

Uncovering the Mysterious: Jean-Luc Marion's Phenomenological Approach to Christian Revelation

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Introduction

This essay consists of an elaborate reading of Jean-Luc Marion's *Givenness and Revelation* (2016)¹⁾. It seeks to follow Marion's thought, which initiates a theological discourse about religious Revelation, in order to verify how his thoughts can accord and collaborate with the Christian theology of Revelation. His thought is significant in that, first of all, he has developed his own kind of phenomenology, the 'phenomenology of Givenness', and secondly, he has applied his phenomenological method to theological investigation. In *Givenness and Revelation*, he tries to fit what he calls 'phenomenon of revelation', to Christian Revelation and he connects that Revelation issues to the Trinity, which is a core theme of Christianity.

I begin this essay by examining how Marion applies his phenomenological concepts, and how they mark his philo-theological work. This might seem just a re-reading of his book, but I think it is necessary to identify the original usage of his ideas to understand his approach to the theology of trinitarian Revelation. I will then delve into areas that Marion does not develop, such as phenomenological changes of the person who experiences Revelation. Furthermore, by comparing Marion's *Givenness and Revelation* to *Dei Verbum*, the first and only Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, this essay will analyze critical points and inspirational aspects of Marion's thought on the phenomenon of Revelation from the perspective of the teaching of Catholic Church. In conclusion, I will present how adapting Marion's phenomenological view of Revelation to the Church's pastoral work can aid in accompanying the faithful in our contemporary world.

1) This book is based on Jean-Luc Marion's Gifford Lectures delivered at the University of Glasgow with the same title, "Givenness and Revelation", in 2014 and published as a book in 2016: Jean-Luc Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis, (Oxford: Oxford University, 2016), v. *Hereafter, the book will be notated as 'GR' in footnotes.

1. Marion's Criticism of the Metaphysical Understanding of Revelation

Jean-Luc Marion provides a new approach to revelation in his book, *Givenness and Revelation*, suggesting that we need to return to understanding of revelation that prevail before the development of systematic theology as *apokalypsis*, which means uncovering the veil of the God's will.²⁾ From his early works, he argues that after Christian theological took a metaphysical turn, its metaphysical notion of revelation lost the transcendental aspect of revelation and reduced it to a matter of human epistemology.³⁾

Marion finds the origin of this misunderstanding in the metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) and Francisco Suárez (1548-1617). He thinks Aquinas is one of the first theologians who attempted an epistemological interpretation of revelation.⁴⁾ Aquinas classified the knowledge accepted by revelation as *sacra doctrina* and *sacra Scriptura*, knowledge given only by God, alongside *theologia philosophica* and metaphysics, knowledge that humans can achieve.⁵⁾ In this classification, revelation gets the new title of 'transcendental knowledge,' superior to natural knowledge. However, the superiority of divine knowledge over human science gives rise to an issue of subordination.⁶⁾ As, Marion points out, "In this way, the supremacy of *theologia sacrae doctrinae* over *theologiae philosophiae* comes at the price of an assimilation of former to the epistemological function of the latter."⁷⁾ This assimilation lead to interpreting revelation as a kind of knowledge in the same category of 'knowledge' in human epistemology.⁸⁾

Marion says that Suárez answered "yes" to the question that Aquinas asked: "Can

2) GR, 1; 33-35.

3) Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being: hors-texte*, trans, Thomas A. Carson, (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2012²), 72: "It is amazing in that the nomination of 'God' as *ens supremum* is attributed expressly to Christian theology and not to the theio-logy of onto-theo-logy."

4) GR, 12.

5) GR, 12-13.

6) GR, 16-17.

7) GR, 16.

8) GR, 17: "Revelation as science joins itself to the philosophical science of God and fits itself to what will become, as the constitution of the system of science."

revelation be accepted as knowledge like a philosophy?”⁹⁾ Suárez emphasized the intellectual aspects of revelation by separating it from faith. In this process, however, revelation has come to be misunderstood as a higher rank of knowledge that completes natural knowledge. Suárez called revelation *sufficiens propositio*, the sufficient and simple proposition that comes from the object of revelation.¹⁰⁾ He went further, maintaining that “natural knowledge serves as the ground (*fundamenta, fundari*) for revealed knowledge”¹¹⁾, and that “without *metaphysics*, revealed theology would lose its grounds and its principles.”¹²⁾ Marion explains Suárez’s thought by saying “More precisely, natural science enters into theological discussion in the form of metaphysics”¹³⁾ Marion criticizes the tendency beginning with Neo-Scholasticism that revelation becomes changed to a kind of information about God in human epistemology.

Marion states, however, that through the Second Vatican Council the Catholic Church in the 20th century has not accepted the intellectual understanding revelation of Neo-Scholasticism. Marion highly appreciates the approach of *Dei Verbum* (1965), Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation of the Second Vatican Council, because this Council for the first time spoke of the role of God’s intent of divine Revelation.¹⁴⁾ The Constitution states, “Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends and lives among them so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself.”¹⁵⁾ In *Dei Verbum*, it is not difficult

9) GR, 20: “Thus we should consider whether Thomas Aquinas, rather than settling the question, instead bring it fully to light”; GR, 21: “Suárez accomplishes this, as usual through allusions and scattered indication, by isolating a *sufficiens propositio*.”

