacted by created intentionality, but through the saturated phenomenon of Christ received in the Spirit. Through this, the phenomenological recipient, or *l'adonné* undergoes a counter-experience, an inversion of the intentionality structure of consciousness, which if received and accepted becomes an unforgettable transformation of the self.

In the following sections, I will try and summarise Marion's trinitarian approach: in §2, I will outline Marion's approach to revelation and the problems of conceptualism. In §3, there is a more detailed treatment of Marion's phenomenological account of the Trinity. In §4, the short conclusion, I hope to limn what for me are some of the limitations of his approach, as it currently stands.

11 John Milbank, "The Gift and the Mirror: On the Philosophy of Love," in Kevin Hart (ed.), *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 253–318.

12 Catherine Pickstock, *Aspects of Truth: A New Religious Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 41–83.

2. Revelation and the idol of conceptualism

The concept of revelation did not have a special place within church teaching until the modern period. Until quite recently within the church's history, "revelation" did not receive a systematic treatment. The language of ἀποκάλυψις amongst theologians often referred to a form of biblical literature, and when this language was used in the scholastic period, it was mostly within the context of biblical commentaries, as when referencing prophecy, or events of visionary rapture. The term *revelare* was first introduced seemingly by Tertullian, and was often connected to ideas of scripture or creation as being *revelatio*. The distinction between special and natural revelation was, largely, not systematically distinguished in the first millennium of the church, even as it gradually begins to achieve some distinction in the High Middle Ages. The first time "revelation" becomes a central thematic within the Catholic magisterium is the *Dei filius* of Vatican I (1870), famously taken up again and revised in the *Dei verbum* of Vatican II (1965).¹³ All of this is not to say that the concept of 'revelation' was completely absent from the patristic and medieval sources: there was a variety of presentations of revelation as divine teaching or economy; this would organically develop into the gradual separation of natural revelation from special revelation, and the distinguishing of scripture and tradition as the two sources of revelation. However, the transition of "revelation" from a thematically "marginal" concept to "an organizing notion of contemporary theology", in the words of Jean-Yves Lacoste,¹⁴ suggest that differing pressures of the modern period have contributed to a distinctive treatment of "revelation" within the theological loci. According to Marion,

13 On the magisterium's treatment of revelation, see *Revelation Comes From Elsewhere*, 63–73. For Marion, the breakthrough within Catholic teaching on revelation happens through Vatican II, which under the influence of the likes of Karl Barth, sought to recover an account of revelation whose primary purpose was not primarily the communication of propositions or items of knowledge, but rather God himself, that is, the personal manifestation of the divine. Conceptualism is hereby subjected to the personal communication or givenness of God within the event of revelation. Natural knowledge of God does not buttress pre-emptively supernatural knowledge, but rather the is already included within the economy of revelation. The idea of "pure nature" or any strong separation of the natural and supernatural, nature and grace, is hereby avoided by *Dei verbum*.

14 Jean-Yves Lacoste, "Revelation," in Jean-Yves Lacoste (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology III* (London: Routledge, 2005), 1389.

the ascent of ‘revelation’ is largely a post-Enlightenment phenomenon, and here, it is often tied to a specific *epistemological* rendering: *to reveal* is to make something *known*.¹⁵

The turn towards ‘revelation’ as a form of scientific knowledge within theology seems to be begin with Thomas Aquinas. For Aquinas, according to his *duplex ordo* of theology and metaphysics, sacred doctrine achieves the knowledge of divine things through scripture directly, while philosophical theology is only able to approach divine things indirectly through their effects. Revelation hereby is understood as a form of knowledge that deifies the human intellect, taking it beyond the capacities of human reason alone. However, the problem arises as to the status of this knowledge and thereby its scientific credentials: one cannot use the normal canons of *scientia* to grasp the divine nature. Therefore, the scientific knowledge of divine things requires a *subalternation* of theological science, insofar as it is rendered a form of *quasi-scientific* knowledge that anticipates, and is subordinated to, an eschatological knowledge in the vision of the blessed; here, theology is, ultimately, subalternated to the knowledge of faith.¹⁶ Sacred doctrine is therefore a quasi-science. But that means, in the here and now, that theology does not, in the words of Marion, “have access to the principles that alone would make it a science”.¹⁷ Marion’s general point here is that while Aquinas initiates a scientific rendering of theological knowledge, this is not the secure kind of knowledge one would expect for a medieval notion of science, since it is ultimately subordinated to the disclosure of faith.

The real turn towards a strongly epistemological theory of revelation happens, in Marion’s reading, through Francisco Suárez and his *propositionalist theory of revealed truths*.¹⁸ In order for revelation to occur, according to Suárez, revelational objects should constitute a *sufficient proposition of faith* (*propositio sufficiens*); these then may become the objects of apprehension and assent. Suárez places his discussion of

15 *Revelation Comes From Elsewhere*, 37–40.

16 *Revelation Comes From Elsewhere*, 40–48; *Givenness and Revelation*, 10–20.

17 *Revelation Comes From Elsewhere*, 48.

18 *Givenness and Revelation*, 20–25; cf. John Montag, S.J., “Revelation: The False Legacy of Suárez,” in John Milbank et al (eds.), *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999), 38–63.

revelation within his context of scientific discovery, suggesting that the sufficient proposition of faith, or theology, may be apprehended without faith through the operations of natural reason, even as any personal assent to the sufficient proposition indeed requires a further bestowal of grace. Hereby, he seeks to establish the scientific sufficiency of theology, which now may be taught and received without faith; this leads, according to Marion, to a division between the *de revelatione* and *de fide*: “the doctrine of the *propositio sufficiens* aims only at making the content of revelation independent enough from the assent of faith so that it may be assimilated to the statement of *scientia*”.¹⁹ In this severing of revelation from faith, we have a breakage from the earlier patristic traditions, exemplified by Augustine, in which faith was a requirement for understanding (*credo ut intelligam*).²⁰ Moreover, the Thomist subalternation of theology to the beatific vision is no longer maintained as a requirement for the scientific stature of theology but is sufficiently contained within the proposition that may be apprehended with or without faith, even by those lacking what Marion calls “the *habitus* of attachment”.²¹ One of the consequences of this is that natural knowledge may serve as a ground or *fundamenta* of supernatural knowledge, which is aided by “the epistemological sufficiency of natural science”.²² It is this grounding of theology within the certitude of epistemic certainty that also leads Suárez to the grounding of theology in metaphysics, in the *conceptus entis*, the concept of being as the most logically embracing concept in which God and created beings are to be conceived as “real entities”.

