Existential and Phenomenological Conceptions of the Relationship Between Philosophy and Theology

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Another Name for Liberty: Revelation, ‘Objectivity,’ and Intellectual Freedom in Barth and Marion

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Abstract: Karl Barth’s and Jean-Luc Marion’s theories of revelation, though prominent and popular, are often criticized by both theologians and philosophers for effacing the human subject’s epistemic integrity. I argue here that, in fact, both Barth and Marion appeal to revelation in an attempt to respond to a tendency within philosophy to coerce thought. Philosophy, when it claims to be able to access a universal, absolute truth within history, degenerates into ideology. By making conceptually possible some ‘evental’ phenomena that always evade *a priori* epistemic conditions, Barth’s and Marion’s theories of revelation relativize all philosophical knowledge, rendering any ideological claim to absolute truth impossible. The difference between their two theories, then, lies in how they understand the relationship between philosophy and theology. For Barth, philosophy’s attempts to make itself absolute is a produce of sinful human vanity; its corrective is thus an authentic revealed theology, which Barth articulates in Christian, dogmatic terms. Marion, on the other hand, equipped with Heidegger’s critique of ontotheology, highlights one specific kind of philosophizing—metaphysics—as generative of ideology. To counter metaphysics, Marion draws heavily on Barth’s account of revelation but secularizes it, reinterpreting the ‘event’ as the saturated phenomenon. Revelation’s unpredictability is thus preserved within Marion’s philosophy, but is no longer restricted to the appearing of God. Both understandings of revelation achieve the same epistemological result, however. Reality can never be rendered transparent to thought; within history, all truth is provisional. A concept of revelation drawn originally from Christian theology thus, counterintuitively, is what secures philosophy’s right to challenge and critique the pre-given, a hermeneutic freedom I suggest is the meaning of *sola scriptura*.

Keywords: revelation; freedom; Karl Barth; Jean-Luc Marion; sola scriptura; objectivity; phenomenology; philosophy; theology; saturated phenomenon; natural theology; liberal theology; ontotheology; ideology; critique

How could theology be *freer* than philosophy? This question and its associated epistemic anxieties, despite its central role in the now decades-long debate over the ‘(re)turn to religion’ in the contemporary humanities—and of which the “theological turn”¹ in phenomenology is just one especially popular outcrop—arises from an aporia. How is it possible, today no less than over the course of the past century, that philosophy, supposedly the mighty fortress from which critique does battle with all modes of deceit, succumbs time after time to a totalitarianism of thought, transmuting itself into the very monolith of unimpeachable *doxa* it was meant to topple? Here the problem of Heidegger is far from the only example, although the former’s

¹ See Janicaud, “The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology.”

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insistence on methodological atheism,² allegedly pursued for the very sake of intellectual independence, helpfully leads us to that “borderland”³ between philosophy and theology where this question of freedom is most poignantly raised. Take, for example, Neo-Thomism’s recent and dramatic resurgence in Catholic intellectual circles: natural law, a universal rational framework accessible *sans* special revelation, becomes almost straightaway the ground zero for an explicitly anti-democratic politics, in which Catholic monarchs would give “error no rights”⁴ and reunify state and church. One may accuse Marxism, as Levinas did,⁵ of the same error. Objective, theoretical rationality—dialectical materialism’s so-called ‘science’—accesses, whether through the proletarians’ or the vanguard party’s mediation, an absolute truth of history, which can then be imposed, by force if needed, both materially and intellectually.

Philosophical rationality thus replaces the primal, irrational myth’s unimpeachable totality—‘tradition’—only in its content, leaving in place the same self-certainty that made the former unfree.⁶ That philosophy’s self-certainty is mediate rather than immediate, as Hegel said, does of course make a difference, as there is now at least a temporal gap between the thinking subject and absolute truth within which (time) a certain agonism between these poles becomes possible. *De facto*, however, the subject often retains little right to conscientious objection in the face of philosophical truth. If theorized at all, the conscience becomes but a mechanism for internalizing an in principle exterior and pre-given truth—as exemplified, say, in the Catholic doctrine of the conscience, whereby the conscience allows us to interpret and apply the moral law in particular situations, but only if “formed”⁷: that is, already conformed to the universal moral law tradition promulgates. Reason posits the subject, in other words, as the legitimator of truth, but if and only if she has already acceded to that truth in advance.

At first (and even second) glance, it is not clear how theology allows us to surmount this aporia; at worst, it would just regress past it, back into myth’s immediacy. This would hold all the more for ‘strong’ theologies of revelation, i.e., theologies which understand God’s self-communication within creation and history as utterly ‘top-down’ and gratuitous, inaccessible to natural or philosophical rationality. For if, as Anders Nygren famously put it, “there is no way of man to God, only a way of God to man”⁸—or if, as that great “hater of philosophy”⁹ proclaimed, in violent opposition to Rome’s synthesis of philosophy with *sacra doctrina*, that the Gospel imparts “a stupid doctrine (*stulta doctrina*)” which “reason...does not understand (*ratio non intelligit*)”¹⁰—the subject’s epistemic integrity seems more, and not less, imperiled. This is the widespread critique leveled from all sides today against two of the ‘strongest’ contemporary theorists of revelation—Karl Barth and Jean-Luc Marion.

² Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, 9 ff.

³ See Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon*.

⁴ This phrase does not literally appear in the document to which it is typically traced, Pius IX’s 1864 *Syllabus Errorum*. John Courtney Murray helpfully describes this concept’s meaning for the integralist imagination, however, in “Religious Freedom”, 134: “The theory of religious tolerance takes its start from the statement, considered to be axiomatic, that error has no rights, that only the truth has rights and exclusive rights. From this axiom a juridical theory is deduced, which distinguishes between ‘thesis’ and ‘hypothesis.’ The thesis asserts that Catholicism, *per se* and in principle, should be established as the one ‘religion of the state,’ since it is the one true religion. Given the institution of establishment, it follows by logical and juridical consequence that no other religion, *per se* and in principle, can be allowed public existence or action within the state (which normally, in this theory, is considered to be identical and co-extensive with society). Error has no rights. Therefore error is to be suppressed whenever and wherever possible; intolerance is the rule.”

⁵ Levinas, “God and Onto-Theo-Logos”, 161.

⁶ For the classic statement of this problem, see Horkheimer and Adorno, “The Concept of Enlightenment.”

⁷ See, for example, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §§ 1782-1792: “Man has the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as personally make moral decisions. He must not be forced to act contrary to his conscience.” But, at the same time, “[c]onscience must be informed and moral judgments enlightened.” Thus, “rejection of the Church’s authority and her teaching” is a “source of error...of judgment in moral conduct.” Moral freedom, in other words, is dependent on tradition; conscience only mediates the pre-given.

⁸ Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 112.

⁹ Büttgen, *Luther et la philosophie*, 11.

¹⁰ Luther, *Annotiones in Epistolam Pauli ad Galatas* (1535), 3, v. 6 (LW 26, 228 = WA 40¹, 361). All original sources from Luther are cited using the two main scholarly editions, the English-language American edition *Luther’s Works* (LW) and the original-language Weimar edition *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (WA) using the format (vol., pg.). I have, where needed, slightly modified the American edition’s translation of the Latin text.

1 “A theology of docile abandon”? The problem of revelation and freedom

We can trace this critique, in regard to Barth, at least as far back as Erich Przywara’s 1923 review of the (second, 1921) *Römerbrief*, wherein Przywara, opening a lasting debate between the two men, accuses Barth of having, in his insistence on a ‘wholly other’ God, “crossed out...the relationship between God and humanity.”¹¹ If there is no creaturely, ‘natural’ *capacitas* always already able to receive God’s self-revelation (a proto-revelation, says Rahner), how is revelation not just an obliteration of human freedom to cooperate with God’s salvific mission? Recent scholars have sensed this critique’s implications for the kind of intellectual freedom needed for doctrinal development, too. As feminist readers of Barth have noted, for example, if “dogmatic theology answer[s] only to the call of Jesus Christ, heard in the words of Scripture,” then “preoccupation with what is called ‘the problem of language’ or the feminist critique of ‘masculine God-talk’”¹² appears illegitimate. The real thrust of this accusation is not so much against the content of Barth’s theological views on specific controversies (such as women’s role in the church), but against the fact that his method, because it insists on a too-radical rupture between God and humanity, cannot integrate humans’ experiences—including their experiences as rational, philosophical, but also politically and socially embedded beings—into its account of God’s relationship with humanity. Because he “dissolv[es] the classical synthesis between faith and reason, collapsing all theological understanding into an exercise of faith,”¹³ Barth remains “apolitical,” “naïve,”¹⁴ and useless for any theology—such as a liberation or contextual theology—that wishes to grant marginalized persons’ or communities’ voices conceptual legitimacy.