10) Rene Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation, Including a Commentary on the Constitution “Dei Verbum” of Vatican II*, (Staten Island: Alba House, 1966), 183.

11) GR, 23.

12) GR, 24-25.

13) GR, 24.

14) GR, 26.

15) *Paul VI, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Dei Verbum*, (Vatican Archive, 1965), article 7., http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html (accessed 29 Sep 2020). *Hereafter this, the Constitution will be notated as ‘D’ in the text.

to find God's initiative in the uncovering process of revelation; for it is a matter of God's will and intent. In other words, revelation takes place because God "Himself wanted to communicate Himself to us." (DV 3) Finally, Marion points out that *Dei Verbum* thus gives a non-epistemological interpretation of revelation¹⁶⁾, and that this Constitution puts light on the goal of revelation as being for transmitting information but for uncovering the economy of salvation.¹⁷⁾ This uncovering (*apokalypsis*) is fulfilled in conversation with God, who desires to communicate with us.

2. Revelation as a Saturated Phenomenon

Marion stresses the need to restore the meaning of revelation to '*apokalypsis*,' the uncovering of God's will as God gives Himself to the people. In stressing this need, Marion follows his important philosophical concepts of the 'phenomenology of givenness' and the 'saturated phenomenon', the critical terms of his phenomenology before his thoughts turned to religious revelation. Though he is a phenomenologist in the tradition of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), he focuses more on the *givenness of the phenomenon*. He thinks that these earlier phenomenologists overly emphasized the intention of the subject in guiding the reduction of a phenomenon. Marion maintains that Husserl focused more on shaping the intention of the transcendental ego, not on the phenomenon itself.¹⁸⁾ Marion claims that "the phenomenological breakthrough consists neither in the broadening of intuition, nor in the autonomy of signification, but 'solely in the unconditional primacy of the givenness of the phenomenon.'"¹⁹⁾

16) GR, 27.

17) GR, 27.

18) Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 16: "nothing appears except by giving itself to and in the conscious I, ..."

19) Jean-Luc Marion, *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*, trans. Thomas A Carlson, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 32

In his book, *Being Given* (2002), Marion proclaims that there are phenomena which cannot be guided or constructed by the subject. He calls these ‘saturated phenomena.’ They overwhelm the subject’s own intentions and cognitive possibilities, and he or she need to simply receive phenomena as they come without resistance. Persons cannot construct phenomena by the intuition of their transcendental ego. This notion of the saturated phenomenon clearly underscores the givenness of phenomenon. The subject’s intention is simply overwhelmed by the saturation, so that the phenomenon can manifest itself and give itself as a gift without any intended expectation on the part of the receiver.

Marion classifies the saturated phenomena in the four Kantian categories of the ‘quantity,’ ‘quality,’ ‘relation’ and ‘modality,’ with the corresponding character of an ‘event,’ ‘idol,’ ‘flesh,’ and ‘icon.’ For example, regarding ‘flesh’ (the saturated phenomenon of relation), I experience myself through my flesh. This relation of self and flesh is so intimate that no other relationship can intervene. The experience and feeling of the flesh cannot be precisely conveyed to another in language as a kind of concept because it is saturated in the category of the relation.²⁰⁾ Marion suggests, moreover, that there is a fifth category of phenomenon, ‘the phenomenon of revelation,’ which exists at the edge of the phenomenal horizon and transcends these four saturated phenomena. This category refers not only to the religious phenomenon but also to any the experience that makes the subject unable to forget the moment and that transforms persons totally and paradoxically, so that they cannot return to the live they had before experiencing that events.²¹⁾ He says, “Such revelations are not lacking, and everyone can experience them sensually, or aesthetically, theoretically or morally,

(‘...’ by the author of this essay).

20) Marion, *Being Given*, 231: “The flesh auto-affects itself in agony, suffering, and grief, as well as in desire, feeling, or orgasm. There is no sense in asking if these effects come to it from the body, the mind, or the Other, since originally it always auto-affects itself first in and by itself”; Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Marion and Theology*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 62.

21) Jean-Luc Marion, “Thinking Elsewhere,” *Journal for Continental Philosophy of Religion*, 1(2019), 7: “A revelation is defined as a phenomenon that is not forgotten, a presence that does not pass away, because it affects and transforms those that see, perceive, and receive it.”

intellectually or religiously, etc.”²²⁾

In his recent article, “Thinking Elsewhere” (2019), Marion distinguishes the phenomenon of religious revelation, as Revelation, ‘marked by capital letter.’²³⁾ He describes it as having “the specific claim of having received a communication about what God himself wanted (or would have wanted) to make known about his presence amidst humanity.”²⁴⁾ Marion explains that it is “indeed the saturated phenomenon par excellence giving itself from itself to the point of showing itself absolutely in itself and by itself.”²⁵⁾ This Revelation affects person who receive it as a saturated phenomenon par excellence. Firstly, the person becomes a ‘witness’ of the phenomenon.²⁶⁾ The ‘he or she’ does not have any concept or mode of knowledge to grasp the event; he or she just accepts the saturation and gives testimony about the experience. Secondly, Marion proposes that there is a paradox involved in this experience of Revelation.²⁷⁾ In the face saturation that goes beyond any intuition, the person experiences the counter-experience of which un-doing the limited conditions of his or her own experiences.²⁸⁾ The experience paradoxically leads the person to share in God’s giving of the Revelation as a witness to others.