Marion will go on to provide a *tour d’horizon* of the concept of revelation within both philosophy and theology²³ – a treatment far too rich and varied to be examined in the requisite detail. However, the main thing to emphasize here is that Marion seeks to contrast his phenomenological account of revelation with an epistemologically centred one. We will turn to his phenomenal account of revelation in due course, but it is worth

19 *Revelation Comes From Elsewhere*, 54.

20 *Revelation Comes From Elsewhere*, 119–12.

21 *Revelation Comes From Elsewhere*, 56.

22 *Revelation Comes From Elsewhere*, 57.

23 *Revelation Comes From Elsewhere*, 74–89; 93–108.

tarrying a bit longer with his critique of what I am calling conceptualism, because it is one of the main targets within his treatment of revelation. The priority of the *conceptus entis* within Suárezian metaphysics (in continuation with the Scotist tradition) would ultimately go on to exhibit a significant influence on the *Schulmetaphysik* and ultimately find its way into post-Enlightenment philosophy.²⁴ The epistemological framing of revelation, and with it the conceptual predetermination of revelation, ends up providing the “conditions” under which revelation can appear or be given, here within the axioms of eternal Reason (to use the lingo of Suárez). It thus ultimately delimits or denies, for Marion, the *elsewhere* of revelation, which is now prescribed by the *cogitabile*, the prescripts of what is *thinkable*. That is, it “proceeds by eliminating the unthinkable, itself understood in the narrow sense as the uncertain.”²⁵ It is this tradition which would go on to influence Descartes: here there is a *dematerialization* of things into the concept, which “reduces the thing to the sum of its calculable forms, which are precise and delimited, permanent and predictable, repeatable and reproducible.”²⁶ In post-Cartesian philosophy, it is this form of conceptual knowledge which is able to be appropriate and grasp objects: “when I think an object of any kind, what it ends up being (precisely a thing restricted to the certitude grasped in it) is determined through and through more by the way I grasp it (my way of conceiving it) than by its own essence, which is in fact reduced and bracketed.”²⁷ Marion will go on to trace this influence in the likes of John Locke in relation to the question of the miraculous,

24 Olivier Boulnois, *Être et représentation: Une généalogie de la métaphysique moderne à l'époque de Duns Scot (XIIIe – XIVe siècle)*. Épipiméthée (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999); 405–515; Boulnois, *Métaphysique rebelles: genèse et structures d'une science au Moyen Age*. Épipiméthée (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2013), 261–311; Ludger Honnefelder, “Der zweite Anfang der Metaphysik. Voraussetzungen, Ansätze und Folgen der Wiederbegründung der Metaphysik im 13./14. Jahrhundert,” in J.P. Beckmann, L. Honnefelder, G. Schrimpf, G. Wieland (eds.), *Philosophie im Mittelalter. Entwicklungslinien und Paradigmen* (Meiner: Hamburg 1987), 165–186; Honnefelder, *Scientia transcendens. Die formale Bestimmung der Seiendheit und Realität in der Metaphysik des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit (Duns Scotus – Suarez – Wolff – Kant – Peirce)*. Paradeigmata 9 (Hamburg: Meiner, 1990), 3–294; Jean-François Courtine, *Suarez et le système de la métaphysique*. Épipiméthée (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990), 246–292; 521–538.

25 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 113.

26 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 113.

27 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 114.

but also in the various ways revelation is predetermined by the concepts of intuition (Schleiermacher), the imagination (Spinoza), the will (Kant), and the concept (Fichte and Hegel). In the latter especially, for Marion, “everything depends on the power of the concept”.²⁸ It is for this reason that Marion expresses a proclivity for Schelling’s philosophy of revelation, and especially his idea of the “unprethinkable fact” (*unvordenkliche Tatsache*),²⁹ that form of factuality which is not predetermined *a priori*; this is a move which is generative for Schelling’s broader historical approach to the question of revelation. However, Marion thinks that the historicist approach of Hegel and Schelling subordinates the phenomenality of the Trinity to historical ‘chronology’, restricting phenomenal disclosure to a predetermined conceptuality of being and temporality, rather than reconfiguring both out of the transformational event of revelation.³⁰

3. The phenomenality of the Trinity

Marion’s phenomenological approach to the Trinity is an attempt to formulate a Christian account which thinks revelation from its *givenness*, as this emerges from the *elsewhere* of the invisible. It draws heavily upon scriptural and patristic sources to show the inherently phenomenological trajectories contained within these traditions. Revelation gives from itself without restriction and *shows* itself according to the capacities of the recipient, the *adonné*. The givenness of revelation, as it unfolds within the fold of givenness, manifests as *gift*, something given without regard to conditions which would restrict its appearance. The gift, in Christian terms, is chiefly exemplified in the phenomenon that gives itself unreservedly in charity; thereby, it draws the recipient deeper into it through attraction and desire. From a trinitarian perspective, this is a *pneumatologically* centred account whereby, through the Spirit, believers are gradually taken up into the primal appearing and self-giving of the Father and Son through the Spirit (*Ur-phänomenologie*). Marion conceptualises this as an *anamorphosis*, by which the Father and Son become ‘targetable’ (*visible*)

28 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 89.

29 F. W. J. Schelling, *Urfassung der Philosophie der Offenbarung: Band 1* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1992), 33.18 (p. 238).

