

Compaan, Auke¹
University of Pretoria

Icon, love and the possibility of the other

ABSTRACT

Is it possible to believe in God and speak about God with intellectual integrity in our post-modern world with its apparent cultural disintegration of Christian symbols, language and rituals? The article wants to examine the profound critique of the French philosopher, Jean Luc Marion on western metaphysics, and his renewal of the phenomenological tradition of Husserl and Heidegger, to explore if he can open a way forward for theology in our postmodern cultural context. Marion claims that there are phenomena that can be received that exceeds being and thought, making it possible to contextualize theology as a non-metaphysical possibility. The critical question that Marion must answer to accomplish his purpose is: can he truly overcome metaphysics, or is he just affirming that which he criticizes?

SEEING MORE THAN OUR EYES MEET

I want to suggest that Christian faith is most fully itself and most fully life-giving when it opens our eyes and uncovers a world larger than we thought. I want to propose that faith does not lead us into a smaller world and does not make us smaller human beings as popular perception implies today, but that faith actually shows us the way into an immeasurably larger world. I want to argue that Christian faith is about educating our vision and our passions, that we understand how to see that which our eyes do not meet, to see behind surfaces, to see the invisible in the visible, the depth that we're not going to master.

To do this, it is necessary to deconstruct the opposition between faith and reason, between believing and knowing, between believing without certainty and knowing from the sciences. It is not that Christians can in any way do without reason. The question is rather: if Christian theology has taken rational knowledge of the divine seriously since Justine and Augustine, why is there such a tension between faith and reason, between theology and science in our time, and is there another way than the unfruitful conflicts that have marked history from Galileo to Dawkins?

I want to propose that the critique of western metaphysics by the French philosopher Jean Luc Marion and his renewal of the phenomenological tradition of Husserl and Heidegger create the possibility of faith as a form of higher reason, of knowing what cannot be known, the possibility of seeing that which our eyes cannot see. The name Jean Luc Marion invokes a distinctive, vibrant and rather enigmatic presence in the world of contemporary continental philosophy and Catholic thought. The mainstay of his academic career is a long series of contributions to Descartes scholarship in the classic tradition of French history of philosophy.² In a second series of books

1 Dr Auke Compaan is a Research Associate at the Department of Dogmatics and Christian Ethics, Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria.

2 Marion has published numerous, highly specialized and incredibly detailed works on the thought of René Descartes. See *Descartes' Grey Ontology: Cartesian Science and Aristotelian Thought in the Regulae* (1975, 1981, 1993, 2000, 2004a, 2008); *On Descartes' Metaphysical Prism: The Constitution and the Limits of Onto-theo-logy in Cartesian Thought* (1986, 1999); *Cartesian Questions: Method and Metaphysics*, University (1999a). *On the Ego and on God* (2007). Marion locates in Descartes work

Marion reveals his theological passion.³ According to Marion, there was and still is a tendency in western philosophy and Christian theology to equate the God of Scriptures with the “God” of metaphysics. He agrees with Nietzsche and Heidegger that metaphysics find it impossible to think otherness and that the God of Scriptures, who acts, moves, speaks and emotes in different ways in history, cannot be reconciled with the abstract, motionless categories of being and Being. Marion claims that God is without being, and must be “thought” otherwise than being (1991b:xx). This article is a critical examination of Marion’s claim that there are phenomena like the icon and love that can be received, while exceeding being and thought, making it possible to contextualize theology as a non-metaphysical possibility. The critical question that Marion must answer to accomplish his purpose is: can he truly overcome metaphysics or is he just affirming that which he criticizes?

Metaphysics, otherness and phenomenology

Marion sees the reinterpretation of Husserl’s and Heidegger’s phenomenology⁴ as a possible answer to the problems of the metaphysical tradition⁵ which especially Nietzsche, unmasked violently, at the end of the nineteenth century (Horner 2005:36). It is Heidegger who in the twentieth century uncovers the inadequacy of metaphysical thinking of being as substance (Aristotle), as cause (Aquinas), and as presence (Husserl). Heidegger writes against a philosophy which asserts the dominance of an apparently objective, theoretical understanding of reality, the isolation of the subject, and the hardening of things and relationships into what can be manipulated and controlled (Horner 2005:36). The phenomenological method that Heidegger

both metaphysical structures and moments of resistance to these structures. Descartes captures God in metaphysics in the sense of onto-theo-logy, that is the systematic explanation of the totality of beings in terms of their common being (onto-logy) and the supreme being (theo-logy) which grounds them in its own ground (*causa sui*). But according to Marion, Descartes also felt himself addressed by an Other and in the idea of the Infinite opens a space for the non-metaphysical God.