3. Pre-eminent Revelation of the Icon of the Father: Jesus Christ

In Christian faith, Jesus Christ is ‘Revelation’ par excellence, a mode of Revelation

22) Ibid., 7.

23) Ibid., 15: “The term Revelation, marked by a capital letter, is nearly confiscated by what, for lack of anything better, is grouped together or, by convention, is confusingly placed under the title of “religious”: in the most prevalent sense, there is Revelation when there is religion especially since there is religion; and there is religion when and especially since there is Revelation.”

24) Ibid., 15.

25) Ibid., 22.

26) Gschwandtner, *Marion and Theology*, 127.

27) GR, 55.

28) Gschwandtner, *Marion and Theology*, 128.

that manifests the saturation and excess of the phenomenon, and also the paradox. The phenomenon of Jesus Christ, his birth, teaching, death, and resurrection bestows the true paradox, not only to the Jews who lived with Jesus but also to every person who experiences him through the Scriptures, preaching, prayer, and etc. Citing the example of the disciples going to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-15), Marion's article "They Recognized Him and He Became Invisible to Them" (2017) well presents Jesus Christ as a saturated phenomenon which paradoxically affects those disciples. Although Jesus walked and talked with them for a few hours together on the way to Emmaus, they could not recognize the resurrected Jesus. This is because they had no concept or intuition of the possibility of the saturated phenomenon, his resurrection.²⁹⁾ Even though Jesus interpreted to them the Scriptures which had been spoken about himself (v. 27), they still could not recognize him. Finally, however, when breaking the bread, at once "their eyes were opened, and they recognized him" (v. 31). As a saturated phenomenon, the risen Christ cannot be accepted through the collection of scriptural or any other information about him or through any intellectual attempt to grasp him. It is only given through by God's will to uncover the signification of revelation; and in that process, they could become witnesses of the phenomenon and embrace the paradox in his life.³⁰⁾

Through Marion's interpretation of Chapter 24 of the Gospel of Luke, 'On the way to Emmaus,' we can find two significant features of the revelation of Jesus. Firstly, only God has the initiative to determine how and to whom a Revelation is made. This is connected to the question of why not all are able to recognize Jesus as the Christ. Marion does not answer who might have the possibility to receive this Revelation, but agrees that the uncovering of Revelation is the work only of the Father.³¹⁾ In the same

29) Jean-Luc Marion, "They Recognized Him and He Became Invisible to Them," in *Believing in order to See: On the Rationality of Revelation and the Irrationality of Some Believers*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner, (New York: Fordham University, 2017), 137: "Here is the intuition that they do not understand, that is to say, they cannot contain, or take back into their concepts."

30) *Ibid.*, 143.

31) GR, 61. "The *mysterion* comes from God and not from other initiates; God is in charge of uncovering it to whomever he wishes, and to whosoever can receive it..."

context, the Gospel says that “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him on the last day” (Jn 6,44). Marion insists that the phenomenon of Christ is a matter of “uncovering itself on the basis of the *mystērion*”³²⁾ and that “to see the uncovered *mystērion*, it is thus necessary to pass from our spirit to the Spirit of God.”³³⁾ It can be assumed that only the one who is helped by the Spirit of God can be a witness of the Revelation.

Secondly, Jesus is the ‘icon’ of the invisible Father (Col 1:15). In other words, the revelation of Jesus leads one to gaze not on Jesus himself, but on the Father. This is the most significant mark of the phenomenon of Jesus Christ. Many biblical references reveal that the icon of Jesus represents the Father. Jesus said to Philip, “whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9), He also proclaimed “whoever believes in me believes not only in me but also in the one who sent me and whoever sees me sees the one who sent me” (Jn 12:44-45). The term ‘icon’ has great importance in Marion’s phenomenology, beginning with his early works. ‘Icon’ is an opposing concept to ‘idol.’ An idol satisfies one “by capturing his gaze, dazzling it, filling it and returning it, working as an invisible mirror.”³⁴⁾ It does not draw one’s gaze beyond the idol itself to approach God. In marked contrast, an ‘icon’ does not rest on its own visible form, but “summons the gaze to surpass itself by never freezing on a visible, since the visible only presents itself here in view of the invisible.”³⁵⁾ This points to the uttermost paradox that exceeds the human expectation of seeing the Son, so that many could not recognize Jesus as the Son of God. It is also the revelation of the exclusive relationship between the Father and the Son, in which the Father is uncovered only through the Son. Marion emphasizes this revelation, saying “To know the one, The Father, then is equivalent to knowing the other, the Son, and vice versa.”³⁶⁾

32) GR, 63.

33) GR, 64.

34) Gschwandtner, *Marion and Theology*, 34.

35) Marion, *God without Being*, 19.

36) GR, 86.

4. Trinitarian Model of Revelation

4.1 *Anamorphosis*

Before *Givenness and Revelation*, Marion already provided his thoughts on Revelation in the context of phenomenology. However, the Trinity was never mentioned in detail before this book. Although he tried to talk about the Trinity in it, interestingly, his attention is not on the role or relationship of the three persons of the Trinity. Rather his argument is about how the Revelation of God can be uncovered in a trinitarian method. He does not focus on the issue of an ‘economic’ or ‘immanent’ understanding of the Trinity because he thinks that these theories are too much based on human epistemology, which cannot acknowledge this aspect of the Godhead unless it is revealed to us.³⁷⁾ He claims that we can only approach God who uncovers this aspect of divinity by revelation. He states, “Revelation reveals the Trinity and, above all, it reveals it in a trinitarian way.”³⁸⁾ Through Revelation, God gives himself to us not only in the content, but also in this method of manifestation.