30 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 283–294.

insofar as the intentionality of the ego is directed towards the loving perspective of the Father on the Son, and the manifestation of the Father in the Son through the gift of the Spirit. The Spirit draws us into the regard of the Father for the Son so that we are able to see and accept Christ as the Son of the Father. Here believers become *witnesses* to the *paradox* of a manifesting of the invisible in the visible, the Son as the icon of the Father.³¹ In short, “the Trinity uncovers itself according to the three dimensions of a single phenomenality: as *the invisible aim* [the Father], as *the visible transparent* to the invisible and aimed at as icon of the invisible [the Son], and as *the invisible who targets*” [the Spirit].³²

Marion distinguishes his phenomenological model from both what he calls an *ontic*³³ and *historical* model.³⁴ By the former, he is broadly referring to any model which attempts to address the question of divine being and oneness (*de deo uno*) apart from the trinitarian relations (*de deo trino*). He acknowledges that the church fathers did draw upon ontological terminology in their phrasing of trinitarian theology (*ousia*, *hypostasis*, *substantia*, etc.) but thinks that the ontic horizon of Greek terminology created ambiguities regarding the specific mode of trinitarian disclosure – as seen for example in the Arian controversies regarding how *ousia* was to be interpreted. Ontological language of this type tended to privilege the

31 Marion gives three types of responses which may occur in relation to a revelatory event, which he gives categorises as *the witness*, *resistance*, and *paradox*. The figure of the witness is one who has undergone an experience of revelation: such a figure points to the transformational event, even without grasping the full scope or meaning of the event. They can indicate that they have experienced such an indubitable happening, an event that comes from *elsewhere*, and can be a witness in spite of their incomprehension of the event. Then there can the resistant response which does not accept the revelation. This can for a variety of reasons: the revelation could reveal too much, or intolerable or unacceptable. One might be disposed to receiving the revelation, and so may come as something overwhelming. Moreover, because there is an existential gap between our experience and the elsewhere of revelation, and therefore can be grasped as an experience of distance, a continuing ambiguity and lack of certainty can persist in any testimony to the revelatory event. And lastly, the experience of revelation may be received as a paradox, that is, it may contradict or upend our ordinary notions of logical possibility or impossibility. This is not a denial of the intrinsic rationality of revelation, but rather that it may resist or transform our very understanding or the conditions of the rational or possible. On this, see *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 17–32.

32 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 319.

33 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 257–272.

34 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 273–295.

principle of identity, and this (to Marion's mind) was unable to unfold the communion of charity characteristic of triune relations. The attempt to define the divine essence – as in the case of the Neo-Arians – led to a denial of the full deity of the Son, which was countered by the Nicæan theologians. One can see this as a kind of antique anticipation of the conceptualism that Marion traces in the scholastic period from Suárez. Here Marion seeks to maintain something of the patristic reserve regarding *what* exactly the trinitarian persons share – and he believes that ontological language does not quite do this. For him, we need to think both the *mode* of trinitarian revelation together with its *content*, since these cannot be separated. Speculation regarding divine being, essence or persons separated from the way the Trinity is manifested may end up predetermining the specific unity of triune action. The second trajectory of the historical model, which Marion links to modern trajectories in the wake of Hegel and Schelling, involves submitting the Trinity to the historical unfolding of the concept, so that the Trinity no longer unfolds out of the economy of revelation itself. For Marion, the economic trinity must be understood within the *elsewhere* of trinitarian manifestation, so that the manifested arises from the auto-manifestation of the Trinity, and not from the unfolding of history. In the end, both the ontic and historical models are unable, for him, to satisfactorily account for the *nescio quid* of patristic theology, the ontic model because it privileges *identity* and historical model because it privileges *the concept*.

3.1 The logic of charity

So if conceptualism, metaphysics, and historicism are restrictive, then what are some of the positive contours for Marion's definition of revelation? In terms of a formal definition, he draws from some of the ordinary ways in which we experience revelatory events.³⁵ Most events that happen to us pass into the realm of the forgotten, that is, they do not stand out from the experiential flux of the everyday. There is a certain kind of banality for most of the happenings in our lives. However, sometimes, there occurs an event which stands out from the background, which emerges as a transformative happening, an event that *remains with me*, one which is not

35 For the following, see *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 3–16.

easily forgotten. It is self-involving, in the sense that *I take something with me*. It is something that when it happens, I am changed; it is unforgettable. It reveals itself to me and when it reveals itself, I cannot simply be the same; I experience myself and my world differently. One can give a variety of instances of this: Marion uses the example of developing practical or athletic skills, such as learning to ride a bicycle, drive a car, or (in his case) skiing. One practices something again and again, until one “gets it”, and when one “gets it”, this is in some sense transformational. It is bound up with practice and effort, but when it happens it is received beyond one’s control; that is, I cannot predetermine when I will master a skill. It is something that *comes to me*. Marion also uses the example of romantic or erotic relationships: through the engagement with the other or beloved, I may come to experience or receive myself differently, because my self-perception is now received through the encounter with the other. Hereby, the erotic couple create a new site or erotically charged space that emerges out of the background of the everyday. In these examples, the emergence of unforgettable events for Marion can only count as revelation if they are experienced as coming from *elsewhere*, as a phenomenon manifesting itself from itself, something that does not lie within the mastery of the ego, but comes to it as a transforming event. It does not coincide with, nor is contained within, the conditions of our experience, but rather transforms those conditions as a counter-experience. And so through its emergence, it is an experience which phenomenally stands out against the banality of its background, appearing from the invisible into the domain of the visible: an apocalypse or an unveiling.³⁶ When it so stands out, it thus becomes a *figure* (or *Gestalt*), something that detaches itself from its immediate environment.