The same charge is leveled at Marion’s theology of revelation, and that by his earliest readers like Janicaud, who detected at the very outset of Marion’s phenomenological—and thus supposedly strictly philosophical—project something “destined to lay the foundation platform available for a higher edifice.”¹⁵ The relationship between philosophy and theology under consideration here is more complex than in Barth, however. As Janicaud concedes, Marion’s third reduction, to ‘givenness’—the operation which, from *Reduction and Givenness* onward, makes the saturated phenomenon and, with it, revelation, philosophically possible—remains just that: a philosophical, not theological, move. Yet the problem is the same as in Barth: Marion, to accommodate the excess of the ‘call of the given’ over objectivity and comprehensibility,¹⁶ denudes the human subject of epistemic integrity. “[T]he qualifying terms, in any case, are neither human nor finite: pure, absolute, unconditioned—such is this call. It addresses itself, it is true, to a reader, to an interlocutor... But [this] interlocutor is in his or her turn reduced to his or her pure form, to the interlocuted ‘as such.’”¹⁷ Janicaud’s earlier critique of Levinas thus applies to Marion as well. “The reader, confronted by the blade of the absolute, finds him- or herself in the position of a catechumen who has no other choice than to penetrate the holy words and lofty dogmas... All is acquired and imposed from the outset, and this all is no little thing: nothing less than the God of the biblical tradition.”¹⁸

While Janicaud laments this reentry of God into philosophy for philosophical reasons—phenomenology, as a critical Enlightenment project, must remain secular—theological critics of Marion raise similar concerns. If God’s self-revelation, as a saturated phenomenon, defies and confutes what we ordinarily call

11 Przywara, “Gott in uns oder Gott über uns?”, 350.

12 Sonderegger, “Barth and feminism”, 259.

13 Rose, “Karl Barth’s failure”.

14 Sonderegger, “Barth and feminism,” 259.

15 Janicaud, “The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology,” 66.

16 Throughout this paper, I will use the term “objectivity” in Barth’s sense, to denote a content (i.e. of revelation) that does not need to accord with the finite subject’s natural constitution. Marion often uses the term “objectivity” in a distinct, phenomenological sense to denote the quality of any phenomenon that appears as a Husserlian object – that is, a phenomenon whose intuition (givenness) adequates its intention (signification). When Marion uses this term, I will render it “objectivity” to distinguish it from my broader use of “objectivity.” See also n. 113, below.

17 Janicaud, “The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology,” 63.

18 Ibid., 27.

rationality—which is why, precisely, the rational, metaphysical 'God' is an idol—then how does theological discourse not become unthinking prostration before revelation's self-professed postmen? John Caputo puts it well, albeit forcefully:

Marion has done very little to overcome paganism and metaphysics... Indeed, I would say that he has done a great deal to reinstate it, that this theology of docile abandon to the *Logos* lends onto-theo-political power a helping hand in its most violent form. It does indeed have a great deal to do with how not to speak, with theological silence, namely, with silencing Dutch and Latin American theologians; it has a great deal to say about how not to speak about God, namely, in disagreement with the bishop. God may evidently do without being, but not without the bishop.¹⁹

As with Barth, then, the charge against Marion is that his attempt to free theology from metaphysical strictures, far from liberating thought, resurrects fideism. Because philosophy is the medium in which lived human experience matures and then musters a critique against all that is pre-given it, theology's rejection of philosophy in the name of God's sovereignty only fortifies the "onto-theo-politics"²⁰ it wrongly claims to besiege.

We thus find ourselves in a difficult position, but not just because theology would offer no respite from philosophy's totalizing temptations, but also because the fideistic critique falls short of explaining Barth's and Marion's consistent commitments to intellectual freedom. The difficulty is more manifest in Barth's case. If the theologian of Basel ignores human experience and historicity in favor of unbending dogmatics, what does he mean when he writes—in the very text in which his view of God's distance is most pronounced!—that "on the thither side of clarity and thingliness (*jenseits aller Anschaulichkeit und Dinglichkeit*), on the thither side everything in the law of which those who possess it approve—the 'ethical kernel,' the 'idealistic background,' the 'religious feeling'—beyond all that is valued in European culture—'conduct,' 'poise,' 'race,' 'personality,' 'delicacy of taste,' 'spirituality,' 'force of character'—beyond all these things is set that which men have to lay before God,"²¹ that "[t]he theocratic dream comes abruptly to an end...when we discover that it is the Devil who approaches Jesus and offers Him all the kingdoms of this world"²²? What then does he speak of at the end of his life in Chicago, where he proclaims that, circumstances permitting, he "would try and elaborate a theology of freedom... Of that freedom to which the Son frees us, and which as his gift, is the only real human freedom"²³?

The charge of fideism is likewise complicated not only by Marion's regular attempts to legitimate the subject's resistance to ideology, as we will see, but also, and perhaps most centrally, by his project's explicit challenge to his own theological tradition's reigning Thomistic paradigm. That he would write that "[e]very pretension to absolute knowledge therefore belongs to the domain of the idol;"²⁴ would continue, in this same text, to almost accuse his own church's *philosophus perennis*—whose "theses," we should remember, "are not to be placed in the category of opinions to be debated one way or another, but are to be considered as the foundations upon which the whole science of natural and divine things is based"²⁵ (Pius X)—of that selfsame idolatry²⁶; and then would finally, also in this text, cajole us into epistemic clericalism, is a claim that merits further investigation. In undertaking such an investigation, however, I not only argue for

¹⁹ Caputo, "How to avoid Speaking of God," 147.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Barth, *Romans*, 68 [43]. Brackets refer to the page numbers in the original: Barth, *Der Römerbrief*, with which I've modified Hoskins' translation where helpful.

²² Ibid., 479.

²³ Qtd. in Godsey, "Epilogue," 79.

²⁴ Marion, *God without Being*, 23.

²⁵ Pius X, *Doctoris Angelici*.

²⁶ Marion, *God without Being*, 81-82: "Such a choice – by a formidable but exemplary ambiguity – Saint Thomas did not make, the Saint Thomas who pretended to maintain at once a doctrine of divine names and the primacy of the *ens* as first conception of human understanding. For our purposes, the historically localizable heritage of this indecision matters little; all that counts is what provokes it: the claim that the *ens*, although defined starting from a human conception, should be valid as the first name of God. This claim does not easily escape the suspicion of idolatry, as soon as the *ens*, thus referred to God, is engendered not only in *conceptione intellectus* but also in *imaginatione intellectus*—in the imagination of the understanding, hence in the faculty of forming images, hence of idols."

Marion's affinity with Barth—statements like “[t]o do theology is not to speak the language of gods or of ‘God,’ but to let the Word speak us (or make us speak) in the way that it speaks of and to God”²⁷ all but suffice on that front—but also ask a broader question about the relationship between philosophy, theology, and what these two ‘sciences’ offer in terms of intellectual freedom. Could an emphasis on the rupture of theology and philosophy, by appealing to a revelation ‘wholly other’ than or ‘exceeding’ (natural) reason, actually enhance, not limit, thought's freedom to critique the pre-given? In other words: could God's sovereignty be human freedom?

The answer—yes!—lies, for both Barth and Marion, in revelation's ‘objective’ or ‘evental’ status. Because revelation is an ‘event,’ by definition unforeseeable, it cannot be confined within any *a priori* epistemic schema; nor can revelation, because inexhaustibly objective and alien to its witness, be adequately interpreted afterward. All human thought, in the face of revelation's event, is rendered relative, provisional, and, precisely for that reason, not liable to compulsion. The crucial difference between Barth and Marion, however, lies in how they situate this freedom of thought vis-à-vis the relationship between theology and philosophy. Both agree that any philosophy that claims to arrive at an absolute, universal knowledge through the knowing subject's natural self-reflection—what Marion calls ‘metaphysics’—compels thought. Such philosophies are, in fact, ideologies, as are their theological doppelgangers: ‘liberal theology’ (Barth), ‘ontotheology’ (Marion), and ‘natural theology’ (both). Where these two theorists of revelation disagree is, first, in their historical assessment of this problem. Marion impugns modernity as the metaphysical epoch *par excellence*, while Barth sees philosophical overreach within theology as the most refined version of humanity's rebellion against grace, a rebellion that spans all church history but that the Reformation decisively (although not wholly successfully) tried to prune.²⁸ Second, though, and more importantly, whereas Barth understands revelation mainly in dogmatic, Christological—that is, explicitly theological—terms, Marion, though he adopts Barth's stance on intellectual freedom, secularizes his doctrine of the Word of God to develop a philosophy of revelation. Using phenomenological concepts, Marion argues that God's self-revelation is one among other saturated phenomena. Non-divine revelations populate our everyday experience. There thus is a way of philosophizing, and not just of theologizing, that is (or can be) otherwise than ontotheological: phenomenology, insofar as this ‘science of experience’ remains ever-willing “to elaborate new and rigorous paradoxes.”²⁹ In the end, though, the ‘objectivity’ of revelation on which both Barth and Marion initially rely—and which justifies their critiques of their respective orthodoxies (liberal theology for Barth, Neo-Scholasticism for Marion)—is the scriptural text's objectivity. The intellectual freedom they aim to establish thus finds its conceptual ground in a core doctrine of the Protestant Reformation: *sola scriptura*, a term which now achieves a philosophical, and not just theological, significance.

2 “Power unto liberty”: revelation, freedom, and Barth's critique of philosophy

Barth's insistence on God's utter transcendence, as articulated most radically in *Romans* (II, on which we will rely), and his rejection of philosophical speculation as a means of access to God—which he stigmatizes as “natural theology”—are most often afforded two distinct, but not necessarily incompatible, explanations. The first is that *Romans*' newfound “emphases upon divine freedom, sovereignty or autonomy”³⁰ were the culmination of a break from prewar German liberal theologians, whom Barth had seen become personally imbricated in bellicose nationalism and whose views he, out of ethical conviction, now had to renounce. The second is that Barth's polemic against natural theology emerged out of his confrontation with Przywara,

²⁷ Ibid., 143. Where Marion ‘crosses out’ the word ‘God’ in this text, I quote it simply as “God” (without quotation marks); I maintain his own quotation marks around “‘God,’” by which Marion means the conceptual idol.

²⁸ Barth, *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God*, 20.

²⁹ Marion, *Reduction and Givenness*, 205.

³⁰ Oakes, *Karl Barth on Theology and Philosophy*, 56.

whose defense of *analogia entis* as the center of Catholic intellectual culture offered Barth the chance to reflight the Reformation.³¹ Although older, more convoluted views of Barth's development (such as Hans Urs von Balthasar's "two-turn theory" and its attempt to enlist Barth as an analogical theologian) are now fairly discredited,³² the extant consensus makes it difficult to understand the continuity of Barth's view on theology's relationship with philosophy outside of sectarian concerns.

