Jean-Luc Marion and Gianni Vattimo’s Contributions for the Postmodern Faith

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JEAN-LUC MARION AND GIANNI VATTIMO’S CONTRIBUTIONS FOR THE POSTMODERN FAITH

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By

Michael J. McGravey

May 2018
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ABSTRACT

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Michael J. McGravey

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Dissertation supervised by Marie L. Baird, Ph.D.

Catholic theology in the postmodern era has encountered various cultural or narrative shifts—both negative and positive—which have helped shape the Roman Catholic Church and Christianity at large. Negatively, the Church has been affected by external factors (e.g., globalization, immigration/emigration, increased access to technology, etc.) and internal struggles (e.g., reduced church attendance, an aging population, etc.). Positively, as others have suggested, postmodernity has ushered in a return to religion through new philosophical and theological ideas (e.g., phenomenology, existentialism, post-metaphysics, etc.). This dissertation aims to contribute to the ongoing postmodern concerns addressed in the cultural and narrative shifts, by focusing on the work of Jean-Luc Marion and Gianni Vattimo. The emphasis of this project focuses on the use of metaphysics as the foundational tool of theology and its corresponding limitations. This project also illuminates a central tenet of Christianity, caritas. Marion and Vattimo address caritas as that which should be the focal point of postmodern theology. Addressing this attribute of Christianity, this project observes the possibility of a ‘return to religion,’ one that reflects the postmodern exploration of religion by the several philosophers addressed herein. While this dissertation avoids offering a reconstruction of theology or, more specifically ecclesiology, it aims to re-establish the importance of philosophy, metaphysics, and caritas in the postmodern context.
DEDICATION

To Stephanie, whose endless support and love is a gift.

To my parents, Vincent and Ellen, my first teachers.
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INTRODUCTION

JEAN-LUC MARION AND GIANNI VATTIMO’S CONTRIBUTIONS FOR THE POSTMODERN FAITH

The flurry of challenges to theological narrative following Nietzsche’s claim, “God is Dead” in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, entices the postmodern theologian, the philosopher, and the historian to re-examine existing systems of thought.¹ For example, Heidegger and his successors, have taken to task the concepts of metaphysics, theology, and Being, especially.² The *status quo* of theology as metaphysically defined is no longer accepted as *de facto* truth. I contend this is especially true in areas in which the philosophical challenge of Nietzsche and the sociological changes following World War II, have aided in the culture shifts found throughout the Euro-American and Western World. Specifically, as Enda McCaffery notes, such shifts relating to philosophy and religion took place in France following the War. Relatedly, the emerging, new political ideologies in the 1980s led to new trends of theological and philosophical thought.³ This ‘new’ wave of thought would therefore, and legitimately, jeopardize the intellectual inheritance of the previous centuries. Since this intellectual revolution, the work of Nietzsche and Heidegger, for example, has allowed several European thinkers to call into question the metaphysical tradition of existing structures and institutions.⁴ One such example of the changing relationship can be articulated in the French, *laïcité*.⁵ One of the prominent institutions affected by these sociological

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and cultural shifts, especially via laïcité, is the Roman Catholic Church. The shift to a personalized and subjective religiosity has challenged the role of the Catholic faith throughout France, many parts of Europe, and more recently, North America.

As this project aims to explore, the metaphysics of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas, and the related declarations of faith and society by religious institutions, including and especially the Roman Church, have been challenged by those who seek a subjective relationship with the Divine, versus a dogmatically contrived one. Rising in place of the traditionalism the Church espouses are several (European) philosophical notions which employ “new phenomenological [methods] and other semiotic and declarative possibilities for the subject,” many of which originated in the 1980s. It is the subject of these cultural and theological shifts that is of particular interest to this dissertation, ultimately asking, “What can postmodern philosophy and theology offer to those disheartened by the tradition given to them, a tradition that has historically been dominated by metaphysics and authority?” Exploring the philosophy of Jean-Luc Marion or Gianni Vattimo attempts to answer this question, offering two ‘pathways’ to explore the Divine outside the limitations of metaphysics.