For this trinitarian manner of Revelation, he employs the term ‘*anamorphosis*,’ which is derived from the Greek prefix *ana*, meaning ‘back’ or ‘again,’ and the word *morphe*, meaning ‘shape’ or ‘form,’ together meaning ‘re-formed shape.’ *Anamorphosis* is a term, used mainly in the fine arts, to describe the method of making and seeing a painting or sculpture that has a certain perspective to bring to light a hidden figure or feature of it.³⁹⁾ Marion attempts to extend ‘the icon’ relationship to trinitarian model of Revelation by applying the concept of ‘*anamorphosis*’.

This concept of *anamorphosis* was already used for explaining the saturated phenomenon in Marion’s other works. He uses the term to focus on a situation when the subject cannot

37) GR, 99; 101: “This model describes our access to the uncovering of what by right remains nevertheless inaccessible to us.”

38) GR, 99.

39) The painting of *the Ambassadors* (1533) of Hans Holbein is a good example of this concept. The viewer of the painting can see the figure of the skeleton in the lower part of the painting only if they are guided to a right viewpoint.

construct the event or have an intention to grasp the saturated phenomenon. The anamorphic character of a saturated phenomenon has a condition for successful manifestation. It can be said that its center of gravity is not known to the subject but only to the phenomenon itself.⁴⁰⁾ In the facing the phenomenon, a person does not have the role of a constructing subject, but must be a receptive witness who is waiting for its manifestation.⁴¹⁾

This character of *anamorphosis* can be exactly applied to the Revelation of God. The Son as an 'icon' uncovers the image of the invisible Father to people, but many people did not meet the right condition of expecting that icon of the Son can manifest the Father. For instance, the Pharisees of the Gospel, who did not accept Jesus as the Son of God, could not see the Father through him; rather they tortured and killed him. This is because they cannot construct the saturated phenomenon of Jesus. They perceived a kind of authority in his presence, saying "They were astonished and said, 'Where did this man get such wisdom and mighty deeds?'" (Mt. 13:44); but their sight did not meet the condition for grasping his nature as an icon revealing the Father. They could only see Jesus as a carpenter of Nazareth: "Is he not the carpenter's son? Is not his mother named Mary and his brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas?" (v. 55) They needed a guide who can lead them to have the condition needed to see the icon of the Son as a Revelation of the Father.

4.2 The Gift: The Holy Spirit

Therefore, Marion points to the role of the Holy Spirit in the *anamorphosis* model of Revelation. In this trinitarian Revelation, the Holy Spirit has the role of leading and helping people acquire the condition of the perspective to see the invisible Father through the icon. One cannot find the place from where they can properly perceive the

40) Marion, *Being Given*, 131. "*Anamorphosis* attests that it possesses phenomenality's center of gravity, since it imposes its constraints on the *I/me*."

41) Marion provides the personal computer as an example for illustrating *anamorphosis*. The computer is a phenomenon that comes to me, but I cannot grasp its potential performance if I do not know how to operate the computer. *Ibid.*, 127-129.

uncovering of Revelation. Marion says, “Indeed, the ‘Spirit positions the human gaze at the exact place and point of view where the visible face of Christ (Jesus as Son) can at once’, with a sudden and perfect precision... and yet, this place and this point of view remain inaccessible to man, who is always the prisoner of his organization of visible, which is not only finite, but above all closed.”⁴²⁾ This role of the Spirit is also supported by the Scriptures: “For our gospel did not come to you in word alone, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with much conviction” (1 Thes 1:5). Paul here teaches the Thessalonians that it is by the help of the Holy Spirit that they, as believers, can fully understand the Word of God, Jesus Christ.

Marion thus identifies the Holy Spirit as the ‘gift’ of God in the trinitarian model of Revelation. The Spirit, himself, is not visible; but gives himself as a gift to guide the human being to perceive a Revelation. To express the trinitarian role of the Spirit, Marion uses the metaphor of an unseen stage director who controls the performance while staying in the wings.⁴³⁾ Furthermore, the Holy Spirit not only gives the guidance; but also, by remaining invisible, bracketing himself as it were, he gives his very self.

Marion already speaks of the concept of ‘gift’ in *Being Given*, where he develops the concept from Marcel Mauss and Jacques Derrida.⁴⁴⁾ He argues there that in the phenomenological view, different from the metaphysical understanding, a gift should be given totally without the possibility of recompense.⁴⁵⁾ This can be done by bracketing ‘the recipient’, like donating something without knowing the receiver, and by bracketing ‘the giver’, like receive the inheritance without knowing the giver. For eliminating reciprocity by bracketing constituent, the gift, giver, recipients, the (way of) giving, etc., the gift would never be responded to or returned. This process makes the gift more phenomenological that gift is given by giving itself. In such a gift, the unknown ‘recipient’ of a donation or anonymous ‘giver’ of an inheritance is left set

42) GR, 108 (‘...’ by the author of this essay).

43) GR, 110.

44) Gshwandtner, *Marion and Theology*, 76-77.