3 See for instance: *The Idol and Distance* (1977, 1981, 2001); *God Without Being* (1982; 1991b); *Prolegomena to Charity* (1986, 2002c); *The Crossing of the Visible* (1991, 1996, 2004b); *The Erotic Phenomenon: Six Meditations* (2006).

4 While Marion’s phenomenological interest are foreshadowed in many of his earlier texts, they are represented most systematically in his phenomenological trilogy: *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger and Phenomenology* (1998b), *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, (2002a) and *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena* (2002b).

5 To give a plausible overview of the concept “metaphysics” lies outside the scope of this article. Metaphysics has to do with the question of “what is” and knowledge of “what is” and in terms of theology the question is how the God of the Bible is related to “what is”. Marion (2008:49-51) is very critical of Thomas Aquinas who “distinguishes between general being and the prime being, separated from matter” and Francisco Suarez, who later defines metaphysics as the science who “abstracts from sensible things and material things . . . , and it contemplates, on the one hand, the things that are divine and separated from matter and, on the other hand, the common reason of being, which both can exist without matter”. From this two definitions of metaphysics a dualistic concept of “being” developed, whereby metaphysics was subdivided into “being in general” and “prime being” or what we recognize as the metaphysical category of Being. This duality of “being” provides the basis for the subdivision of metaphysics into general and special. It was accepted that these dual modes of being relate to each other separated from matter such that abstract qualities are attributed to material things or in themselves viewed as substances. It was further accepted that knowledge of “prime being” is grounded in reason’s ability to recognize abstract qualities within “beings in general” and to extrapolate them to “prime being”. In the history of metaphysics this extrapolated concept of “prime being” was equated with “God” or the Divine such that God is viewed as Ultimate Being. Lastly, “prime Being” and being in general constitute a relationship of ground, cause or reason such that being in general is explained solely in terms of prime being (Foutz 1999:1). For Marion, metaphysics reached its end positively with Hegel and negatively with Nietzsche (2008:50).

inherits and then develops, seeks to understand what it means to be situated always and already as part of the world. Heidegger takes as his point of departure the question of being, and to elaborate a way of thinking that is otherwise than being. Heidegger teaches us that the principle failure of philosophy has been its inability to think “ontological difference”, the difference between being (*das Sein*) and beings (*das Seiende*). In obscuring this difference, metaphysics has thought being as the ground or cause of beings (Marion 1991b:4-45).

The flip side of the problems of metaphysics is the question of how to think otherness. Metaphysics seeks to find what belongs to another order, but it actually found that order with reference to itself. In its attempt to think its own ground, usually God or the self, it is confronted by falseness, since the god it invokes and the self it names are nothing more than empty projections of the will (Horner 2005:46). Marion can be situated in the context of the inadequacy of metaphysics and the desire to find a way for otherness to have meaning precisely as other. Thus, the problem of how to think otherness without turning it to more of the same is for Marion relevant to theology and phenomenology. The possible signification of otherness for him means the thinking of a God who can be thought as so far as revealed⁶ and an Other who can reveal her or himself as lover.

Marion agrees with Heidegger’s account of the forgetting of ontological difference in metaphysics and his critique of onto-theology, where being is tend to be thought in terms of beings, and as the grounds of being, the highest being. For Heidegger being is not God – a thesis with which Marion readily agrees (Marion 1991b:33-37). In *In God Without Being*, Marion explains Heidegger’s distinction between theology and theiology to give shape to his own understanding of metaphysics, theology and phenomenology. Theology, for Heidegger is a matter of faith, whereas theiology is a philosophical undertaking. The task of theiology is to obtain insight into the divine, into Dasein, into prime Being through philosophical reflection, explanation and definition. These goals stand in stark opposition to faith, and as such, could not possibly belong to theology. Heidegger never conceptually equates God with Being nor even employ the term Being in discussions of God. This unwillingness derives from what he sees as a direct opposition of philosophical definition to faith (Marion 1991b:65).