So why might a theological treatment of revelation dispose itself towards a phenomenological approach? For Marion, revelation intimates a phenomenological approach insofar as revelation is concerned with *appearance* and *manifestation*, with an arising in the visible from the *elsewhere* of the invisible. Marion here engages in extensive scriptural and

36 Marion spends a large part of the book distinguishing the logic of “unconcealment”, which is concerned with the adequation to truth, whereas apocalypse or “unveiling” with the phenomenological excess and saturation. Space does not permit an extensive treatment of this distinction here; *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 115–117; 137–162.

patristic exegesis to show why a phenomenological approach is particularly suitable to a Christian account of revelation. It is central for this account that God is invisible (1 Tim. 1.17), that no one has ever seen God (Jn. 1.18), and that God dwells within an unapproachable light (1 Tim. 6.16). No one can see the face of God and live (Ex. 33.20). And yet, according to early Christian confession, Christ himself is the icon of the invisible God (Col. 1.15; cf. 2 Cor. 4.4), and has “exegeted” him (Jn. 1.18). In Christ, the mystery of godliness, has been revealed in the flesh (1 Tim. 3.16); in him the grace of God has appeared to all human beings (Titus 2.11); he is the one in whom the divine glory and eternal life have been seen (Jn. 1.14; 1 Jn. 1–3). “Christ accomplishes this “exegesis” of the invisible God by making himself seen among men and women, a phenomenon among phenomena, by phenomenalizing himself without reserve—by making himself a phenomenon in our phenomenality, by making himself man.”³⁷ It is this self-phenomenalization “without reserve”, the divine self-giving in love, which will serve as a point of departure for Marion’s phenomenology of revelation. For him, what is made to appear in revelation is a gift of divine love that in its lovability attracts and draws to itself. By contrast with conceptualism, Marion understands revelation not under the priority of the concept but rather under the priority of gift and love, that is, through “the logic of absolute love”³⁸ (here quoting Hans Urs von Balthasar’s *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe*): on this picture “love is only known through love”.³⁹ For him, in revelation we are moved from “the logic of the concept to that of the manifestation where love is phenomenalized.”⁴⁰ This implies a relating of divine givenness and revelation within the logic of love. One of his favourite texts is a line from Bernard of Clairvaux in his *Sermons on the Canticles*: *dando revelat et revelando dat*, in giving Christ reveals and in revealing he gives.⁴¹ For Marion, the givenness of love has priority over every metaphysical concept which would predetermine its appearance.

If then every phenomenon shows itself to the extent that it gives itself,

37 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 32.

38 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible*, trans. D.C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 113.

39 Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible*, 107.

40 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 111.

41 Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs* VIII.3.

then the Revelation of God as charity, and of a God who consists only in his charity, will manifest itself absolutely, without reserve or compromise, to the extent, itself absolute, unconditioned, and infinite, that God gives himself...God thus reveals himself according to the laws of phenomenality, except this phenomenality does not unfold according to the rules of our mode and our phenomena, but according to the proper exigencies of that which gives itself. Revelation is phenomenalized, but its phenomenality has no other law than the (erotic) logic of the gift, of *agapē*.⁴²

Marion also reads this phenomenality in accordance with his concept of the *saturated phenomenon*, that is the idea that there is an excess of intuition that exceeds the intentional grasp of consciousness (more on that shortly). For Marion, following the kenotic theology of Balthasar, no concept can contain the unrestrained givenness of divine revelation manifest in the *figure* of Christ's flesh: it is an "infinite phenomenization, because it brings about, in charity, an infinite gift", even to "the point of being annihilated" in its "self-abandonment", without cancelling the infinity of this givenness.⁴³ And because its phenomenality is so inexhaustible, it requires "an endless hermeneutic,"⁴⁴ a continuing interpretation of this figuration.⁴⁵ However, he stresses that the interpretation of this figure can only be approached or seen through faith and love, which indeed must be *practised*. Marion is explicitly countering here the Kantian idea that trinitarian theology gives nothing for practice.⁴⁶ To press against this reading, Marion invokes William of St. Thierry, another medieval theologian, and here particularly his gnomic phrase *amando intelligare et intelligare amare*, that is, we are to understand by loving and loving by understanding.⁴⁷ The practical approach

42 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 106.

43 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 107.

44 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 108.

45 Hermeneutics, for Marion, concerns the lag between what *gives itself* and what *shows itself*, between givenness and manifestation, particularly with saturated phenomena which are continually interpretable and received; Jean-Luc Marion, "The Hermeneutics of Givenness," in Jean-Luc Marion and Christiaan Jacobs-Vandegeer (eds.), in *The Enigma of Divine Revelation: Between Phenomenology and Comparative Theology* (Cham: Springer, 2020), 17–47.

46 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 264–265.

47 William of St. Thierry, *Exposition on the Song of Songs* §64.

to trinitarian phenomenality thereby involves knowing by loving, that is “we must pass from a purely theoretical rationality to a rationality that is also *pragmatic*: Revelation uncovers and is uncovered because it must do so and it cannot be known except by being practiced”.⁴⁸ In distinction from conceptualism, what is known through faith and love is “no longer only a matter of propositional and predicative knowledge without certainty, nor that of a foundation, but of a knowledge tested in action—the knowledge of love verified by the act of loving”.⁴⁹

Marion does distinguish this specific account from a Kantian practical use of reason, mainly because (to his mind) it still privileges theoretical reason – which is a part of the conceptualism which Marion is pushing against. For the specific phenomenon of love, there is a confusion of these categories: here it is “only love that thinks correctly”,⁵⁰ and so it is within this specific phenomenality that any hardened distinction between theoretical and practical reason becomes unsustainable. Moreover, Marion is also not here prioritizing *the will*, which still has the ego at the centre, but rather with *attraction* and *desire*, insofar as the *elsewhere* of the revelation draws the addressee towards itself. Here, once again, a Latin theologian will serve as inspiration, with a phrase from one of Augustine’s tractates on the Gospel of John: that which reveals is that which draws (*ista revelatio, ipsa est attractio*).⁵¹ Drawing from Augustine’s exegesis of John 6.44, Marion draws several implications from this for a trinitarian phenomenology: the Father draws to the Son so that the Father may be seen in the Son. It is an attraction from *elsewhere*, a call, which stimulates the desire to see the Father in the Son. One can only see Jesus Christ as the Son of the Father if one is *willing* to see and interpret Christ as the Son, as the one who makes the invisible Father visible. However, such a hermeneutical decision requires a *conversion* of the will, of our desires and our loves, what Marion calls “a counter-intentionality”⁵² that occurs through the love of God being “poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 5.5). Or

48 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 122.

49 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 123; on pragmatism, see 135–136.

50 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 126.

51 Augustine of Hippo, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* XXVI.5.

52 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 129.

in other words, through a receiving of “the spirit of sonship” (Rom. 8.15) – to invoke a Pauline phrase. It is this conversion of the desire and will that Marion calls an *anamorphosis* (more on that later).