45) Marion, *Being Given*, 94-102.

aside in brackets, the possibility of reciprocity thus being eliminated in perfect progress of giving. Marion thus illustrates the Holy Spirit as a perfect phenomenological gift, always remaining aside as the giver brackets.

How can this gift be given to people? When do we gaze at uncovered Revelation with the help of the Holy Spirit? In the article, “The Phenomenality of the Sacrament” (2010), Marion gives the clue to answer these questions. “The sacrament accomplishes and increases the intrinsic manifestation of the Son, ‘the transition in him from Father’s invisibility to Christ’s visibility, spread by the Spirit’ in its Church. In fact, the Church consists only in allowing the ‘trinitarian mystery to show itself’-to phenomenalyze itself according to all the figures of grace”⁴⁶⁾ This means that the trinitarian phenomenon is uncovered by the help of the Holy Spirit through the sacraments of the Church. In *God without Being*, he mentioned that “...‘by the labor of the Spirit’ that arranges a eucharistic community in such a way that reproduces a given disposition of the Word-referent...”⁴⁷⁾ It can thus be seen that in Marion’s vision, the trinitarian revelation and the gift of the Holy Spirit can be firmly and remarkably represented as a phenomenon in the communal sacraments of the Church. Though we cannot set a limit to God’s work of the human being, it would be difficult to deny that the Eucharist is one of the most remarkable expressions of the gift of God’s intent to communicate himself in the icon of the Christ to believers.

5. Conversion: Anamorphic Formation

The focus of this chapter is questions about the human spectator, gazing at uncovering trinitarian Revelation. First, how can a person be guided by the Holy Spirit to have the correct perspective for receiving the Revelation? What creates the right

46) Jean-Luc Marion, “The Phenomenality of the Sacrament,” in *Believing in Order to See: On the Rationality of Revelation and the Irrationality of Some Believers*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University, 2017), 112 (‘...’ by the author of this essay).

47) Marion, *God without Being*, 156-157 (‘...’ by the author of this essay).

condition to receive the gift of God? This can be answered by Augustine's *The Trinity* as interpreted by Andrew Staron. In his book, *The Gift of Love*, Staron employs Marion's phenomenological approach to Augustine's thought on the Trinity to correct the former epistemological understanding of Augustine's idea. He claims that the original intention of Augustine was to provide a soteriological reading that clarifies God's desire of uncovering himself to human beings. Staron states that "If the Trinity cannot be signified without our already in some way knowing it, then to know it depends first upon 'its already being present within us', upon its 'already being given to us through the gift of love' that is poured into our hearts."⁴⁸⁾ He thus maintains that Augustine thought that human being have been given the potential to receive the Revelation of the Trinity.

Staron modifies Marion's phenomenological term '*anamorphosis*.' Marion uses the term only to describe the inner dynamic of trinitarian Revelation. Staron speaks instead of 'anamorphic formation' or 'anamorphically formed,'⁴⁹⁾ and he uses the concept to illustrate transformation in the person who experiences the great paradox of the phenomenon of Revelation, something that Marion overlooks in his book *Givenness and Revelation*. He maintains that the Holy Spirit re-forms us anamorphically to be able to have the right perspective for receiving the trinitarian Revelation. The Spirit does not accomplish this magical way which changes the person suddenly and totally; rather, the Spirit's work changes us bit by bit in a lifetime experience. Using Marion's ideas of prayer, Staron cites it an example of this anamorphic formation, saying "Prayer, Marion suggests, can serve as the intentionally by which we open ourselves to the particular saturated phenomenon given in Revelation, thereby being anamorphically formed to that which is given,"⁵⁰⁾ In a nutshell, the transformation taking place in two-pronged dynamics; the gift of love within us and the gift of the Holy Spirit who

48) Andrew Staron, *The Gift of Love: Augustine, Jean-Luc Marion, and the Trinity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 131 ('...' by the author of this essay).

49) Ibid., 355, 368.

50) Ibid., 369.

helps us to reach the point to see icons as manifesting the invisible Father.

Staron's notion of this anamorphic formation is in line with Marion's notion of the word, 'conversion' as stated in *Givenness and Revelation*. On the final page of that book, Marion points out that the "*anamorphosis*, to which only the Spirit leads" can be seen as the 'conversion' of human perspectives.⁵¹⁾ Dongkyu Kim has pointed out that Marion's idea of 'conversion' of Marion "is not a matter of the cause or factor of the phenomenon, but the result or effect of the phenomenon, so that it comes later than Revelation."⁵²⁾ Marion himself does not separate the acceptance of the manifestation of the Trinity from the formation of the believer; nor does he understand it as repentance of the sinner. Rather, it is rooted in the awareness of the gift which becomes incarnated in the person as one surrenders oneself to be transformed totally in the Trinity's love for human beings. It is thus more like a response to the experience of Revelation and the paradox it entails. If one accepts the mystery of great love and the paradox of conversion, he or she experiences a movement toward the Trinity. However, if one cannot accept the love and shuns the paradox, remaining where one always was, he or she rejects conversion. In conversion, a person acknowledges oneself as a sinner before the great gift of love and takes courage to praise God for it.⁵³⁾ This kind of conversion finally leads one to follow the footsteps of the person of Jesus Christ, the icon in whom he recognizes the uncovering Revelation.