While maintaining Heidegger’s critique of theiology, Marion claims that Heidegger’s positive thesis, regarding theology, is inadequate. While Heidegger’s critique helps to explore the idolatry of metaphysics, in Marion’s view the same idolatry emerges yet again in Heidegger’s work. Marion’s charge against Heidegger is that he cannot but think God as a being and that he has therefore settled for an idol. For Marion, the question is whether or not God can only be thought within the confines of being: “Undoubtedly, if God is, he is a being; but does God have to be?” (Marion 1991b:44). In addition to the two paths showed by Heidegger, namely theiology and theology as faith, Marion suggests and pursues a third way, theology without reference to being, while staying within the confines of phenomenology.

In Marion’s phenomenology it is the primacy of the “I” and the promotion of the horizon that are put into question (2002a:179-234). For Marion, phenomena are possible that are not reducible to the “I” of consciousness. It is possible that phenomena might give itself absolutely without regard for the anterior condition of the horizon that is a precondition for knowledge in the work of Husserl and later Heidegger.⁷ Marion’s work is also about theology, because he

6 Marion is careful to state what he is doing is phenomenology and not theology. In Marion, the first examples of saturated phenomena are aesthetic (painting) and philosophical (Plato’s Good beyond being and Descartes’ idea of infinity). Religious phenomena of revelation, comes up as one phenomenon in a list that includes these others. Marion’s discussion of revelation belongs not to proper theological considerations but to the considerations of the various modes of phenomenology (Marion 2002a:199-245).

7 See also the concept of “saturated phenomena” in Marion’s book: *In excess: Studies of Saturated*

critically re-examines the principles of phenomenology in such a way that religious phenomena might appear within the framework of phenomenology. It can be said that religious phenomena represent a trail to phenomenology, because religious phenomena mark a limit beyond which previously phenomenology had feared to tread (Marion 2002a:242). For Marion, theology constantly opens onto what exceeds being and thought. The “object” of theology can only be recognised, rather than cognised, received rather than appropriated. For Marion, God gives God self to contemplation in the icon and is only to be known as and through love, more particularly as a gift of love.

I would like to outline two points that seem essential to understand how Marion thinks otherness within the limits of the phenomenological tradition that he received from Husserl. First, phenomenology could be defined broadly as the appearing that remains in and for consciousness when all openness to transcendence has been shut down or closed by reduction. Phenomenology is, in short, the field of immanence (Janicaud 2000:35). The challenge for Marion is to show how it is possible to respect the criteria of phenomenology and stay in the field of immanence, while talking about God and transcendence. In other words, Marion must try to recover the meaning of transcendence in immanence (Kosky & Carlson 2000:114-115).

The second problem Marion faces has to do with knowing, or the constituting ego. For Husserl it is ultimately the ego whose activity makes phenomena appear. Phenomena appear within the limits of what can be experienced by an ego or I. The challenge for Marion is that, if every phenomenon is to be reduced to the constituting I or ego, then absolute irreducible or unconditional phenomena are excluded at the outset. Since it is precisely what Marion claims, it would seem that the religious phenomenon cannot appear – unless there is a new understanding of subjectivity (Kosky & Carlson 2000:115-116). In the next few pages it will become clear how Marion challenges the primacy of the ego’s intentional activity in favour of a reversed intentionality, where the ego finds itself subject to, not the subject of a gaze. For Marion, the “I” no longer precede the phenomena that it constitutes, but instead are called into being or born as the one who receives or suffers this intentionality.

The icon and idol

Marion uses the icon as a phenomenon that interrupts consciousness and exceeds thought. He started to develop the theme: icon versus idol, in his book *The Idol and Distance* and it re-appears constantly over decades in his articles and books. Here, the idol is not characterised as the personification of its god, but as the image by means of which the worshiper is referred only to the human experience of divinity (2001:19-22). While the idol is about preserving the proximity of the divine, the icon manifests distance.⁸ In *God without Being*, Marion’s understanding of how idols and icons functions, is deepened. Here he perceives that the same object can function as idol or icon (Marion 1991b:8-9). An idol is not an illusion: it consists precisely in being seen,

Phenomena (2002b). Saturated phenomena are phenomena that disrupt the fulfilment of the intentional aim in intuition, not because intuition is lacking but because it is excessive (2002b:112).