These existing explanations are also often dissonant with the texts they aim to interpret. We are asked to believe, for example, that Barth turned against his liberal teachers not over some "epistemological point," but because of "concrete and highly contextual differences in politics, national allegiances, and doctrines of providence"³³—that is, over ethical and political squabbles—when he wrote that an "honest humanitarianism... recognizes[s] that the strange chess-board upon which men dare to experiment with men and against them in State and Church and in Society cannot be the scene of the conflict between the Kingdom of God and Anti-Christ,"³⁴ or that the God of revelation exists "beyond [human] good and evil (*jenseits von ihrem Gut und Böse*)"³⁵ and ties Godself, necessarily, to no "ethics or sacrament (*Moral und Sakrament*)."³⁶ Likewise, while it is incontestable that "the debate about the *analogia entis* was and is a manifestation of [other] basic differences"³⁷ between Protestant and Catholic theology, that these other differences were in fact "more central," or that Barth acted merely as a partisan for the Reformed tradition while "obscur[ing]...critical issues"³⁸ in his confrontations with Przywara and other defenders of analogy, does not account for why Barth identified analogy with the problematic intertwining of philosophy and theology he believed the Reformation had overcome.³⁹ A closer reading, however, shows why Barth's two great opponents—liberal theology and the *analogia entis*—are really two sides of the same coin for him. This becomes clear once we understand why Barth sees intellectual compulsion as underlying both.

With regard to liberal theology, there remains considerable debate about who or what this category denotes vis-à-vis Barth's breakthrough. Usually this discussion centers on whether the 'theologians of Feeling' like Schleiermacher and Adolf von Harnack should be grouped together with other more metaphysically-oriented Protestant theologians, "a camp they"—that is, Schleiermacher and his heirs—"thought themselves beyond."⁴⁰ As Ingrid Spieckermann has wisely pointed out, however, Barth's insight is that whenever we isolate any subjective datum, be it 'Feeling' or the "inward coming of the kingdom (*innerlichen Kommens des Reiches*)"⁴¹ as the normative criterion by which revelation must be interpreted, we actually only prolong modern philosophy's enframing of revelation within (de)finite, *a priori* epistemic parameters. The difference lies in that while metaphysically-inflected theologies use ontological categories to restrict revelation, 'theologies of Feeling' use affective categories, even as the latter are reified into the former in their moment of description. "Liberal theology turns out to be the derivative, modern, subjective-relative flipside of [the] metaphysical model and it happens...first and foremost...in the genuine sublimation of the objectivity of the knowledge of God in the subjectivity of religious feeling and experience."⁴² Barth

31 Johnson, *Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis*, 234-235.

32 Oakes, *Karl Barth on Theology and Philosophy*, 51-52: "The prevailing picture of Barth's development is that his thought underwent a 'single turn': from being a liberal, Marburg theologian to a dialectical theologian of the Word... Such a view has largely replaced von Balthasar's 'two-turn picture,' which has Barth moving from liberalism to dialectical theology and then from dialectic theology to analogical theology."

33 Ibid., 58.

34 Barth, *Romans*, 489 [472].

35 Ibid., 70 [45].

36 Ibid., 75 [49].

37 Johnson, 234.

38 Ibid., 234-235. Emphasis mine.

39 The "background and antithesis to 'Natural Theology,'" after all, "is the knowledge of God and the service of God according to the teaching of the Reformation." Barth, *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God*, 8. Emphasis original.

40 Oakes, *Karl Barth on Theology and Philosophy*, 52.

41 von Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, 52 [34]. Where necessary, I make reference to the original German edition in brackets.

42 Spieckermann, *Gotteserkenntnis: Ein Beitrag zur Grundfrage der neuen Theologie Karl Barths*, 17.

thus becomes obsessed with rejecting what he calls “the *a priori* of all representation.”⁴³ There is no finite and natural human faculty that necessarily re-presents God’s revelation to the knowing subject and that could thus set an epistemically independent benchmark for revelation’s legitimacy. Rather, revelation is entirely “objective.” “Reformed teaching does not mean a knowledge which is based merely on feeling, which is peculiar to the individual and which therefore has no binding character. On the contrary, no more objective knowledge can exist.”⁴⁴

Why Barth sees this move to ‘objectivity’ as grounding intellectual freedom becomes clearest in contrast to the so-called liberal theologians’ theories of revelation, which, despite their attempt to destroy and expose the ‘philosophical’ and ‘metaphysical’ influences “Hellenism (*das Griechische*)”⁴⁵ had wrought upon primitive Christianity, repeat the coercive tendency latent in all philosophically-justified Christianity. Harnack, for example, initially attacks any “elaboration of the Gospel into a vast philosophy of God and the world, in which every conceivable kind of material is handled.” This “conviction that because Christianity is the absolute religion it must give information on all questions of metaphysics, cosmology, and history (*der Metaphysik, Kosmologie, und Geschichte Auskunft*)” is just “Greek intellectualism,” which must be overcome along with its doctrine that “*Knowledge is the highest good*.”⁴⁶ In place of such knowledge, though, historical criticism uncovers the ‘essence’ (*Wesen*) and absoluteness of Christianity all over again in the “subjective Act (*subjektive That*).”⁴⁷ It finds that “the Gospel is nowise a positive religion like the rest” because it “contains no statutory or particularistic elements... [I]t is, therefore, *religion itself (Religion selbst)*,”⁴⁸ the religion of the Kingdom of God “as something inward (*als etwas Innerliches*)” and not as “the external rule of God.”⁴⁹ The latter, of particularistic ‘Israelitish’ provenance, is non-unique to the historical Jesus.⁵⁰ All questions of its historical accuracy aside, the epistemic consequence of a move like Harnack’s is that historical criticism, because scientifically objective and so rationally necessary, accesses a site of God’s continuity with history (the inner Kingdom) from which intellectual dissent is *de jure* impossible. This site’s historical and cultural vehicle is then sanctified. Harnack unsurprisingly reminds his German audience: in Christianity it is “*our* history [that] was... developed; for without that all-important transformation there would be no such thing as ‘mankind,’ no such thing as ‘the history of the world’ in the higher sense... [E]xtended to cover all human relationships and really observed, it contains a civilizing force of enormous strength.”⁵¹ Christianity, the universal religion because rationally accessible through historical criticism, can rightfully “govern (*regieren*)”⁵² the particular religions.

In his invective against any “speculative optimism which thinks it is very well acquainted with God in nature, in history, and in the heart of man,”⁵³ then, Barth, does not just nurse a political animus against his teachers’ generation. Rather, he critiques the conceptual link between human knowledge and revelation that allows someone like a Harnack or an Ernst Troeltsch⁵⁴—whose *The Absoluteness of Christianity and the*

43 See Barth’s August 6th, 1915 letter to Eduard Thurneysen in *Karl Barth – Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel*, vol. 1 (1913-1921), 70: “Kein Wort von der ‘Erkenntnis Gottes,’ von der ‘Umkehr,’ dem ‘Warten’ auf das Gottesreich...das doch das Apriori alles ‘Vertretens’ ist!”

44 Barth, *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God*, 25.

45 Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, 206.

46 Ibid., 228 [142]. Emphasis original.

47 Ibid., 18 [11].

48 Ibid., 63 [41]. Emphasis modified.

49 Ibid., 52 [34].

50 Ibid., 53.

51 Ibid., 76.

52 Ibid., 63 [41].

53 Barth, *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God*, 30.

54 Troeltsch did not sign the Manifesto of the Ninety-Three as Harnack did, but nonetheless was a vociferous advocate of German imperialism on the basis of (alleged) German cultural superiority. As *Die Welt* notes, “Troeltsch was seen as one of the most significant representatives of the intellectual movement in favor of war. He never tired of pointing out the ‘decadence’ and ‘arrogance’ of the French, and said of the English that they fought, ‘like a physically deficient woman, with nothing other than the means of a calculating, poisonous tongue.’ Germany’s model soldiers, on the other hand, were culturally and morally superior to their adversaries, and were forced to war by the instinct of self-preservation against the dangers of ‘barbarians, fanatics, and illiterates.’” See Bendikowski, “Ernst Troeltsch and the power of the pen.”

History of Religions follows Harnack's pattern, disavowing Christianity's metaphysical supremacy only to proclaim Christian 'inwardness' the truth of human religion as such—to underwrite that "we shall carry on this war to the end as a civilized nation, to whom the legacy of a Goethe, a Beethoven, and a Kant is just as sacred as its own hearths and homes."⁵⁵ The link is that of epistemic certainty: as long as human beings can, from a universally accessible perspective within history, identify a definite point of continuity between divine and human activity, ideology arises. Moreover, insofar as 'philosophy' names the most sophisticated human striving for epistemic certainty, philosophy's admixture with theology becomes a prime ideological catalyst. Barth's first formal response to Przywara's *Analogia Entis*,⁵⁶ the 1929 "Fate and Idea in Theology" lectures in Dortmund, make this extremely clear and mark the conceptual continuity between his rejection of both liberal and analogical theology. "The great temptation and danger consists in this, that the theologian would actually become what he seems to be—a philosopher."⁵⁷ The quarrel here is not with philosophy as such, since philosophy and theology alike rely on human concepts. Both use "tools" of "ordinary human thought and speech with their own definite laws, possibilities and limitations."⁵⁸ Rather, Barth condemns theology's attempt to subsume philosophy (and vice-versa), which would fix God's free irruption into human history to some finite historical reality or concept. When this latter reality is 'external,' theology becomes metaphysics; when 'internal,' liberal theology. Both sides of this "realist theism" are problematic:

Classical theism like that of Aquinas's stresses both aspects equally... Within the bounds of realism, however, the possibility exists that one side might be weighted more heavily than the other or perhaps even placed in conflict with the other... A few examples can easily make it clear that these conflicts are not irresolvable, that they beckon to one another, that in one way or another they finally instantiate the same conception. Was anything really new said to Wallenstein, who while gazing at the stars heard a voice tell him, 'In your heart are the stars of your fate.'... Wasn't Luther on target when he lumped together the Anabaptist claim that the Holy Spirit was given in the individual's heart, with the Roman Catholic claim that it was given in papal authority? Or don't those two feuding siblings, pietism and rationalism, actually belong together, since the one elevates the subjective religious experience of the inner world into the criterion of theology, while the other does the same thing with the objective experience of the outer world?⁵⁹

The problem with such 'realism,' which Barth explicitly identifies with *analogia entis*,⁶⁰ is that it deifies thought's rational necessity. This "theological empiricism" thus "discovers God in fate—a fate that befalls human beings inwardly-outwardly, subjectively-objectively, something which becomes all too powerful for them and takes them prisoner, setting them in absolute dependence."⁶¹ While "[n]o theology can afford not to share completely the intentions evident here,"⁶² this thought of God as "*causa sui, ens realissimum, and actus purus*"⁶³ culminates in, on God's side, the denial of grace; on humans' side, the denial of freedom. "If the basic orientation of realism is not to be something completely different from that of a person who hears God's Word, then the presupposition of an inherent human capacity will have to be met with...outright rejection," for "[i]n contrast to the whole possible range of human experiences, the Word says something new."⁶⁴ Thus, "God's givenness to us and to the world—God's givenness in his revelation—cannot be understood as though it were somehow accessible to a set of precise conceptual formulations."⁶⁵ Grace is therefore the operative category that opposes analogy's fatalism; hence why, for Barth, there is *stricto sensu* no concept of grace. Nor can grace be naturalized: "[n]o inherent grace or capacity for grace can be claimed in virtue of which the knower and the known would exist in relation to God through the *analogia entis*."⁶⁶

55 J. von Ungern-Sternberg and W. von Ungern-Sternberg, *Der Aufruf 'An die Kulturwelt!'*, 163.

56 Johnson, *Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis*, 93.

57 Barth, "Fate and Idea in Theology", 29.

58 *Ibid.*, 27.

59 *Ibid.*, 33-34.

60 *Ibid.*, 33.

61 *Ibid.*, 35.

62 *Ibid.*, 37.

63 *Ibid.*

64 *Ibid.*, 39.

65 *Ibid.*, 40.

66 *Ibid.*, 39.

If “God distinguishes himself from fate by the fact that he is not so much there as rather that he comes”⁶⁷—*à-venir*—then revelation must never be constructed out of some intellectual necessity or “theosophy.”⁶⁸

Theology is thus freer than philosophy for Barth because—at least when theology remains *theology*,⁶⁹ namely, when it “found[s]...both the church and human salvation...on the Word of God *alone*, on God’s *revelation in Jesus Christ*, as it is attested in the Scripture, and on faith in that Word”⁷⁰—in it, the objectivity of God’s self-revelation renders all human discourse relative and provisional. This very provisionality, however, secures intellectual freedom. No system of human knowledge, not even the most philosophical or exhaustive, can compel its own acceptance; it stands relativized before revelation’s ‘*krisis*.’ Hence why theology itself “will only be a theology of God’s Word if it somehow makes the concept of predestination central to its concept of God.”⁷¹ Barth signals hereby no agonizing Puritanism, but theology’s liberatory epistemic function: so long as theology remains aware of grace *qua* grace, it tempers thought’s absolutist pretensions. This does not subordinate philosophy to theology, since both sciences are prone to deify thought and thereby wage the perennial “conflict against grace that is man’s own deepest and innermost reality.”⁷² Indeed, God may act through philosophy as well as through theology.⁷³ Nonetheless, *theology*, insofar as it conceptually permits and so at least formally submits itself to grace, remains a more potent critic of ideology than philosophy. Philosophy “at least aspires to say an ultimately definitive word, at least aims in that direction, at least considers it to be potentially utterable,”⁷⁴ while theology knows it should reject this temptation. Barth’s preference for “dialectical” theologizing, which tries not to submit a tension of opposites to sublation’s finality, should be read in light of this concern.⁷⁵

Although Barth will nuance his views on theology’s relation to philosophy even further in the later *Church Dogmatics*—though we affirm, *pace* von Balthasar, that this inaugurates no ‘catholicization’ of his rejection of natural theology⁷⁶—the earlier *Römerbrief* still best lays out Barth’s notion of grace as critique. “The encounter of grace,” we read there, “depends on no human possession; for achievement...is of no value and has no independent validity in the presence of God. Where God speaks (*Wo Gott reden*) and is recognized, there can be no speech (*Rede*) about human being (*Sein*), having, or enjoying”; hence, “when there arises the possibility of faith, this is intelligible only as an impossibility.”⁷⁷ Again: “The men of God know that faith is faith only when it is product of no historical or spiritual reality (*geschichtliche und*

⁶⁷ Ibid., 40.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 56.

⁶⁹ I take up Marion’s distinction between *theology* and *theology* from *God without Being*, 148–154. *Theology* (authentic, revealed theology) has as its “first principle...a hermeneutic of the biblical text that does not aim at the text”—historical criticism—“but, through the text, at the event, the referent... Hence the human *theologian* begins to merit his name only if he imitates ‘the theologian superior to him, our Savior’ in transgressing the text by the text, as far as to the Word”—i.e. interpreting Scripture Christologically. In contrast, “the status of a science makes of theology a *theology*,” which, “instead of interpreting the text in view and from the point of view of the Word, hence in the service of the community, [has] only one alternative: either to renounce aiming at the referent (positivistic, ‘scientific’ exegesis) without admitting any spiritual meaning...or else to produce by himself, hence ideologically, a new site of interpretation, in view of a new referent.”

⁷⁰ Barth, *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God*, 8–9.

⁷¹ Barth, “Fate and Idea in Theology,” 59.

⁷² Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, §26, 142.

⁷³ Barth, “Fate and Idea in Theology,” 57–58.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 53.

⁷⁵ See Feneuil, “Le théologien, un drôle de philosophe: Karl Barth et la spécificité du discours théologique,” 102 ff.

⁷⁶ Johnson, *Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis*, 201–202: “The distinction between von Balthasar’s interpretation of Barth and Barth’s interpretation of his own views about the nature of God’s relationship with humanity centers upon the question of whether Barth is able to define the being of the human in faith strictly in terms of the being of Jesus Christ *without* presupposing a prior determination of human being in God’s creation. Von Balthasar’s key mistake is that he failed to recognize that Barth’s entire account of creation is predicated on avoiding precisely this presupposition... [V]on Balthasar failed to see the... ‘decisive innovation’ in [Barth’s] doctrine of creation: Barth’s decision to make the human Jesus of Nazareth” – i.e. God’s self-revelation – “the condition for the possibility of knowledge of human being as such.” In his own rejection of natural theology, Marion will make the same maneuver, subordinating any so-called ‘natural’ theology to revealed theology (that is, insofar as there is ‘natural *theology*,’ God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ is presupposed); see Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 26–29.

⁷⁷ Barth, *Romans*, 59 [34–35]: “Wo Gott reden und erkannt wird, da kann von einem Sein und Haben und Genießen des Menschen nicht die Rede haben.”

seelische Wirklichkeit). They know that faith is the unutterable reality of God (*unsagbare Gotteswirklichkeit*), that clarity of sight is no technique (*Methode*), no discovery of research."⁷⁸ God's self-revelation is a pure 'event' as phenomenology will understand it, albeit "not an event in history at all," because "[g]race is the incomprehensible fact that God is well pleased with a man." But "only when it is recognized as incomprehensible (*unbegeislich*), is grace grace."⁷⁹ Barth's theory of revelation thus disqualifies any philosophical propaedeutic for theology that purports to explain, rather than just proclaim, grace, e.g. as *perficiens non tollens naturae*. "[N]o divinity which *needs anything*, any human assistance" of this kind, "can be God."⁸⁰ Such assistance stands under "the No (*das Nein*) under which all flesh stands, the absolute judgment," which "is what God means for the world of men, time, and things (*die Gott für die Welt des Menschen, der Zeit und der Dinge bedeutet*)."⁸¹

This last statement is crucial. With it, Barth marks a dividing line between God's different meanings for theology and philosophy. Within theology—that is, starting from God's self-revelation and it alone—God has one meaning (*Bedeutung*), which dogmatics elucidates. Within philosophy—that is, "flesh," which denotes for Barth, as it did for Luther, "whatever is best and most outstanding in man...namely, the highest wisdom of reason"⁸²—God's self-revelation means the provisionality of all knowledge. "[I]n the radical dissolution of all physical, intellectual, and spiritual achievements of men, in the all-embracing relativization (*Relativierung*) of all human distinctions and human dignities, their eternal meaning (*ewige Bedeutung*) is made known."⁸³ Humanly achieved truths, above all philosophical ones, are not thereby meaningless, but rather always dubitable. Because "[t]he Gospel is not a truth among other truths," "it sets a question-mark against all truths."⁸⁴ This is the sense in which 'krisis' means, above all, critique. But critique "does not mean...the denial or the depreciation of that which is not God... [I]t does mean," however, "that this latter factor is criticized, *limited*, and made *relative*."⁸⁵ In political terms, this means freedom from ideology, from being the "slaves and puppets of things, of 'Nature' and of 'Culture,' whose dissolution and establishing by God" ideology "overlook[s]."⁸⁶ In the presence of revelation's judgment, because no human thought is epistemically necessary, "what cannot be avoided or escaped from" can no longer, as under ideology, "become...confused with some necessity of nature," which "is in very truth a demonic caricature of the necessity of God."⁸⁷

This is why—*pace* those who would see in it quietism or, worse, a reactionary hatred of social change—Barth closes *Romans* with a kind of apophatic political theology of endless deliberation. "Having freed himself from all idolatry," the Pauline figure "recognize[s] that relative possibilities"—philosophical, intellectual, and political—"are, in the midst of their evil, good, and...accept[s] them as shadows preserving the lineaments of that which is contrasted with them."⁸⁸ Then, "when the tone of 'absoluteness' has vanished from both thesis and antithesis...room has perhaps been made for that relative moderateness and for that relative radicalness in which human possibilities have been renounced."⁸⁹ The intellectual freedom that our extrication from natural theology cements thus culminates for Barth in the human subject's actual historical freedom. This is the "freedom of God (*Freiheit Gottes*)"⁹⁰ in the subjective-genitive sense (as it

⁷⁸ Ibid., 58 [33].