3.2 The Icon of the Son

Key for Marion’s phenomenology of revelation is his concept of the saturated phenomenon. It is probably his most significant, albeit controversial, contribution to phenomenological method.⁵³ One can see it as arising largely from a critical engagement with the Kantian tradition: Marion particularly has in mind the famous interrelation of concepts and intuition within Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*: on the one hand, intuitions require the organisation of concepts for rational engagement; on the other hand, concepts without intuition are constitutively empty, having nothing to rationally organise. Marion’s proposal is that there are phenomena – such as the experience of the infinite, the sublime, or temporality – in which intuitional content radically outpaces and circumvents any conceptual capture. These are to be distinguished from what Marion calls poor or common-law phenomena, which lack the density of saturated phenomena. They are experiences that overwhelm the subject and are uncontainable within the standard Kantian account of the unity of experience, or for that matter Husserl’s account of the horizon of phenomena. They do so insofar as saturated phenomena transcend any prescriptions of quantity, quality, relation, and modality. In regard to quantity, such phenomena are not foreseeable, that is, the scope their immensity cannot be grasped or anticipated. In a punning turn of phrase, they are *in-visible*, that is, they are not “targetable” by ordinary intentionality. By intentionality, Marion is referring to the directional nature of consciousness, that in everyday life we are always conscious *of* something. In saturated phenomena, by contrast, this intentionality is not able to constitute any object available for measurement, because these phenomena outpace such attempts through their *extensive* magnitude. Moreover, as regards quality, saturated phenomena are experienced as unbearable, overwhelming and bedazzling in terms of their *intensive* magnitude, so that the one experiencing them cannot contain them in any conceptual arrangement. Saturated

53 On saturated phenomena, see *Being Given*, 179–247.

phenomena also negate any analogy and relation, and thus not contained within the unifying structures of experience, but rather irrupt and reshape the horizon of the ego. The saturated phenomenon as auto-manifestation is not constrained by preexisting webs of relational determination. And lastly, in terms of modality, Marion considers saturated phenomena to be *irregardable*, by which he means that this experience is not objectifiable in the ordinary sense, and so cannot be seen according to the standard gaze of the ego. It forms what he calls a *counter-experience*, in which the *adonné*, the subject of “adonation” is re-constituted. Hereby, the giftee of the phenomenon becomes a witness to the event, even if they are unable to fully understand or receive the event; they experience the rupturing of the normal standards of rational order through *paradox*, since the saturated phenomenon destabilises the horizon of what is rational and possible for the ego. It is this account of saturated phenomena which is central for this account of revelation and especially the way that he tries to address how God becomes a figure for contemplation if God is fundamentally invisible. And, moreover, how can this infinite phenomenization be received and accepted by the finite? The key here for Marion is Christology, and the way that the finite gaze of the creature is taken up, by the Spirit, into the hypostasis of the God-Man.

One of the tasks of ancient Israel, according to Marion, was “to make appear the radical invisibility of God”.⁵⁴ Chiefly through a reflection on the Pentateuch, Marion argues that the God of Israel seeks to manifest the divine invisibility through a kind of personal presence and name. The encounter between Moses and YHWH, especially in Exodus 33, exhibits something of the play between visibility and invisibility within the narrative. Moses is promised a face-to-face encounter with YHWH (Ex. 33.11), even as this is ultimately problematised by the claim that no one can see God and live (33.20) – as famously recounted in YHWH’s hiding of Moses in the cleft of the rock, covering him with his hand so that he can only see a trace of the divine glory (Ex. 33.23). However, there is also the suggestion that there is a face-to-face interaction between Moses and YHWH (Ex. 33.14–15), since the term usually translated as “presence” here literally has the meaning of “face”. Marion suggests that pulling together

54 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 172.

the tendrils of the narrative might suggest that the personal presence of YHWH, the ‘face’ of God, is not manifest in any worldly phenomena, but chiefly through the divine word and name: “The face gives itself in person not by showing itself as a thing of the world, but in giving his word, as a promise that comes from and is kept from *elsewhere*”.⁵⁵ YHWH’s presence is communicated through speech, through the Name, and it is through this Name that the invisible is made visible: “Revelation is not uncovered by the phenomenon of a spectacle, nor the vision of a form, but by the opening of the word and the unfolding of a Name. The word and the Name come to me from elsewhere; they do not come from me, nor fall under my gaze”.⁵⁶

In the New Testament, in an analogous way, the mystery of the Kingdom of God (Mk. 4.11) “unveils that it arrives among us, before we understand what it means”, that “it comes as fact while still incomprehensible – too quickly accomplished, already given, not yet understood, in the strict sense known as unknown”.⁵⁷ One does not have time to belabour here the extensive and in-depth exegesis Marion engages in. However, one especially rich text for his purposes as regards *the mystery of charity* is Ephesians. Here “the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God” (Eph 3.9),⁵⁸ of “the boundless riches of Christ” (Eph. 3.8) and “the immeasurable riches” of divine grace (Eph. 2.7) are now being manifested through “a spirit of wisdom and revelation” that opens “the eyes of the heart” to perceive “the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints” (Eph. 1.17–19). The density of saturation climaxes in the unfathomable immensity of divine love that transgresses every human dimension of containment, as when the writer of Ephesians prayerfully says and hopes that his audience “may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3.18–19). Such fullness or saturation is not humanly containable, and so it is only in Christ that such saturation of all things can find its recapitulation (Eph. 1.9–10; 23). Only Christ, as the God-man, can accomplish this human gaze of

55 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 174.

56 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 177.

57 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 185.