6. Critical Issues: The Catholic Perspective

This essay now calls attention to issues in Marion's thought as applied to

51) GR, 115: "...according to a point of view and a site defined by *anamorphosis* (or conversion of the human perspective), to which only the Spirit can lead."

52) Dongkyu Kim, "Through Phenomenology to God-Talk: A Consideration on the Theological Turn of French Phenomenology- Janicaud, Levinas, and Marion," *Philosophical Research*, 46(2017), 162, fn.93.

53) Jean-Luc Marion, *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, trans. Jeffery L. Kosky, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 20, 30.

phenomenology of the Catholic theology of revelation. First of all, Marion does not specify how one can phenomenologically derive the concept of ‘the Trinity’ from Revelation. In line with his method of the revelation of phenomena, he uses the term as a phenomenological concept, rarely uses the term itself, but repeatedly uses the adjectival form, ‘trinitarian.’ However, ‘trinitarian’ also has the hermeneutical meaning of ‘the Trinity’ deduced over the centuries in theological discussions based on the understanding of the Apostles and first disciples who directly meet Jesus Christ, through the idea of the Trinity was not revealed or mentioned explicitly by God either in the Old Testament, or by Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

Believers encounter the phenomenon of Jesus Christ through the Scriptures and prayer, but can these indirect experiences bring them to an awareness of the trinitarian God? Even if it might do so, the indirect experience of human beings cannot be as perfect as that of the Apostles who directly experienced Jesus. Even the Scripture passages which Marion provides as the source of the phenomenon contain the hermeneutic considerations of the Christian community. Catherine LaCugna has shown that the Bible already gives different understandings of the persons of God.⁵⁴⁾ Marion uses this interpreted word of the Church, but does not refer to any hermeneutical discourse of matter.

This leads us to further considerations, that the Catholic Church puts great emphasis on the experience of the apostles. In Marion’s view, the apostles, like us, had limits of human nature, so that they, too, could not properly receive the saturated phenomenon of the Revelation of the Trinity. He thus does not grant any special authority to their understanding. However, the Church gives the highest authority to their experiences and testimony as the deposit of the faith handed down by them. *Dei Verbum* states that

54) Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity & Christian Life*, (New York: Harper Collins: 1973), 113-114: She points that through the Paul’s phrase “giving thanks always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father” (Eph. 5:20) suggest a binitarian interpretation, Matthew’s phrase “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19b) indicates a trinitarian understanding of baptismal prayer.

their “commission was faithfully fulfilled by the Apostles who, by their oral preaching, by example, and by observances handed on what they had received from the lips of Christ, from living with Him, and from what He did, or what they had learned through the prompting of the Holy Spirit” (DV 7).

A second point to be noted about Marion’s trinitarian model of Revelation is that it is difficult to understand how we recognize the person of the Holy Spirit. In his explanation, the Spirit does not have visibility, because he gives himself as a gift, remaining unseen.⁵⁵⁾ Marion does not say how people then can have the concept of the Spirit and confess that the Spirit is Lord. In the Scriptures, the Spirit manifests himself as a person of the Trinity, in the figures of ‘dove’ (Mt 3:16), and ‘tongues as of fire’ (Act 2:3), as well as in Jesus reference to ‘Advocate’ and ‘Paraclete’ in his farewell address at the Last Supper (Jn 15:26). If the disciples could not recognize the Spirit because he is not visible, the Scriptures should have given only binitarian expressions of the Godhead. Hans Urs von Balthasar has pointed out that in the scene of Jesus’s baptism, the Spirit appears visible as a dove.⁵⁶⁾ Then, too, right after the baptism, the Spirit “drove him out into the desert” (Mk 1,12). This illustrates that the Spirit does not remain hidden in the wings as an unseen director. For this part, Raymond Brown has proposed that “John presents the Paraclete as the Holy Spirit in a special role, namely as the personal presence of Jesus in the Christian while Jesus is with the Father.”⁵⁷⁾ These examples cannot be understood without having a relationship with the Revelation of the Trinity. They indicate that the Spirit has to some extent uncovered himself visibly.

Thirdly, except for his reference to the Eucharist,⁵⁸⁾ there is no discussion of

55) GR, 109.

56) Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic: Theological Logical Theology*, vol. 3, *The Spirit of Truth*, trans. Graham Harrison, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 94. Balthasar said that this is the visualization of Isaiah’s prophecy that “Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased. Upon him I have put my spirit; he shall bring forth justice to the nations.” (Is 42:1)

57) Raymond Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), 1139.

58) Marion, *God without Being*, 156-157.

communal Revelation in Marion's writings. He implicitly focuses on the individual experience of Revelation. For example, the depiction of persons being led by the Spirit implies that the phenomenon is uncovered in individual personal situations. However, the testimony of the Bible shows that the belief through the experience of a phenomenon can be public. When Jesus asks the disciples about his identity, he says, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" (Lk 9:18) He was wondering about the thought of the crowds (ὄχλοι, ochloi) that had just come face to face with the phenomenon of the 'feeding of five thousand' (Lk 9:10-17). Jesus then asks "But who do you say that I am?" (v. 20). Here, Jesus uses word of 'Υμεῖς (hymeis), which is the plural form 'σύ,' (su, you), because he wants to know the thought of the disciples' community, not the personal understanding of Peter. John Carroll, has rightly noted that "Peter has given voice to the thought of the disciples as a whole, as a representative character."⁵⁹⁾ This gives us the idea that the phenomenon of Jesus was uncovered to the disciples in a communal way and that the response was also collective.