⁷⁹ Ibid., 30-31 [6-7].

⁸⁰ Ibid., 36.

⁸¹ Ibid., 77 [51]. Emphasis mine.

⁸² Luther, in *Gal.* 3, v. 3 (LW 26, 216 = WA 40¹, 347-348): "[Q]uicquid in homine est praestantissimum extra spiritum, vocatur caro, etiam ipsa religio."

⁸³ Barth, *Romans*, 78 [52].

⁸⁴ Ibid., 35.

⁸⁵ Barth, *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God*, 16.

⁸⁶ Barth, *Romans*, 51.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 488.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 489.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 503 [487]. Emphasis mine.

was for Luther⁹¹), the “freedom in God’s captivity (*Freiheit in der Gefangenschaft Gottes*)...wrought by Christ and which Grand Inquisitors of all ages have found so awkward and so dangerous.”⁹² Because “[o]ppressed on all sides by God”—a statement which, out of context, might sound fundamentalist—those who “live in Pauline fashion...must dare to live freely”⁹³ from all other oppressions and compulsions, above all the compulsion of thought Barth understands philosophy as imposing. Paradoxically enough, then, theology is, ultimately, what secures philosophy’s own critical aspirations. The theologian’s “work is, therefore, always exercising itself in criticism; it is lacerating (*zerfetzend*) and Socratic (*sokratisch*)”⁹⁴; more Socratic, indeed, than philosophy itself.

3 “A more generous rationality”: freedom in Marion’s philosophy of revelation

Though some recent work has, at last, begun to note the strong affinities between Barth’s theology and Marion’s,⁹⁵ it is likely von Balthasar played an outsized role in mediating this influence. Marion himself admits as much but draws no sharp distinction between the two. Both, he says, share a theological “starting point. God reveals himself—that means the self-manifestation of God from himself and according to his own rules.”⁹⁶ Another historical mediator, though more roundabout, may be Levinas, whose supposed discovery of *l’Autrui* has, with some controversy, been traced to Barth as well.⁹⁷ While both Barth and Marion understand philosophy’s totalizing temptations, however, the crucial difference between the two is that Barth understands the ‘incomprehensible,’ ‘new,’ ‘gracious’ self-revelation that relativizes all human knowledge in dogmatic terms. The “sternness of *the Gospel of Christ*” is that “which constitutes its tenderness and gentleness and its power unto liberty.”⁹⁸ Marion, on the other hand, moves to understand revelation’s ‘evental’ character precisely with this term and the strictly philosophical pedigree it designates. ‘Event’ (*Ereignis*), drawn from Heidegger’s ‘methodologically atheist’ toolkit, joins a host of others—‘saturated phenomenon’ first of all—that translate revelation, theologically overdetermined, into a philosophical category. Whether this imports a confessional commitment from Marion’s part—a commitment which, despite its being debated *ad nauseam*, he never really tries to hide—only remains a pressing question if, rather unphilosophically, one confuses a concept’s genealogy with its coherence. A far more powerful hermeneutic opens up if, reading Marion against the scholarly grain (and perhaps even himself), we understand his notion of the saturated phenomenon as what secures, for philosophy, the intellectual freedom which a Barthian doctrine of revelation authorizes within Christian dogmatics.

Like Barth, however, Marion also immediately ties the problem of intellectual freedom to the relationship between philosophy and theology because it is precisely in the former’s pretense to devour the latter that compulsion of thought is born. Equipped with a Heideggerian vocabulary, Marion explicitly names this tendency ‘ontotheology,’ a term which “established a hermeneutic of the history of philosophy so powerful that it could not be matched, save by the one used by Hegel.”⁹⁹ For Marion, the operative center of Heidegger’s triad is Λόγος, which denotes not just that ‘God’ and ‘Being’ are somehow related in themselves

⁹¹ Luther sees the hermeneutic shift from the objective-genitive or ‘active’ sense of the term *iustitia Dei* to its subjective-genitive or ‘passive’ sense as the core of his discovery; by an ‘analogy’ (*analogia*) – but not of being – he then uses the subjective-genitive to read Scripture in a way that is ‘other’ (*alia*) than the one pre-given by tradition. See Martin Luther, *Vorrede zum ersten Bande der Gesamtausgaben seiner lateinischen Schriften* (1545) (LW 34, 337 = WA 54, 186).

⁹² Barth, *Romans*, 504–505 [489].

⁹³ Ibid., 503.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 507 [491].

⁹⁵ See, for example, McNassor, “Revelation and phenomenology in the Christologies of Karl Barth and Jean-Luc Marion.”

⁹⁶ Marion, *The Rigor of Things*, 26.

⁹⁷ See Moyn, *Origins of the Other*.

⁹⁸ Barth, *Romans*, 70. Emphasis mine.

⁹⁹ Marion, *God without Being*, 200.

(Marion has, for example, no *de jure* issue with Thomas's apophatic *esse*¹⁰⁰), but that the human being could access this relation adequately through the concept. 'Being' thus takes on a uniquely problematic role only because it is preeminently through this word that philosophy, as modern metaphysics, has "give[n] to the supposed contribution, the representing idea (*Vorstellung*) of [ontological] difference, a place within Being."¹⁰¹ Marion's initial theological forays make this very clear: 'Being' is the main, but by no means only, conceptual idol ontotheology mobilizes for its ends. That is why, for example, Nietzsche "remains an idolater"—not because he blatantly names 'God' 'Being,' but because "the divine...depends radically on the Nietzschean *valuation* of Being"¹⁰² as the will-to-power, and thus on some *a priori* conceptual valuation the subject carries out. Heidegger remains implicated in ontotheology for the same reason.¹⁰³

To avoid such idolatry, then, a genuine *theology* must impose no 'preliminary conditions' on God's self-revelation, an epistemological decision that runs through Marion's entire oeuvre. "[O]ne could not do a 'theology of the Word,' because if a *logos* pretends to precede the *Logos*, this *logos* blasphemes the Word (of) God."¹⁰⁴ Then, thirty years later: "Nothing less is necessary than leaving the essentially *finite* horizon of Being and beings...which could not harbor the unseen of God, much less disclose it and uncover it."¹⁰⁵ Any philosophical *logos* or "discourse,"¹⁰⁶ when it imposes epistemic preconditions upon theology, refracts revelation through the concept's finitude and so makes God's appearance—as *infinite* reality—impossible. This concern's origins are, of course, rooted in a Christian understanding of God, for if a screen of finitude must filter God's self-revelation, then this revelation cannot be, precisely, a *self-revelation*. Revelation becomes "a piece of information"¹⁰⁷ distinct from God's own self. But "God's *intention*" in revealing Godself "is not so much to make himself known as to make himself *re-cognized*, to communicate himself, to enable men to enter into a communication that puts them into communion with him."¹⁰⁸ Thus, any theory of revelation that bifurcates God's self from God's revelation is idolatrous, because it ignores the *self-communicatory* divine intention underlying revelation—a view traceable, in fact, to Luther.¹⁰⁹

Nevertheless, unlike Barth, Marion attempts to give this priority of the donor over the recipient in the act of revelation a philosophical, and not just theological, intelligibility. To do so, Marion turns to Husserlian phenomenology, which in its 'principle of all principles'—namely, that "what offers itself originally to us in 'intuition' must be taken wholly as it gives itself, but also only in the limits within which it gives itself"¹¹⁰—yields, at last, a philosophy of revelation. *Reduction and Givenness* marks the first foray into this philosophy, finding as it does in Heidegger's "What is Metaphysics?" and its analysis of boredom a possible 'liberation' from Being. "If boredom liberates the *there* [*Da*] from the call of Being, it sets it free only in order to expose it to the wind of every other possible call; thus, the liberated *there* is exposed to the nonontological possibility of another claim... [T]he claim might" thus "exert itself under another name than that of Being, in the name of an other than Being."¹¹¹ This 'third' reduction, still termed here "the reduction

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 196-236.

¹⁰¹ Heidegger, "Die onto-theo-logische Verfassung der Metaphysik (1956/57)," 69: "So bringen wir denn die vermeintliche Zutat, die *Vorstellung* von der [ontologische] Differenz, beim Sein unter." Emphasis mine.

¹⁰² Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, 73. Emphasis mine.

¹⁰³ Marion, *God without Being*, 51.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 143.

¹⁰⁵ Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 70.

¹⁰⁶ Marion, *God without Being*, 143.

¹⁰⁷ Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 22.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 27.

¹⁰⁹ Luther, in *Gal. 4*, vv. 8-9 (LW 26, 400 = WA 40¹, 608): "The knowledge of God is twofold (*Duplex est cognitio Dei*): general (*generalis*) and particular (*propria*). All men have the general knowledge, namely, that God is, that He has created heaven and earth, that He is just, that He punishes the wicked, etc. But what God thinks of us (*Deus de nobis cogitet*), what He wants to give and to do (*dare et facere*) to deliver us from sin and death and to save us – which is the particular and true knowledge of God (*propria et vera cognitio Dei*) – this men do not know... So it is that men naturally know that there is a God (*naturaliter noverunt deum esse*), but they do not know what He wants and does not want (*quid velit, quid non velit, ignorant*)." The 'God' of natural theology remains an idol, in other words, *not* because this 'God' is unreal, but because this 'God' has no meaning for us (*für uns, pro nobis*); the God natural theology reveals is not God Godself. Godself is revealed in Jesus Christ (alone).