58 Translations taken from the NRSVUE.

the divine saturation of love: it is “the only phenomenological gaze that is infinite, yet in our flesh”.⁵⁹ This is the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3.4), who himself contains, in the words of Colossians, “the riches of the glory of this mystery” (Col. 1.27). Christ himself is the mystery of God: in Marion’s words, he is “the unique phenomenalization of the Father, as the unique gaze in which is shown everything that gives itself, the phenomenal center of the glory of all things as given”, being “the icon of his own invisibility, as the hyperbolic phenomenon of charity”.⁶⁰ Drawing upon Basil of Caesarea and John of Damsascus, for Marion to be drawn into the life of the Trinity is to be taken into this *iconification* of the Father by the Son: “the immanent Trinity is accomplished iconically, as exactly as the economic Trinity is manifested iconically”,⁶¹ so that “Trinitarian identity is uncovered in the process of their common manifestation, or rather, their communion in the manifestation”.⁶² We are hereby taken into the trinitarian movement of iconification whereby “Seeing the Father consists in seeing him in the Son, seeing sonship in the Son (toward the Father), and thus inseparably the paternity that sees me (starting from the Father)”.⁶³

3.3 The Anamorphosis of the Spirit

Anamorphosis, like the term saturated phenomena, carries a specific resonance within Marion’s intellectual project. Drawing from the realm of optics, his appropriation of anamorphosis references a particular phenomenon which can only be seen when one is placed in a specific vantage-point to see it. One needs to be suitably placed so that the phenomenon in question can become ‘targetable’ (*visible*), able to be aimed at. In his work, anamorphosis has a link to saturated phenomena insofar as it points to the way that these phenomena invert the usual intentional structure of consciousness. In the case of saturated phenomena this intentional structure is subverted, so that the perceptual capacities of the subject are overwhelmed, and a counter-intentionality imposes itself upon the subject. It is this counter-intentionality, whereby I am transformed by the object

59 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 197.

60 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 199.

61 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 305.

62 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 307.

63 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 307.

rather than me imposing my categories on the object, that Marion names anamorphosis, because it suggests that the phenomenon is unfolding from itself, that this givenness is not something that the ego enacts reflexively but comes to it from *elsewhere*. In this way, the phenomenon is received and interpreted as something truly given. There is an arising from the realm of the unformed to the formed, whereby it becomes a figure that stands out against its background. In order for us to see it, we have to habituate ourselves to the phenomenon, and allow it to appear on its own terms.

For Marion, it is the Spirit that opens immanence to “the Trinitarian site”, that is “the phenomenalization of the Father and the Son”.⁶⁴ It reveals in “a Trinitarian way what is revealed,”⁶⁵ for it is through the outpouring of the Spirit that “the economic phenomenalization of the Trinity” occurs.⁶⁶ The Spirit itself, Marion does add, is not made visible in the trinitarian phenomenalization because it is precisely the Spirit who *makes us see* the single act of phenomenalization of the Father and Son, “the *only one visibility* in the manifestation of the Trinity”.⁶⁷ For Marion, the anamorphosis of the Spirit involves a transformation and conversion of the I, a spiritual re-directing of the intentional consciousness through the Spirit towards the Father through the icon of the Son. He makes reference to Paul regarding how the believer’s self-knowledge of divine filiation, of being a child of God, happens through the interior interchange between the human spirit and the Holy Spirit, so that believers are transformed into the image of the divine Son, taking on the gaze of the crucified and resurrected Christ; hereby we are joined to Christ’s own naming of the Father, and incorporated into the cry of *abba* (Rom. 8.15; Gal. 4.6; Mk. 14.36). According to Paul, the subject who has been converted to the revelation of the Father through the Son, undergoes a fundamental displacement of the ego: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2.20). To quote Marion, “It is not I who un-covers the mystery, but the Spirit, who alone allows my gaze to traverse the anamorphosis, in order to see according to

64 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 225.

65 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 299.

66 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 303.

67 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 313.

and from the point of view of the Spirit”.⁶⁸ Hereby, adopting the patristic language of theosis, Marion says that “The identity of gazes implies a transfer of idioms, a divinization of the human aim by the divine aim... I do not see charity by facing it like an object, but by living in its midst, so I do not un-cover the mystery by facing it, but by sinking into it and exposing myself to it ... we cannot see God, but God can put us in his place, where we enter into the mystery – he sees us”.⁶⁹ Through this, the believer is taken up by the Spirit into the intratrinitarian phenomenization of the Father and the Son, that is as the Father manifests the Son as he gives himself in the Son, and the Son reveals the Father as he gives himself in the Father.⁷⁰ “No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matt. 11.27). The Son manifests through the Spirit the *elsewhere* of the Father, and likewise in order to see the Son we need to be placed within the regard of the Father by the Spirit to see the Christ as the Son. Through the anamorphosis of the Spirit, believers are taken into “the aim of the Son towards the Father and the view of the Father on the Son”.⁷¹

To take the correct point of view on the phenomenon that God gives to be seen (in Jesus Christ) can indeed only come from God himself (the Father), who offers at the same time the phenomenon (that which shows itself) and the conditions of its visibility (what shows itself as it gives itself). And since this can only come from elsewhere (from the Father), it cannot be the object of our will, our decision, or any action that we could or should produce, but only of a will, a decision, and an action that remains for us to give, or in this case, to receive. The one who shows himself, Christ, cannot be seen unless we place ourselves at the very point of view of the one who gives him, the Father. Christ can thus only be seen if the Father gives access to this point of view ... The Father establishes the condition of Christ, as he gives him and as the latter shows himself. The Father thus constitutes at the same time the depths of the unseen of the Son, the unseen

68 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 200.

69 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 200–201.

70 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 236.

71 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 249.

manifested in the depth of the visibility of Christ, the face of Jesus, and the condition of un-covering of the Son as such, as his envoy.⁷²

The iconicity and phenomenality of Christ is indeed *given*, but our gazes need to be transformed through an anamorphosis since they are “restricted by their history, their destiny, and their shame”.⁷³ Our desires need to be redirected, and the love of God poured into our hearts (Rom. 5.5). For Marion, all of this can only be truly unfolded through a transformation of love that is manifested in a life of holiness, since the holiness of the Trinity is “only revealed to holiness”.⁷⁴ It therefore needs to be something confessed and performed for it is only through such transformation that the Son’s iconification of Father through Spirit is perceived, insofar as it is only love that is able “to see according to the correct anamorphosis of charity”.⁷⁵ The anamorphosis of Spirit within the divine economy gives to us the immanent movement of trinitarian phenomenalization because it coincides with the Spirit’s own *givability*, so that the given gift within the economy remains the giving gift of the immanent trinity.⁷⁶ For him, “the Spirit proceeds eternally as gift, because he is constituted from all eternity as givable”⁷⁷ Therefore, through the anamorphosis of the Spirit we are introduced into the life of the immanent Trinity, into “the very place of Spirit” insofar as we are situated “*in* the place of their common gift”.⁷⁸

4. On discernment

As mentioned, Marion is resistant towards any priority of metaphysics in his approach to phenomena. This is not to say that he forbids metaphysical reflection at all: towards the end of *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere* he

72 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 240–241.