⁸ Distance is the theological motif most consistently used in Marion’s work. Robyn Horner in his book, *Jean-Luc Marion: a Theological Introduction* (2005:51), traces the concept of distance in Marion’s work back to the influence of Hans Urs von Balthasar. Distance for Marion is what enables proximity. Infinite space promotes, at the same time the greatest intimacy. Divinity is manifested only in the distance of withdrawal. The Paschal mystery shows Christ’s divinity in two such ways: on the Cross, the distance of withdrawal is seen as a complete distinction from the Father; and in the Resurrection, the distance is seen in his complete unity with the Father. For the disciples this means that manifestation always coincides with disappearance (Marion 2001:118-120). In Marion’s thought the very characteristic of excessiveness is that it both refers us to God in distance and simultaneously forbid absolute reference (Marion 2001:198).

in becoming an object of knowledge. The idol depends on the gaze that it satisfies. An object becomes an idol in the consideration of the gaze. The intention of the gaze aims at the divine, but it is stopped there. In the face of the idol, what Marion calls “the first visible”, the gaze allows itself to be filled. At the same time the gaze discovers its own limit (Marion 1991b:11-12). The gaze cannot be critical, but rests in the idol, incapable to go beyond it. In the idol we see the divine, but only according to the measure of our own gaze (Marion1991b:13-14).

The idol divides the invisible into the part which is reduced to the visible and another part which is invisible due to gaze’s fixation on the idol. This portion of the invisible remains invisible. “The icon does not result from a vision but provokes one” (Marion 1991b:17). Contrary to the idol, the icon allows the visible to become saturated by the invisible, without the invisible being reduced to the visible. The invisible is unenvisageable⁹ and is only represented in the visible insofar as the visible refers to what is other than itself. The icon attempts to render visible the invisible as such, and thus, strictly speaking, shows nothing (Marion 1991b:18). It retrains the gaze to proceed beyond the visible into an infinity whereby something new of the invisible is encountered. The icon’s gaze never rests or settles on the icon, but returns upon the visible into a gaze of the infinite.

How can the invisible become visible in the icon at all? Marion distinguishes between God’s presence as substantial (referring to the Greek *ousia*, substance, which he associates with metaphysics) and God’s presence as personal (using the Greek *hupostasis* or the Latin *persona*). *Hupostasis* does not imply a substantial presence for him (1991b:19). He defines the icon like the idol, in terms of the gaze, but is here concerned with the gaze of the invisible rather than with the gaze of the human. The icon shows us a face that opens on to the infinite (Marion 1991b:19). “In the idol, the gaze of man is frozen in its mirror; in the icon the gaze of man is lost in the invisible gaze that envisages him” (Marion 1991b:19). For Marion the icon functions as a locus for a significant reversal. What is made visible in the icon is the gaze of the invisible other, who looks at my gaze, or whose look crosses my gaze (Marion 1991b:19). The contemplation of the icon is thus an experience of a type of kenosis where looking at the idol reinforces the identity of the ego, coming before the icon empties the ego of its ability to control, to understand, to manipulate, to grasp.

In his book, *The Crossing of the Visible* (2004b) Christ is for Marion the supreme icon of visibility that refers to invisibility:

Christ offers an icon to the regard only in manifesting a face, that is to say a look, itself invisible. It is therefore a matter, in the first place, of a crossing of regards, as it is with lovers; I look, with my invisible look, at an invisible look that envisages me; in the icon, in effect, it is not so much me who sees a spectacle as much as a other regard that sustains mine, confronts it, and eventually, overwhelms it. But Christ does not only offer to my regard to see and to be seen by his regard; if he demands from me a love, it is not a love for him, but for his Father ... But since the Father remains invisible, how am I able to see the Father in seeing Christ? (2004b:103).

For Marion, Christ does not offer an image of the invisible, but the face of the invisible itself (Horner 2001:168). The iconic image does not concern the visible or the aesthetic, but the crossing of two regards. The one who prays before the icon is not drawn to an image but by the origin of the other’s regard. The iconic image breaks with the usual understanding of the image (2004b:106-108). Images, that qualify as icons are those where the visible renounces itself (2004b:109). It is in this way that Christ functions as icon to manifest the glory of the Father. Although Christ is the visible icon of God, God remains invisible. In Christ we see not God’s face, as the face of Christ, but the trace of God passing in the face of Christ (2004b:110).