This third issue of communal revelation and reception lead to the role of the Church. I think of the Church as an essential aspect of the communal deposit of revelation. *Dei verbum* testifies that "the task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ" (DV 10). Of course, this does not explicitly refer to communal Revelation; but *Dei Verbum* illustrates the collective nature of revelation better than Marion's description of a person's reactions after receiving the uncovering of the phenomenon. His phenomenological perspective throws light on how Revelation can occur, the Apostolic Constitution on how it can influence the believers. Marion focuses on the unexpected nature of Revelation for either an individual or a community. *Dei Verbum* emphasizes the communal reflection and discernment that takes place after receiving Revelation. Its teaching is not in the realm of phenomenology, but it is linked with

59) John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 211.

the spreading of uncovered phenomena to all creatures by those who accept the paradox of conversion.

These issues bring us to three critical areas in which Marion's thought can be broadened by an enriched hermeneutic consideration of the saturated phenomena of Revelation important for the Church: the interpreted concept of the Trinity, the superiority of the Revelation as received directly by the apostles', and the authority and process of communally received Revelation. Marion's perspective can help the Church reflect on the shape of their faith and how it can be developed in the encounter with Marion's phenomenological approach.

7. Shared Perspectives and Inspiration for the Church

Even though there are critical differences between the perspectives of Revelation of Marion's and the Catholic Church, his understanding can provide meaningful insights for the Church in its theology and ministry. The basic direction of his thought does not collide with the Catholic teaching on Revelation and applying his thoughts to theological discussion can be fruitful for Church to ministry. Firstly, Marion's depiction of revelation can be understood as a development of a non-epistemological approach of Dogmatic Constitution of Divine Revelation of Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*. In line with Marion's criticism of the metaphysical and epistemological understanding of Revelation, Joseph Ratzinger has said about the Constitution that "the fathers were merely concerned with overcoming neo-scholastic intellectualism, for which revelation chiefly meant a store of mysterious super-natural teachings, which automatically reduces faith very much to an acceptance of the supernatural insight."⁶⁰ Marion's phenomenological perspective provides one way of overcoming this 'intellectualism.'

60) Joseph Ratzinger, "Commentary on Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 3., ed., Herbert Vorgrimler, trans. William Glen-Doepel, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 172.

Furthermore, his emphasis on the will of God in the uncovering phenomenon of Revelation thoroughly supports the idea of *Dei Verbum* that “God chose to reveal Himself (*se ipsum*) ...so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself.” (DV 2).

Marion’s notion of trinitarian revelation also can be seen as the echoing *Dei Verbum*’s trinitarian axiom of revelation, “God chose...to make known to us...by which ‘through Christ’, the Word made flesh, man might ‘in the Holy Spirit’ have access ‘to the Father.’” (DV 2).⁶¹⁾ The *anamorphosis* model of the phenomenon of revelation effectively visualizes the trinitarian Revelation of the Second Vatican Council. Also, both *Dei Verbum* and Marion’s *Givenness and Revelation* share a Christocentric view of trinitarian Revelation. *Dei Verbum*, states in Article 4: “Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making Himself present and manifesting Himself” (DV 4). Marion responds to this article with a quote of Augustine’s *De Trinitate*, “There is only one visibility, and thus only one phenomenon in and for all Trinity: the persona of Christ.”⁶²⁾ The last sentence of DV Article 2, speaks of “the Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation,”; and Marion’s model of ‘icon’ for Christ as the image of the Father exactly expresses this notion of ‘the mediator and the fullness.’ Referring to the ‘persona of Christ,’ Ratzinger comments that the last sentence “does not present a one-sided Christocentric view... He enfolds us in the dimension of the Spirit, and our being in him means at the same time that we have been led to the Father.”⁶³⁾ In sum, the ideas in Marion’s *Givenness and Revelation* well accord with the Second Vatican Council’s idea on Christ-centered trinitarian model of Revelation.

Above all, Marion’s thoughts on Revelation are particularly significant when it applied to the personal lives of believers in today’s world. Marion does not limit the

61) ‘...’ by the author of this essay.

62) St. Augustine, *The Trinity*, II, 10, 18 in trans. Edmund Hill, O.P., (Brooklyn NY: New City Press, 1991), 110 modified by Jean-Luc Marion and quoted in GR 110.

63) Ratzinger, “Commentary on Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation,” 172.

boundaries of Revelation to ecclesial realities. It can be given anywhere, including outside of the sacraments, liturgies, and the other acts of faith within the Church. According to his thought, every person can interpret his or her own moment of existential experience as Revelations of God. In the face of special experiences, anyone can be overwhelmed by saturated phenomena which lead to the paradox of an existential decision to convert. The existential issues that 21st century Christians face the environmental problems, refugees and migration, the imbalance between social classes, sexual and racial discrimination are not abundantly talked about and shared in the context of the Christian faith. People have thus too readily come to consider the Church as a vacuous realm separated from the social, and personal issues that they face. As Elizabeth Johnson has well stated, “Christianity became a little Church in a much bigger world. Believing Christians found themselves a cognitive minority scattered in a wider culture that bore the stamp of other influences, both secular and religious. Consequently, a variety of viewpoints pressed themselves on the average person.”⁶⁴⁾

Cannot the Church embrace the paradoxes of these issues? Can these matters not be discussed with the people of God in the Church? Marion’s phenomenological approach can provide a good attempt to deal with these questions. Even if it does not give direct answers, the Church could find help by applying his phenomenological view of revelation. As Zoltan Alszegehy has said, “The Phenomenological approach allows theological research to constitute a connatural and necessary explication of ecclesial life rather than remain on its fringes.”⁶⁵⁾ The phenomena which the people of God experience in their daily lives can be shared in the Christian community. Even if such personally revealed phenomena are not a matter of Revelation as it is spoken of in the Church’s traditional deposit of faith, it is important to value persons’ personal experiences highly. For, as Johnson has said, “At the heart of Christian faith, the

64) Elizabeth Johnson, *Quest for the living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*, (New York: Continuum, 2014), 25.