¹¹⁰ Marion, *Reduction and Givenness*, 49.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 196.

to and of this call,” “transgress[es] the claim of Being”—Heidegger’s ‘*Dasein*-analytic’—but still “belongs to the phenomenological field for precisely the same reason that would allow the *Dasein*-analytic to replace the constitution of [Husserl’s] transcendental *I*.”¹¹² The ‘same reason’ in question is objectivity, not (importantly) in the precise phenomenological sense of a phenomenon whose intention and intuition are adequate (objectivity),¹¹³ but in the broader sense of the phenomenon’s anteriority over its own reception. In *Being Given*, Marion tries to accord precisely such an objective consideration to phenomena that, in his view, flabbergast Kant’s transcendental categories and thus metaphysics itself: phenomena “invisible according to quantity, unbearable according to quality, absolute according to relation, irregardable according to modality”¹¹⁴—the event, the idol, the flesh, and the icon, respectively.¹¹⁵ Irrespective of their genealogies, these are here secular, philosophical terms. The extent to which one believes Marion successfully articulates a philosophy, and not just theology, of revelation thus depends in large part on whether one finds his descriptions of these saturated phenomena in non-confessional contexts—of a painting as an idol, of the face of the Other as an icon, etc.—convincing or not. This openness to descriptive critique, however, hardly qualifies something as dogmatic, let alone intrinsically ‘theological.’

The more serious critique of the saturated phenomenon, as we have seen, is that it seems to rob the subject of epistemic integrity. In fact, Marion goes so far as to claim to overcome the subject in favor of *l’interloqué* (‘besought,’ *Reduction and Givenness*) or *l’adonné* (‘gifted (one),’ *Being Given*). “[I]n admitting the blow of the claim, the *interloqué* acknowledges first and definitively having renounced the autistic autarky of an absolute subjectivity. This compulsion [!] to alterity (whatever it may be) precedes even any form of intentionality or of Being-in-the-world.”¹¹⁶ The saturated phenomenon’s claim might be so powerful, in other words, that its reception transforms the recipient’s own constitution as metaphysics understands it. “Individualized essence” would thus “no longer precede relation.” Rather, “relation here precedes individuality. And again: individuality loses its autarchic essence on account of a relation that is not only more originary than it, but above all half unknown, seeing as it can fix one of the two poles—*me*—without at first and most of the time delivering the other, the origin of the call.”¹¹⁷ This suggests that the ‘me’ might be helplessly effaced and traumatized ‘from elsewhere’ and thus have the meaning of her ownmost self dictated by “transcendent” phenomenality, a point which Michel Henry perceptively raised and saw as but a subtler return to “ontological monism.”¹¹⁸ This criticism, however, not only overlooks the fact that the epistemological subject’s transformation in the light of saturation’s brilliance is always, for Marion, able to be refused,¹¹⁹ but also that the saturated phenomenon’s excess inaugurates not a dogmatic restriction of meaning but a corresponding excess of signification itself—the “infinite hermeneutic.”

¹¹² Ibid., 197.

¹¹³ The relationship between intuition and intention, terms Marion draws from Husserl, lies at the heart of Marion’s phenomenological claims. Intuition is whatsoever is given in experience (such as sense data), whereas intention is the signification the recipient of that experience (the experiencer – in metaphysics, the “subject”) brings to that experience. In the experience of any given phenomenon, intuition and intention can have one of three relationships: either intention exceeds intuition (“poor phenomena”), intention adequates intuition (“common-law phenomena”), or intuition exceeds intention (“saturated phenomena”). Whether one finds Marion’s phenomenological claims convincing, or not, ultimately rests on whether one believes that an experience wherein intuition exceeds intention is actually experienceable at all (for Husserl, there is no such experience). See Marion, *Being Given*, 222 ff. See also n. 16, above.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 199. Emphasis removed.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 228–233.

¹¹⁶ Marion, *Reduction and Givenness*, 200.

¹¹⁷ Marion, *Being Given*, 268.

¹¹⁸ See Henry, “The four principles of phenomenology”, 1–21.

¹¹⁹ Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 117: “Faith does not enter in as an obscure replacement for the light of understanding, but in order to bring the understanding to will or *not to will to accept* to accept the coming of God in and as the event of Jesus... But this decision, which puts into operation the structure of call and response, rhymes, according to a logic as rigorous as it is surprising, with the fundamental structure of the event and of every phenomenon.” Emphasis added. In understanding revelation, if not phenomenality *tout court*, according to the structure of a grace that is freely offered but can always be refused, Marion still remains a Catholic – a Protestant would insist on grace’s, and perhaps the phenomenon’s, irresistibility. Henry – who comes across, for this reason, as much more Protestant than Marion – criticizes Marion for insisting on Life’s ability to resist all given phenomena.

In phenomenological terms, the saturated phenomenon appears when “intuition”—the donor act—“always submerges the expectation of the intention”¹²⁰—the receptive act, which means that the intention, which operates according to concepts, cannot affix any single concept to what it receives in the intuition. Unlike Kant, however, Marion does not think a ‘blindness’ results; rather, the intention produces an endless parade of significations that will never adequate (but do still signify) the phenomenon in question. This double structure of saturation—its unpredictability or *événementialité* on the one hand, the infinite hermeneutic it produces on the other—ultimately characterizes all four types of saturated phenomena, despite the fact that Marion’s oeuvre describes their interrelationship in evolving ways. *Being Given*, for example, for which “the Other showing himself in the icon of the face” still “gather[s] within it the modes of saturation of the three other types,”¹²¹ also describes the historical event proper and the idol according to an event/infinite hermeneutic binary. “For those...whom it enlists and encompasses, not one of their (individual) horizons will be enough to unify it, speak it, and especially, foresee it”; this “plurality of horizons forbids constituting the historical event into one object and demands...an endless hermeneutic in time.”¹²² “The intuitive given of the idol,” which has its own “purely unpredictable landing,” likewise “imposes on us the demand to change our gaze again and again, continually, be this only as to confront its unbearable bedazzlement”; though our hermeneutic may thus be “solipsistic,” it is nonetheless also unending.¹²³ So too with the icon. “By gaze and by face, the Other acts, accomplishes the act of his unpredictable landing... Like the historical event, [he] demands a summation of horizons and narrations” and “happens without assignable end.”¹²⁴ *In Excess* sees these same characteristics playing out, finally, in the phenomenon of the flesh (although there for a stricter temporal reason).¹²⁵ Marion will thus rather unsurprisingly admit that his work’s “main theme is in the end the question of the event,”¹²⁶ that “all...saturated phenomena turn out to be governed each in their own way by *événementialité*.”¹²⁷ Moreover, if we couple this claim with another—that his “entire project...aims to think the common-law phenomenon, and through it the poor phenomenon, on the basis of the paradigm of the saturated phenomenon”¹²⁸—we glimpse an attempt to grant the freedom God’s (self-)revelation enjoys in Christian theology to all appearing phenomena, including the human (flesh, Other).

Marion’s insistence that “paradoxically, but logically, revelation, by virtue of the givenness that it alone performs perfectly, would accomplish the essence of phenomenality”¹²⁹ should thus be read more as importing the *form*, rather than the *content*, of a ‘strong’ Christian theology of revelation into phenomenological philosophy. A possible “phenomenon of revelation...saturating phenomenality to the second degree, by saturation of saturation”¹³⁰ would thus further confirm, rather than limit, all phenomenality’s *événementialité*, since it would show that even the conceptual significations phenomenology coins to describe saturation can be exceeded. That Marion describes this possible phenomenon in terms of the Christ-event raises theological rather than philosophical difficulties, since ultimately this event’s meaning seems to balloon to titanic proportions: “It could even be that history (in the case of time), civilizations (in the case of space), and spiritualities, literatures, cultures,” etc., “are set forth only to decline, unfurl, and discover the paradox of Christ.”¹³¹ Whether this implied ‘Christosis’ of phenomenality is not just a more refined natural theology (equating ‘Christ’ with givenness *tout court*), or

120 Marion, *Being Given*, 225.

121 Ibid., 234.

122 Ibid., 229.

123 Ibid., 230. Marion takes “the painting” as an example of an idol and gives various types of art criticism as attempts at the infinite hermeneutic in its case.

124 Ibid., 233.

125 Marion, *In Excess*, 99 ff. Because the flesh is the donor act of the capacity of intentionality itself (it gives intentionality), the flesh intuitively precedes its ego’s intention at each moment. Thus, it exceeds adequation while permitting interpretation.

126 Marion, *The Rigor of Things*, xii.

127 Ibid., 169.

128 Ibid., 227.

129 Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 7.

130 Marion, *Being Given*, 235.

131 Ibid., 240.

whether Marion somehow avoids this charge by referring phenomenality back to one Trinitarian ὑπόστασις instead of an anonymous *divinitas*, is an open dogmatic question. This question does not strictly speaking import faith into philosophy, however, because “revelation” so defined has no doctrinal content. It denotes only a formal structure: a necessary openness to whatsoever content may ‘eventally’ arrive, which may (or may not) include a faith that may (or may not, we could not decide this phenomenologically) itself be an “illusion.”¹³² Moreover, even the reception of any “Revelation” proper, that is, “of God by himself,”¹³³ would still require the “absolutely infinite unfolding of possibilities” of this content, requiring a genuinely “theological progress”¹³⁴ (i.e. doctrinal development) carried out within the believing hermeneutic community. “We are” thus not only “infinitely free in theology,”¹³⁵ as Marion explicitly writes, but in philosophy as well, inasmuch as philosophy takes up the freedom for eventual openness *theology* bequeaths it as a method.