9 The French word “invisible” signifies that at which one cannot aim (Marion 1991b:18).

Love – threshold of the [im-]possible

For Marion, concepts also act as idols and icons, according to the intention and gaze with which they are beheld (1991b:22-24). Just as the idol capture a small portion of the divine while limiting the gaze to itself, so all theological names for “God” that are supposed to reveal God, do so at the expense of limiting the horizon of the gazer’s ability to grasp God. For Marion it is not a question of using a concept to determine an essence of God, but of finding an iconic concept to contemplate the divine intention of the invisible God. The concept that Marion finds in Scripture which serves as both name and intention, is love. For Marion God’s first name is love (not being).

It is possible to say that love is for Marion the threshold where the impossibility of knowing the “unsayable” and “unrepresentable” God becomes a possibility (Marion 2007b:25)¹⁰. How is this possible impossibility to be conceptualized? For Marion the question of God survives the impossibility of God. Reason requires that we give a rational account of the paradox how the impossible endures as a possibility. For Marion, the only possible pathway to God emerges in, and goes through the impossible (Veldsman 2011:5). What is impossible for us is possible for God. Marion (2007b:28) captures the inversion of the possible and the impossible with the term the “[im-] possible”. This threshold – that is, the conversion of the impossible into the possible for God is for Marion crossed by love. Love can free us from the idolatry of God as Being, because love does not suffer from the unthinkable or from the absence of conditions, but rather is reinforced by these absences. Because God loves without condition, limit or restriction, it is not fulfilled through being conceptualized, named or comprehended, but rather is fulfilled in giving of itself. In being fulfilled simply in giving itself, love cannot be frustrated by ignorance or stopped through its refusal. Humanity necessarily responds to this divine love, since it is given without limit and condition. Humanity has no alternative but to will to receive or refuse such love (Foutz 1999:4).

For Marion love provides a way beyond metaphysics. In *On Descartes’ Metaphysical Prism* (1999:305) and *God Without Being* (1991:117) he makes use of the work of Pascal to show how love goes beyond thought, but still bears a relationship with thought. Marion quotes Pascal: “When speaking of things human, we say that we should know them before loving them – a saying that has become proverbial. Yet the saints, on the contrary, when speaking of things divine, say that we should love them in order to know them, and that we enter into truth only through charity.” For Marion love involves a movement of the heart or will and provides access to a new kind of knowing. Love is a hermeneutical principle that opens onto a new world. It is not so much to know a new object, as to know according to a new condition (1999:313). But love is more than a condition or orientation of looking at the world. Love actually allows new phenomena to be seen. “... new phenomena appear among the things of this world to an eye that is initiated in charity ...” (Marion in Horner 2005:68).

In *God Without Being*, it is love that enables us to go beyond not only metaphysics, but also beyond ontological difference.¹¹ Here love is thought in terms of the logic of the gift. In response

10 See how Systematic Theologian, Danie Veldsman (2011:1-11) has integrated the paradox of the possible impossibility in Marion’s understanding of the icon in his reading of the Psalms as a threshold of the impossible possibility for speaking about God, but also on the return of the subject of what he calls with Graham Ward, the broadened horizon of the unsayable and unrepresentable.

11 Not only does Scripture know nothing of ontological difference and the question of Being, it speaks about being, no-being and beingness in search of a reference which is indifferent to the ontological difference of Heidegger. Marion examines Romans 4:17; 1 Corinthians 1:28 and Luke 15:12-32 to show the love of God as indifferent to ontological difference. Romans 4:1, according to Apostle Paul Abraham is made “the father of us all, as it is written, ‘I have made you the father of many nations, facing Him in whom he believed, the God who gives to the dead and who calls the non-beings as beings, *kalountos ta mē onta hōs onta*. Here we are told that the God in whom Abraham believed is He who gives life to the

to objections to *God Without Being*, Marion claims that to think God without being does not imply being condemned to thinking without reason. Marion argues that it is necessary to think according to the logic of the gift that precedes being, that is, according to a different reason, but not without reason. Marion suggests that we develop a new way of seeing. Following an analogous path of Heidegger in *Being and Time*, Marion observes that particular moods offer us different perspectives on the meaning of the world. From the perspective of boredom or melancholy the world strikes us as completely meaningless or vain (1991b:108). The contrary mood of this is love, for love is the complete investment in meaning, whereas boredom and melancholy open upon a complete absence of meaning. It is possible to go beyond metaphysics by learning to see the world from the perspective of infinite love.