65) Zoltan Alszegehy and Maurizio Flick, *Introductory Theology*, trans. D. W. Wuerl, (London: Dimension Books, 1982), 58.

almost unbelievable idea that the infinitely incomprehensible holy mystery of God does not remain forever remote but draws near in radical proximity to the world.⁶⁶⁾ Far from denying this possibility, Marion encourages the potential for uncovering the saturated phenomenon of Revelation in one's everyday life.⁶⁷⁾ If a person's personal revelatory experiences lead to the paradox of conversion and a radical change of life, the Church need to embrace those experiences and provide forums where they can be share. For God works freely from the least to the great.

Conclusion

People's personal conversions and paradoxes may bring about tension of the people may give the tension in the Church, but a Christian accepts the paradoxes and tensions of just as Jesus Christ did in his life. The intrinsic paradox of Christianity as life pursued after the model of Jesus can be amplified by the personal revelations that lead each believer to existential conversion. It can greatly enrich the life of the Church as a whole when it provides forums to hear of the conversions and paradoxes of the people of God in their experiences of uncovering the saturated phenomena of Divine Presence. Through attentive listening to one another, members of the Church can reflect more deeply on the Christian way of life and discern where they can find and manifest the presence of the trinitarian God, who wants to "speak to men as friends" (DV 2). The importance of Marion's thought is that it can move believers to ponder more deeply the presence of the Trinity in their own existential decisions made in the light of faith. It is one of the most positive challenges of his thought, moreover, that it can encourage the Church to consider how to receive with the eye of faith the saturated phenomena that is personally uncovered to each believer.

66) Johnson, *Quest for the living God*, 39.

67) Marion, "Thinking Elsewhere," 7.

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Uncovering the Mysterious:
Jean-Luc Marion's Phenomenological Approach to Christian Revelation

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The French phenomenologist, Jean-Luc Marion, suggests the possibility of a new approach to Christian Revelation in his book *Givenness and Revelation* (2016). Marion criticizes Neo-Scholasticism and contends that we should return to *apokalypsis*, 'uncovering the will of God.' He claims that the Revelation of the Divine Trinity must be uncovered in a trinitarian way. When the Son as icon, reveals the invisible Father, the Holy Spirit guides a person to have the proper perspective to see the icon, completing the threefold manner of God's uncovering himself. There are some hermeneutical points that can be questioned about Marion's idea. Nevertheless, Marion's new approach to understanding Revelation provides meaningful insights in terms of theological concerns. Such a phenomenological understanding of Revelation can help the Church a richer realm for Christians to share their real-life personal experiences in the context of a relationship with God who wants to communicate with us.

Key Words: Revelation, Trinity, Jean-Luc Marion, *Dei Verbum*, Phenomenological Theology

계시의 삼위일체적 드러남:
장-뤽 마리옹의 계시에 대한 현상학적 이해

김현직 S.J.

이 논문의 목적은 현상학자 장-뤽 마리옹(Jean-Luc Marion)의 계시론을 비판적으로 분석하고, 신학적 의미를 제시하는 것이다. 마리옹은 그의 저서 『주어짐과 계시』(2016)를 통해 현상학적 방식으로 그리스도교의 계시에 대한 자신의 논의를 펼친다. 그는 계시에 대한 네오-스콜라주의적 접근을 비판하고, 하느님 뜻의 드러남(*uncovering*) 즉, ‘묵시’(*apokalypsis*)로 돌아가야 함을 주장한다. 그는 삼위일체이신 하느님이 자신을 드러내는 ‘계시’는 그 내용뿐 아니라, 방식에서도 ‘삼위일체적’으로 자신을 드러내 보인다고 한다. 그는 ‘보이지 않는 성부’와 이를 드러내는 ‘이콘인 성자’의 이중적 관계에, 아버지를 보여주는 정확한 시선으로 관람자를 ‘인도하는 성령’의 역할을 부여함으로써, 계시의 삼위일체적 모델을 제시한다. 마리옹의 현상학적 계시 모델은 이 시대의 가톨릭 교회에게 특별한 의미와 영감을 제시한다. 그의 계시에 대한 논의는 이 시대를 살아가는 신앙인들이 자신들의 삶에서 맞닥뜨리는 다양한 삶의 경험들을 하느님과의 관계 안에서 이해할 지평을 제시한다. 나아가 교회는 이 논의들이 신앙 안에서 나누어지고, 또 해석될 수 있도록 나눔의 장을 제시할 필요가 있다.

주제어: 계시, 삼위일체, 장-뤽 마리옹, 하느님 말씀(계시현장), 현상학적 신학

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