Regardless of whether this constitutes an encrypted return to the *liber mundi* and thus a betrayal of Barth’s vision, repeats Barth’s subordination of the ontological to the Christological in a phenomenological key, or is just one more conceptual “counterblow”¹³⁶ of theology upon philosophy, it is at least clear what Marion’s framework opposes: namely, a metaphysical totality wherein phenomenal experience is submitted to some *a priori* discursive field. Marion sees Hegelianism as this trend’s modern exemplar, since it attempts to apply Kant’s universal moral law, valid for Kant only for noumena, onto the particularities of phenomenal history. This results, Marion claims, in “ideology” and “totalitarianism.” “Ideology produces a world that from the outset is in conformity with the demands of discourse. Put another way, it claims to offer reasons for what is by referring to what ought to be, and it thus eventually authorizes destroying whatever is that does not conform itself to what ought to be.”¹³⁷ Ontotheology reaches its logical conclusion and non-confessional meaning: having ‘killed God’ due to God’s non-conformity to metaphysical epistemology’s strictures, it now aims this deicidal conceptual violence against human beings. In this movement, metaphysics’ subjectivism exposes itself. Where metaphysics had once pretended to ground itself in external, ‘objective’ reality with the caveat that only what limited itself to the subject’s finitude could ever constitute that reality, ideology reverses this relation. ‘Objective’ reality is now explicitly the projection of the metaphysical subject (*in concreto*, of the sovereign), of “the new gods” who “for a century have...ceaselessly arrived catastrophically.”¹³⁸ These ‘gods’ operate by compelling thought. “Feuerbach, Stirner, and Marx rely on the supremely idolatrous identification of ‘God’ with the absolute Knowledge that Hegel had constructed for them”¹³⁹; ideology’s “*du sollst!*”—which commands thought as much as (moral) action—thus results from conceptual idolatry, the “political form” of which “displays itself, *par excellence*, in Leninism and Nazism.”¹⁴⁰ Unlike other Catholic critics, however, Marion does not advocate returning to Neo-Scholastic metaphysics as a solution to such political idolatry. In fact, this “indiscriminate return to... Thomas Aquinas...form[s]” only “a kind of philosophico-theological ideology of the Catholic Church.”¹⁴¹ Marion thus agrees with Barth: modern philosophy’s subjectivism extends, rather than turns away from, far older metaphysical systems and their allied theologies.

Intellectual freedom thus consists, ultimately, in granting to thought the *événementialité* all phenomena enjoy. Because there is no transcendental subject, only *l’adonné* “said and spoken before being...born from a call that [she] neither made, wanted, nor even understood,”¹⁴² an absolute system of knowledge could neither delimit, in advance, the event of this utterly singular recipient, that of ‘whatsoever’ she intuitively receives,

¹³² Deketelaere, “Givenness and existence,” 6.

¹³³ Ibid., 236, n. 90.

¹³⁴ Marion, *God without Being*, 158.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 21.

¹³⁷ Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, 33.

¹³⁸ Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, 74.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 76.

¹⁴⁰ Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, 34.

¹⁴¹ Marion, *The Rigor of Things*, 182.

¹⁴² Marion, *Being Given*, 290.

nor that of the interplay between these. To critique Marion here for importing a doctrine of "election"¹⁴³ into phenomenology needlessly theologizes the point's Humean origins: because we cannot in principle certainly know that the future will resemble the past or present, no epistemic framework can ever consider itself finalized. This only means that the hermeneutic tasks Marion insists upon are impossible, however, if the phenomenological recipient's *de jure* ever-open malleability was radically realized *de facto* at each historical instant. That experience suggests that, *de facto*, this malleability is only relative cannot justify a return to *humana natura*, though, as e.g. Emmanuel Falque's response suggests (although, somewhat shockingly, only by appealing at once to a doctrine of Creation),¹⁴⁴ since doing so only reifies, in terms of a metaphysical ground, a phenomenological fact that needs no such grounding to hold descriptively true.¹⁴⁵ Yet this metaphysical groundlessness is what guarantees not only, on the one hand, the subject's free self-reception from herself *qua* flesh (Marion's debate with Henry here notwithstanding¹⁴⁶) and thus her phenomenological right to dissent from 'transcendent Being' (Henry), but reason's inability to close itself off from the flux of incoming revelations that always challenges and expands reason as such. This 'evental' character of phenomenality "arouse[s]...a diversity without end of meanings, all possible, all provisional, all insufficient."¹⁴⁷ Any appearance can confute the certainties pre-given to us, but this absence of certainty is just another name for liberty. And so while it is true that against the "rationality [that] today often makes itself totalitarian, it will be quite necessary for freedom to oppose itself to it,"¹⁴⁸ Marion offers the panacea, not of nonsense or unreason, but of a broader understanding of reason's own possibilities. We should "attempt to think of love itself as a knowledge," for example, "and a preeminent knowledge to boot."¹⁴⁹ "The heart has its reasons, that reason does not know"¹⁵⁰ (Pascal), but reasons they remain. In the end,

[a] multiplication of modes of rationality then becomes possible. For it is certainly not a matter of leaping into irrationality. Quite to the contrary, irrationality arises from a very narrow definition of rationality, which limits itself to [phenomenological] objectness and to the transcendental constitution, expelling an immense crowd of phenomena into the shadows of supposed irrationality, phenomena that might very well have enjoyed full citizenship in a more generous kind of rationality.¹⁵¹

By granting revelation a philosophical, and not just theological, meaning, in other words, Marion dissolves the implicit competition between these two 'sciences' as it still exists in Barth. This dissolution, far from chaining thought to dogma, actually frees the former from older orthodoxies. Faced with the given's radical objectivity—which Marion articulates through the originally but not necessarily theological term 'revelation'—philosophy knows it will be ever-incomplete. This incompleteness, however, is what grounds its deliberative, critical, and rational task—a task of which phenomenology is, perhaps, the vanguard. Theology, then, liberates philosophy formally (though not materially) for Marion, and although this renewed freedom permits revealed theology, it does not require it. Indeed, in contrast to ontotheology's "forced baptism"¹⁵² of reason, which sees in every metaphysical subject nothing less than the 'anonymous Christian,' the believer *in ovo*, the phenomenology of givenness admits that faith may not be given me. I am free: free to say no. No, I do not receive that—because I receive otherwise.

143 Falque, *The Loving Struggle*, 122.

144 Ibid., 123.

145 Objections to his project on the basis that "we will not find finitude as such within the thought of Marion" (see *ibid.*) thus operate under an ontological definition of finitude – namely, the persistence in presence of the ὑποκείμενον, the bearer of an unchanging but defined *essentia* – the *epochē* already precludes. The 'principle of all principles' cannot coexist with some presumed anthropological *Hinterwelt*, since this would preclude the possibility that the recipient could give herself to herself in a radically new appearance incommensurate with this anthropology. This objection is thus not properly speaking a *phenomenological* one; it is a metaphysical critique (perhaps quite legitimate) of the phenomenological method as a whole.

146 See Henry, "The four principles of phenomenology," and Jean-Luc Marion, *Reprise du donné*.

147 Marion, *In Excess*, 117.

148 Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, 47.

149 Ibid., 160.

150 Pascal, *Pensées*, 216 (= L423).

151 Marion, *The Rigor of Things*, 94.

152 Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 104.

4 “No law except Scripture”: *sola scriptura* as intellectual freedom

For both Barth and Marion, then, the category of revelation functions both as a dividing line between theology and philosophy and as a bridge between those modes of philosophizing and theologizing that leave room for thought’s ‘evental’ possibility. In the first instance, the traditional distinction remains: philosophy remains within pure reason’s realm, while theology admits of some special revelation. This first instance, however, remains coherent only under a delimited definition of both sciences: philosophy understood as metaphysics in its Scholastic and modern modes (‘Natural Theology’), theology as the kerygma of God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Barth almost always, and Marion oftentimes, indulge this bifurcation because it easily allows them to contrast the radically new, unforeseeable, gracious character of the Christ event to philosophy’s ideological temptations—temptations which they both see philosophy as having surrendered to, in a unique way, in modern political and intellectual history. In their more nuanced moments, however, both reject this oversimplified opposition and admit that philosophy, if it resists absolutizing itself, remains critical and free. “Good for him,” Barth says, “if in the framework of philosophy he is nothing but a human thinker, a *philosophus* among others, reflecting fundamentally on the conception of human existence, and yet is still a witness to thinking based on divine revelation.”¹⁵³ This latter openness to revelation, which Barth understands mainly in dogmatic terms, Marion reframes as a philosophical concept; for him, this openness just designates the proper comportment to all given phenomena, of which God’s self-revelation is one especially important instance. Rather than subordinating philosophy to theology, however, and thereby revoking the former’s aspiration to intellectual freedom, this aperture to the given strengthens philosophy’s critical capabilities. No *a priori* restrictions can limit the given in the way that metaphysics—whether deified as “the moral ‘God’” (classical metaphysical theism to Kant) or “the ‘new gods’”¹⁵⁴ (modern ideology)—desires; thus, the “task of thinking”¹⁵⁵ remains forever open, both to potentially ever-arriving phenomena and to better interpretations of ones already given (the infinite hermeneutic). Philosophy adopts a theological concept—revelation—but in so doing only becomes more, not less, philosophical.