In the essay: "The Intentionality of love" in his book *Prolegomena to Charity* (2002c) we find a link between Marion's phenomenology of the other person and his theology of the icon (2002c:103). Asking how it is that I can experience the other as other, Marion moves away from Husserl where the other is reached only at the end of an intentionality of my consciousness. In Husserl's thought, otherness completes intentionality, without transgressing it or putting it into question. The other arises as constituted by the ego, submitting the other as an object to my consciousness. "To think the other as subject one must give up seeing the other as subject (2002c:79)." The other must remain invisible to offer himself to the possibility of love. For Marion, as for Lévinas, the intentionality of love depends not on seeing the other and thereby reducing the other to the scope of my own gaze, but on feeling the weight of the others unsubstitutable gaze as it crosses my intentional aim.¹² The weight of the other is experienced as an always-prior injunction that exposes and obliges me. "The other as other, irreducible to my intention, can never be seen by definition" (2002c:81).

This paradox is confirmed for Marion in the immediate experience of the exchanged gaze. If I want truly to gaze on the other I must "faced up" to the eyes, and directly in their centre – the pupil which for Marion is an infinite black hole (2002c:81). "Even for a gaze aiming objectively, an irremediable denial of the object; here, for the first time, in the very midst of the visible, there is nothing to see, except an invisible and untargetable (*invisible*) void (2002c:81). To love, for Marion, would thus be defined as seeing the definitively invisible aim of my gaze exposed by the aim of another invisible gaze. The two gazes, invisible forever, expose themselves each to the other in the crossing of their reciprocal aims. Loving no longer consists in seeing or being seen, nor in desiring or desire, but in experiencing the crossing of the gazes within (2002c:87). The interlocking of the two gazes is the point at which the lovers share a common lived experience (2002c:89). This can occur only if each of the lovers is prepared to surrender the ego, which involves the surrender of intentionality.

While Marion claims that love is not a type of intentionality, he maintains that it is a type

dead and calls the non-beings into being. The question of what Paul here intends with the rather strange notion of "calling non-beings as beings" is compared by Marion to Aristotle's notion of what would be required for the extreme form of change whereby the nonexistent (unfinished *ousia*) to the existent (finished *ousia*). Whereas Aristotle himself doubted that such a transition was in fact possible, Paul here declares it possible in reference to God. It is not the case that Paul here grasps the form of transition which Aristotle could not do, but rather that Paul attributes by faith a seeming impossibility to God (Marion 1991b:86-88).

12 Horner (2005:70) argues that Marion differs from Lévinas in four ways: firstly, he tries to argue for the specificity of the other, whereas Lévinas' other has been seen to resist specification. Marion also differs from Lévinas in that, while the other puts the "I" into question, the relationship is not entirely asymmetrical as it is in Lévinas. Marion further notes that the injunction does not come from the other towards me. It actually arises in me. Finally, he differs from Lévinas in maintaining that love ultimately exceeds intentionality.

of knowing. It is knowing that does not have an object, yet it involves a moment of personal recognition. The problem with Marion's argument is if knowing the other, and knowing God depends on a decision in advance to recognise the other as other, which is confirmed in the act of loving the other, then knowledge of God is based on nothing more than my will to believe that God gives God self to me in love. As Horner (2005:71) puts it: "But perhaps this is precisely the issue. The choice for God involves, as Marion admits, a type of madness: while the risk may be subsequently confirmed in an experience of love, it will never be confirmed in any absolute sense, and the *aporia* remains." Marion has no other choice than to admit that metaphysics can only be unsettled by faith, a faith that is solely characterized in terms of a leap.

CONCLUSION

Marion argues that metaphysics is deficient because it cannot think what matters. What matters is God as love, and being loved by the other. The question is if Marion can really think God and the other person otherwise? It is clear that he constantly associates the knowing (seeing) of the Other/other with the will (loving) rather than with reason. If the recognition of the other becomes possible through my decision, Marion is actually repeating the metaphysical position which he wants to overcome.

Given the critique above, I still think Marion helps theology to see that the rationality of western metaphysics is not a reliable tool for theology. Metaphysics cannot produce what it claims it can. Marion helps us to understand that reason suffers two limitations that are linked to each other and can become real dangers in our so-called secular societies. To reduce all experience to objectifiable phenomena and to ignore the possible excess of otherness in and around us, can lead to the devaluation of all values and in the end, nihilism.