73 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 301.

74 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 314.

75 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 315.

76 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 317. The language of the “givability” of the Spirit is drawn from Augustine, but it also forms a part of Marion’s vocabulary more generally insofar as it describes for him an aspect of givenness. In ordinary terms, it refers to that modality of the gift to be given or received, what he calls the “before-being-possessed” and the “before-being-given”; *Being Given*, 107.

77 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 322.

78 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 327.

attempts to think both being and temporality as arising from the *elsewhere* of revelation, of the ontological difference as an index of the gift.⁷⁹ If this is the case, then maybe, even within Marion's approach, there is a route to a practical metaphysic of the Trinity. I will not here engage in an extensive critique of his approach to metaphysics – which has been addressed quite extensively by others. In regard to his trinitarian theology, I think there are avenues here worth pursuing. His emphasis on the practice of love as a route towards the knowledge of Trinitarian love is something worth expanding upon and exploring further. However, here it is worth registering at least something of a counter-balance to Marion's phenomenology of givenness: that is, I think Marion needs a stronger account of how the perceptual capacities of the *adonné* are developed, and especially those learned capacities to discern and receive different degrees and kinds of givenness. One might frame this as a kind of hermeneutical acculturation, or *Bildung* – in the Gadamerian sense.

There are numerous critical receptions of Marion's phenomenology of givenness: we may think of Dominique Janicaud's well-known criticism of the theological turn in phenomenology as a departure from the Husserlian method.⁸⁰ It was in reaction to this critique that Marion developed his approach to saturated phenomenon as an outworking of Husserl's and Heidegger's ideas of *givenness*.⁸¹ From a theological angle, John Milbank has provided extensive critiques of Marion's idea of the gift, and its ultimate denial of reciprocity through its unilateral movement of gift-giving.⁸² For my purposes here, however, I think especially of the critique of Sameer Yadav, who argues that Marion can be targeted by a Sellarsian critique of "the myth of given".⁸³ For Wilfrid Sellars, 'the myth of the

79 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 337–378.

80 Dominique Janicaud et al., *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 16–103.

81 For his more mature reflections on the philosophical origins of "givenness", see Jean-Luc Marion, *The Reason of the Gift*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Charlottesville and London: The University of Virginia Press, 2011), 19–34.

82 John Milbank, "Can a Gift Be Given". *Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic*. *Modern Theology* 11.1 (1995): 119–161; "The Soul of Reciprocity Part One: Reciprocity Refused." *Modern Theology* 17.3 (2001): 335–391.

83 Sameer Yadav, *The Problem of Perception and the Experience of God: Toward a Theological Empiricism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 141–174.

given’ referred to any empiricism that purported to ground knowledge in an *unmediated* reception of sense data; according to the myth, this sense data, without the mediation of concepts, would then be foundational for epistemic claims. Sellars argued that this trades on “the myth of the given” insofar as any empirical claim, no matter how reduced, can only become a basis for knowledge when it enters “the logical space of reasons”, the realm of human language, discursivity, reason, and so on. There are no uninterpreted facts: sensuous and intuitional content is always mediated conceptually – something Sellars explicitly links to Hegel.⁸⁴ That is, they must in some way be normatively structured. Yadav goes further: following John McDowell, he believes that to avoid the myth of the given implies seeing phenomena themselves as normatively structured, as inherently *knowable* by epistemic agents. This intrinsic normativity of phenomena is in turn linked to our conceptual capacities, so that any reference to “unconstituted givens” – that we could *know* or be *aware* of intuitional content that exceeds the conceptual – ends up returning us to the myth of the given. Without both, our concepts could never achieve that correlation between intuition and intentionality which is required for thought: as Yadav says “we have to be *capable of receiving* what is given”.⁸⁵ Along similar lines, there have been several critiques which have questioned Marion’s priority of phenomenology over hermeneutics.⁸⁶ To be fair, the hermeneutical element of his philosophy has been clarified in more recent work, but even these attempts have not convinced some, such as Catherine Pickstock. In a discussion of Marion’s account of givenness, she argues against there being any clear boundaries between phenomenal appearing and hermeneutical reception.⁸⁷ There is no clean distinction between the gift and the interpreted given, or a unilateral direction between the pole of phenomenal givenness and interpretative reception. The norm-

84 Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

85 Yadav, *The Problem of Perception and the Experience of God*, 169.

86 Shane McKinlay, *Jean-Luc Marion, Saturated Phenomena, and Hermeneutics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

87 Catherine Pickstock, *Aspects of Truth: A New Religious Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 41–83; Pickstock, “The Phenomenological Given and the Hermeneutic Exchange: Which Holds Priority?” *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 76.2–3 (2020): 715–728.

governed quality of the phenomena requires a correlation with the norm-recognizing capacities of the recipient. And so to supplement Marion's saturated phenomenon, Pickstock proposes not a saturation of intuition over the conceptual (which is the myth of the given), but what she calls "the saturation of the conceptual".⁸⁸ For this, one needs a metaphysical picture that does not lead to dualistic pole of unliteral donation on the one side and preconceptual content on the other. A more coherent relating of mind and world is required here.