In pursuit of intellectual freedom, Barth and Marion both turn to a renewed understanding of objectivity, which (again) denotes not metaphysical or phenomenological *objectivity*, but the event that, even in its reception, remains epistemically independent from and imposes itself upon its witness according to this event’s own logic. Quite counterintuitively, however, the event’s objectivity—its freedom to appear from itself—confirms, rather than denies, its receptor’s freedom. Both Barth’s and Marion’s work suggests, moreover (though only Barth says so explicitly), that this kind of objectivity is grounded in a specific theological maneuver: *sola scriptura*. A typical rejoinder to Marion’s philosophy of revelation—that his analysis fails because it presumes in Jesus Christ an ungiven phenomenon—thus does not really get to the heart of the matter, since the revealed objectivity to which Barth and Marion turn is mediated through the objectivity of the biblical text, described by both in terms of “witness.” Barth’s reason for this is clear: Scripture, God’s Word, is not by itself God’s self-revelation, who is Jesus Christ and to whom church life and proclamation also witness. However, despite “their similarity as phenomena...there is also to be found between between Holy Scripture and present-day proclamation a dissimilarity in order, namely the supremacy, the absolutely constitutive significance of the former for the latter.”¹⁵⁶ The Scripture’s textuality vouchsafes this significance. “On the written nature of the Canon, on its character as *scriptura sacra*, hang his [*sic*] autonomy and independence, and consequently his free power over against the Church and the living nature of the succession.”¹⁵⁷

For Barth, Scripture’s autonomy defines Protestantism’s theological breakthrough. For even if a given confession of faith is “good,” “very original,” and “interesting”; indeed, he says, “even if it had significance as a standard of the church, it could not even then be understood as a code of doctrine binding us by its

¹⁵³ Barth, “Fate and Idea in Theology,” 28.

¹⁵⁴ Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, 73.

¹⁵⁵ See Heidegger, “Das Ende der Philosophie und die Aufgabe des Denkens”, 67-90.

¹⁵⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, §4, 102.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 104.

letters and sentences. Reformation teaching knows of no law set over it except the spiritual law of Scripture, which must be ever heeded anew."¹⁵⁸ It is thus hardly shocking that Barth not only saw in the German Christians' near-triumph during Nazism another plot of natural theology, but also found at Barmen, not the victory of one theological faction over another, but the Word's victory. "[T]he Church was—as always miraculously—saved because the Bible remained in the face of the 'also' of invading natural theology and its secret 'only.'"¹⁵⁹ In the ever-incomplete interpretation of this Word of God, which Barth identifies with the Holy Spirit's freedom, we find human freedom's real meaning.

Because the Word of God is heard and answered by theology, it is a modest and, at the same time, a free science... [I]t seeks expressions that resemble the ratio and relations of the Word of God in a proportionate and, as far as feasible, approximate and appropriate way. Theology's whole illumination can be only its human reflection, or mirroring (in the precise sense of 'speculation'!); and its whole production can be only a human reproduction. In short, theology is not a creative act but only a praise of the Creator and of his act of creation—praise that to the greatest possible extent truly responds to the creative act of God. Likewise, theology is *free* because it is not only summoned but also liberated for such analogy, reflection, and reproduction. It is authorized, empowered, and impelled to such praise.¹⁶⁰

Marion's use of Scripture grants it this same autonomy from the tradition, and not only in *God without Being*, where his meditation on *theology's* supposed "Eucharistic site," far from highlighting any ecclesiastical hierarchy (the scorn heaped on one aside about bishops notwithstanding¹⁶¹), culminates in a summons to return to the biblical text. Here, as in Barth, "theology...occurs to us through a word." But "[w]hat does this word say? Inevitably, it transmits a text," one that "fix[es] literarily the effects of meaning and of memory on the witnesses of [the] unimaginable, unheard of, unforeseeable, and in a sense invisible irruption" of "[t]he Christic event."¹⁶² The argument even turns to explicitly Barthian terminology as it concludes: the "text escapes the ownership of its literary producers to be inspired, so to speak, by the Word: *or rather*, it assumes the 'objective' [!] imprint of it in the same way that the disciples receive, from the Word, an 'objective' figure: apostleship."¹⁶³ Later works bring out Scripture's critical potential even more obviously. *Being Given*, for example, in its decisive confrontation with the metaphysical tradition, on the very cusp of its crescendo toward describing revelation, the "phenomenon that concentrates in itself the four sense of the saturated phenomenon" and thus the model of phenomenality as such, turns to "privilege the manifestation of Jesus Christ." But how is Jesus Christ 'manifest' within Marion's text? Answer: "as described in the New Testament and in conformity with the the paradigms of the theophanies of the Old."¹⁶⁴ An incredible dense slew of biblical quotations follows: quotations which, the text claims, "confront...the *visible* Christ."¹⁶⁵ *Givenness and Revelation's* decisive thesis—that "the question is not only not only that of seeing Jesus, but that of looking upon his face as that of the Christ...that is to say, of knowing in it, by viewing it through a certain angle, the icon of the invisible Father, in a phenomenon that is at once visible and invisible"¹⁶⁶—thus refers, ultimately, to this invisible face made visible, legible, in the scriptural text. (The rejoinder that for Marion only faith accesses this legibility is correct, although that "[t]here is a moral dimension to this claim"¹⁶⁷ reflects concerns about moral-theological or soteriological positions—about, say, grace's resistibility—his texts decisively defer.)

¹⁵⁸ Barth, *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God*, 11.

¹⁵⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, §26, 173.

¹⁶⁰ Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, 17. By 'analogy' here, Barth means *analogia fidei*, not *analogia entis*; see Johnson, *Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis*, 158-191.

¹⁶¹ Marion, *God without Being*, 153.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 144-145.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁶⁴ Marion, *Being Given*, 236.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 89.

¹⁶⁷ Deketelaere, "Givenness and existence," 7. To most substantially address these concerns, we would need to ask what positions Marion's account of 'eniconization' in *Givenness and Revelation* suggests regarding grace, election, and free will. This important theological task is unfortunately beyond the scope of this analysis.

If Marion's use of Scripture does have an accusatory bent, it is an internal one aimed at his own theological heritage, for his critique of the "epistemological interpretation of revelation"¹⁶⁸—and, with it, the entire ontotheological, Neo-Scholastic ('Suárezian') tradition that authorized that interpretation—relies neither on some decisive figure (e.g. Basil of Caesarea) nor on some magisterial document. Although he invokes both such authorities when convenient, *Givenness and Revelation* bases its argument on Scripture alone. This is obvious not only from its structure as, basically, a running phenomenological commentary on the New Testament's original Greek, but from its self-avowed, albeit at times understated, method. Toward the end of his first lecture, Marion considers the essential point: is there 'natural theology'? "Vatican II understands what the textual evidence requires to be understood, and what the scholastic reading missed or masked: knowledge of God on the basis of creation...does not precede revelation."¹⁶⁹ Marion's view is clear: the tradition is correct, but not because it is tradition. It is correct because "*it understands...the textual evidence*"—namely, if we look to the surrounding passages, the textual evidence of Paul's Romans! And finally, to tie it all together, Marion, like Barth, identifies theology's access to Scripture as the Holy Spirit's work. "The Spirit imposes himself as the phenomenal way of access to the iconic vision of the Father in the Son as Jesus the Christ"—the 'iconic vision' that takes place, as we've seen, in scriptural exegesis—"functioning as the director of the trinitarian [*sic*] uncovering of God, the only economy of theology."¹⁷⁰ The theologian's intellectual freedom to critique the tradition is the Spirit's own freedom, but she only has this freedom when she takes Scripture's objectivity as theology's *norma normans: sola scriptura*.

But if there is (as Barth suggests, and as Marion develops) a philosophy—and not merely a (Christian, dogmatic) theology—that awaits revelation's possibility, then *sola scriptura* refers, perhaps, not only to the most powerful critique the Christian tradition ever developed against itself, but to one of the very meanings of critique. Phenomenality may itself be 'text,' the *liber mundi*, giving itself excessively and with no one fixed interpretation. We may be abandoned, philosophically as well as theologically, to a perpetual uncertainty, but this abandonment is freedom's photographic negative. This uncertainty, this necessary openness of thought, would then make deliberation possible. Λόγος would thus mean here again (as it did in the πόλις) the public dialogue that grounds intellectual plurality, in contrast to the authoritarian metaphysical principle this term became by late antiquity, and certainly for the Gnostics. Hence the full ambiguity of 'the Word,' the quintessentially Greek banner under which the Reformers marched to war against 'reason.' But this was precisely Luther's insight: the "urging of conscience and the evidence of things (*urgente conscientia et evidentia rerum*)"—the *res* always being for him Scripture's 'matter,' its πράγματα—run not opposed, but stand united against the tradition, "this Troy of ours (*hanc Troiam nostrum*),"¹⁷¹ which cloaks itself in the mantle of universal and thus unimpeachable rationality. To refuse the closure of reason would thus be the philosophical heritage of Protestantism, by which we are "loosed...from the whole compulsion of authority and regimentation, from the whole multiplicity of godlike powers and authorities who make up our world."¹⁷² What would *sola scriptura* mean, then, as a philosophical principle? Would it mean, perhaps, to be always willing to reinterpret the text of experience, to read—and so think—better, and again? Foucault asked, or said, it best:

It meant returning to the Scriptures, seeking out what was authentic in them, what was really written in the Scriptures. It meant questioning what sort of truth the Scriptures told, gaining access to this truth of the Scriptures in the Scriptures and maybe in spite of what was written, to the point of finally raising the very simple question: were the Scriptures true? And, in short, from Wycliffe to Pierre Bayle, critique developed in part, for the most part, but not exclusively, of course, in relation to the Scriptures. Let us say that critique is biblical, historically.¹⁷³

168 Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 8.

169 Ibid., 28.

170 Ibid., 106.

171 Luther, *De servo arbitrio* (1525), §2 (LW 33, 73 = WA 18, 641).

172 Barth, *Romans*, 503.

173 Foucault, "What is Critique?", 45-46.

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