Firstly, in his critique of modern metaphysics Marion unmasks the proud ego of modern metaphysics and the limits of what the "I" can know. The "I" know with certainty because it remembers from experience only what it can keep of it, abandoning all of the rest as unknowable. The problem is that it is only phenomena of quantity and exteriority that can be grasped in this way (Marion 2008:149). Alternatively, Marion wants to open our eyes to what is closest to us: the knowledge of pain and pleasure, death and birth, hunger and thirst, sleep and fatigue, but also hatred and love, communion and division, justice and violence. These are phenomena that no one can pretend to ignore but nevertheless, no one can conceive them by the rationality of objects. Non-objective phenomena like the idol, which fascinates the gaze while offending it; the icon that is saturated with the invisible, the face of the other who imposes respect upon me, are phenomena that the "I" not simply constitute, to the contrary they are phenomena that make me and unmask me. It surpasses my objectifying rationality and points to a "greater reason".

The second difficulty that phenomenology and theology (faith) have to confront more urgently than objectivity is linked to nihilism. For Marion today it is no longer a question of saving reason from superstition, but saving it from its own dangers. "It is no longer a matter of giving reason to all things, but of giving reason for rationality" (2008:151). Rationality needs faith to be saved from nihilism. Why? Marion would answer that nihilism has to do with the disarming question: "What's the use?" Nihilism asks why is the humanity of humans, the naturalness of nature, the justice of the polis and the truth of knowledge, significant? Why not their opposites, why not the dehumanization of humans to improve humanity, why not the systematic sapping of nature to develop the economy, why not injustice to make society more efficient, why not the absolute empire of information-distraction to escape the constraints of the truth? (Marion 2008:151). These counter-possibilities to construct life are for Marion no longer phantoms or

predictions, since the sole programme of ideologies that dominated history since the beginning of the last century, have been for him to put them into effect.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Kosky, JL. & Carlson, TA. 2000. "The Phenomenology of religion: new possibilities for philosophy and religion." In *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate*. New York: Fordham University Press. pp. 107-120.
- Foutz, S.D. 1999. Postmetaphysic Theology: a case study – Jean Luc Marion. *Quidlibet Journal*. Vol. 1 (3); pp. 2-11.
- Janicaud, D. 2000. Contours of the Turn. In: *Phenomenology and the Theological Turn: The French Debate*: Kosky, JL. & Carlson, TA (eds.). New York: Fordham University Press. pp. 18-35.
- Horner, R. 2001. *Rethinking God as Gift. Marion, Derrida and the Limits of Phenomenology*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Horner, R. 2005. *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*, Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Marion, JL. 1991a. *Cartesian Questions: Method and Metaphysics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Marion, JL. 1991b. *God Without Being*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Marion, JL. 1998. *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger and Phenomenology*, Evanston, EL: Northwestern University Press.
- Marion, JL. 1999. *On Descartes' Metaphysical Prism: The Constitution and the Limits of Onto-theo-logy in Cartesian Thought*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Marion, JL. 2001. *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Marion, JL. 2002a. *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Marion, JL. 2002b. *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, New York: Fordham University Press.
- Marion, JL. 2002c. *Prolegomena to Charity*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Marion, JL. 2004a. *Descartes' Grey Ontology: Cartesian Science and Aristotelian Thought in the Regulae*. South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press.
- Marion, JL. 2004b. *The Crossing of the Visible*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Marion, JL. 2006. *The Erotic Phenomenon: Six Meditations*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Marion, JL. 2007. *On the Ego and on God*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Marion, JL. 2007b. The impossible for Man-God. In: Caputo, JD & Scanlon, M J (eds). *Transcendence and Beyond. A Postmodern Inquiry*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Marion, JL. 2008. *The Visible and the Revealed*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Veldsman, DP. 2011. Reflective notes from a phenomenological perspective on the iconic significance of the Psalms as literary genre for speaking about God (*forthcoming*). *HTS*. pp. 1-11.

KEY WORDS

Jean Luc Marion
Theology as a non-metaphysical possibility
Phenomenology and Otherness
Icon and idol
Love - threshold of the [im]-possible

KONTAKBESONDERHEDE

Dr Auke Compaan,
11de straat 44,
Menlopark,
0081 PRETORIA
E-posadres: auke@skuilkrans.co.za