Space does not permit a fully-fledged critique of Marion on this point, nor a fully worked out picture of what an alternative metaphysic might look like. In more recent work, he has sought to distinguish phenomenological givenness from the givenness that Sellars is critiquing.⁸⁹ He does prioritize the inherent "sense" and "signification" of phenomena given in the reduction,⁹⁰ and in the case of the Trinity Marion affirms the intrinsic normativity of the phenomenon, insofar as the economic phenomenality unfolds from an immanent phenomenization of the Trinity, a triplicity of movement within one phenomenality. However, one wonders if his talk of revelation as "analytically" and by "definition" something that "contradicts the conditions of finite experience"⁹¹ (in conscious allusion to dialectical theology) presents too much of an agonistic relating of the ontic and the ontological, which in its unilaterality of the gift does not allow sufficient place to hermeneutical reciprocity from the side of the creature. If there is no dualism of the natural and supernatural – as Marion wholly accepts after *nouvelle théologie* – then such a picture must include not only how the normativity of phenomena unfolds from their givenness, but also how such normativity is *discerned* by the creature, something which does not

88 Pickstock, *Aspects of Truth*, 80.

89 Jean-Luc Marion, "The Hermeneutics of Givenness," in Jean-Luc Marion and Christiaan Jacobs-Vandegeer (eds.), in *The Enigma of Divine Revelation: Between Phenomenology and Comparative Theology* (Cham: Springer, 2020), 17–47.

90 Cf. Marion, "The Hermeneutics of Givenness," 24–36. Or see p. 42: "signification intervenes with an essential lateness, and the phenomenon remains haloed with a border of conceptual imprecision that doubtless will never fade. This imprecision does not, however, imply any unintelligibility or irrationality, since it attests a reserve of rationality and intelligibility still to come—a phenomenality that comes to mind because it is temporalized. Hermeneutics, by deploying it in the time of invention, transforms the (saturated) phenomenon from an object into an event".

91 *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, 160.

only “contradict” the finitude of experience but fulfils the supernatural end of the finite. If there are saturated phenomena, including revelation of the Trinity, then we need to make allowance for a *hermeneutical preparation* as regards their discernment – here echoing Christina Gschwandtner.⁹² This picture would emphasise the importance of *learning*, of how we develop those capacities to receive the inherent normativity of phenomena. Several decades ago, Rowan Williams, wrote about how “Theology...is perennially liable to be seduced by the prospect of bypassing the question of how it *learns* its own language. We can only talk intelligently about ‘authorization’ if we attend to this question; otherwise, authorization simply becomes an appeal to unchallengeable authority, and theological language is thought of as essentially heteronomous, determined from an elusive ‘elsewhere.’”⁹³ In another place, Williams speaks about how Marion himself is “at best cavalier about the *extended* social and historical processes whereby the name of God appears”.⁹⁴ Again, space does not permit a longer account, and so I can only schematise here: in broad consonance with John McDowell⁹⁵ and Sameer Yadav,⁹⁶ I would emphasise both the intrinsic normativity of phenomena and the acquisition of conceptual capacities to discern through cultural formation. This picture suggests that maintaining a realism regarding the fit between mind and world requires both that phenomena themselves are norm-governed *and* that we develop the hermeneutical capacity for discerning their normativity. If the intuitional and the conceptual are both required to avoid a mythical form of givenness, then we need a picture which includes how these are held together. Indeed, our conceptual capacities do not just happen. Conceptual skills are a part of our second natural acquisition, capacities that are learned through specific habitual and sustained training. In this way, I would emphasise more those aspects of experience that Marion calls *habitual phenomena*, which

92 Christina Gschwandtner, *Degrees of Givenness: On Saturation in Jean-Luc Marion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).

93 Rowan Williams, “Trinity and Revelation,” in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 131.

94 Rowan Williams, “God,” in David F. Ford, Ben Quash, and Janet Soskice (eds.), *Fields of Faith: Theology and Religious Studies for the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 86.

95 John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996)

96 Yadav, *The Problem of Perception and the Experience of God*, 271–315.

he only treats fleetingly.⁹⁷ We do not simply recognise the significance of things apart from acquiring those skills for recognising and discerning the normativity of things, that is apart from *practices*. From a theological vantage, I would combine this picture with an account of spiritual perception. On the question of the hermeneutical unfolding of revelation and the phenomenology of the Trinity, I follow others like William Alston,⁹⁸ Sarah Coakley,⁹⁹ Mark Wynn,¹⁰⁰ Sameer Yadav,¹⁰¹ amongst many others, in making a plea for a contemporary re-appropriation spiritual perception.¹⁰² Originating in the scriptural language of the spiritual senses, it developed especially after Origen of Alexandria, and can be found extensively in mediaeval thinkers. It articulated that a specific form of spiritual training contributed to the expansion of our perceptual capacities to discern the invisible in the visible, whether this be in the ‘mystical’ experience of God, the contemplation of nature, or the meaning of the liturgy and scripture. Such a tradition, I believe, can be fruitfully combined today with contemporary reflection on something like phenomenology and value perception,¹⁰³ here within in a more theological register. We have already seen how Marion references Augustine of Hippo, Bernard of Clairvaux, and William of St. Thierry on the link between the knowledge of love with

97 Marion, *Being Given*, 130.

98 William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991).

99 Sarah Coakley, *Sensing God? Reconsidering the Patristic Doctrine of “Spiritual Sensation” for Contemporary Theology and Ethics* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2022).

100 Mark R. Wynn, *Renewing the Senses: A Study of the Philosophy and Theology of the Spiritual Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

101 Yadav, *The Problem of Perception and the Experience of God*, 363–456.

102 For a broad overview of the topic, see Mariette Canévet, “Sens spirituel,” in A. Derville et al eds., *Dictionnaire de spiritualité: ascétique et mystique, doctrine et histoire, Tome IV* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1990), 598–617; Elisa Zocchi, “The Doctrine of the Spiritual Senses from Origen to Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Theological Aesthetics.” *Adamantius* 25 (2019), 108–122.

103 John J. Drummond, “Feelings, Emotions, and Truly Perceiving the Valuable.” *The Modern Schoolman* 86.3/4 (2009): 363–379; Ingrid Vendrell Ferran, “Feeling as Consciousness of Value.” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 25 (2022), 71–88; Søren Engelsen, “Feeling Value: A Systematic Phenomenological Account of the Original Mode of Presentation of Value,” in Rodney K. P. Parker and Ignacio Quepons, eds., *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy, Volume XVI* (London: Routledge, 2018), 231–247.

the practice of love, and I believe that something like this might be very fruitful for a practical metaphysic of Trinity.

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