Overcoming the metaphysical tradition which has for so long defined the Christian faith, as well as recognizing the historical and cultural connection of Christianity to the West, offers a path for a theological restoration or theological maturation. As Lieven Boeve notes, such new developments in philosophy and religion has resulted in a figurative distance between contemporary people and traditional Christianity. The developing postmodern hermeneutics requires a cultural shift in which the Church may recognize the figurative distance its

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6 McCaffery, 2. McCaffery lists several Continental (primarily French) philosophers who have contributed to discussion of both phenomenology and subjectivity including Jean-Luc Marion and Gianni Vattimo, in ibid., 2-3.
(metaphysical) theology has had towards people, thereby opening the doors to the laity who may help shape what the Church of the next few decades may look like. Secondly, proposing a theological and ecclesial tradition grounded in post-metaphysical philosophy, which seeks to re-focus theology to an iconic understanding of the Divine and a re-imagining of the Church as a post-metaphysical organization requires two initial steps: (1) understanding the socio-religious, socio-political, and cultural shifts that have taken place in (Western) Europe since World War II and (2) choosing an example of where these theological shifts have taken place. The first is an exploration of sociology and religion, which focuses on the personal faith and narrative shifts which have taken place in the Western hemisphere. This dissertation proposes that such shifts have not only opened the door for a ‘return to religion,’ but possibilities for ‘new’ theological discourse to excite theological development. Attention is given to cultural shifts that are a result of immigration, globalization, and technology, rather than a foolish attempt to delineate the totality of a culture’s changes; the project would simply be overwhelming.

The example referred to here is the Republic of Ireland. In choosing the Republic as an introductory model, one witnesses the rapid changes the nation has faced. Recently, Ireland has been directly impacted by changes to the nation’s aging and diversified population, factors relating to globalization (e.g., tourism and education), increased access to technology, as well as overwhelming economic growth. Its place as an economic powerhouse in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries—the ‘Celtic Tiger’—encouraged a cultural shift. This narrative shift has left many questioning their status, their religion, their identity as Irish within an ever-changing country. Previous affiliations to such institutions such as the Catholic Church and its relationship to secular state politics became a point of debate, particularly among the generations who benefited from such growth. Compared to its neighboring European countries, Ireland’s shift towards the
secular is recent. Church attendance and religious affiliation have been tracked over the past few decades, a topic addressed further in chapter one. Lastly, and until recently, Ireland has avoided the additional challenges Islam offers to secular democracies throughout Europe. The belief systems disseminated from European social surveys, the research of sociologists, and general misgivings towards the Catholic Church may benefit from the work of Vattimo and Marion.

In summary, the Roman Church finds itself facing a demographic who is disheartened by the inherited narrative its theology possesses. I propose an examination of the metaphysical narratives juxtaposed to the narrative submissions of Marion and Vattimo. Ireland’s role in this project serves only as a locale, which having undergone its own more recent narrative transition, illustrates the vast changes the Western and European Catholic Church has experienced. Its role in chapter one of this project does nothing more than highlight Ireland’s place in Europe, as a once predominant Catholic nation, and a country experiencing its own sociological and religious changes. In short, the Republic of Ireland has been vastly affected by the postmodern changes, vastly speaking, that have shaped contemporary Europe.

Posing the question, ‘What can postmodern philosophy and theology offer?’ requires an understanding of the sociological narrative shifts which have affected countless faith adherents in Europe and beyond. Such narrative shifts in theology have helped shaped the postmodern context, articulated in the work of scholars who have addressed traditional approaches to the Christian faith versus the (postmodern) subjective shifts taking place in the form of personal spiritualism or belief. These postmodern theological shifts have accompanied the sociological and cultural changes various Western societies have experienced due in part to technological development, scientific discoveries, immigration and emigration, and religious syncretism of varying religious
backgrounds. I intend to argue that the narrative shifts in postmodernity have challenged Christianity and the Roman Catholic Church to open new venues for philosophy, particularly phenomenology and post-metaphysics, which have encouraged a return to religion, not in a return-to-the-pews motif, but a philosophical and historical interest in the traditions which helped shape Western Europe especially.

In this exploration of the larger issues, I aim to articulate four main points central to this project. First, a review of the sociological narrative shifts happening in traditionally European and Christian communities. Several theologians and sociologies are highlighted in this exchange. Second, the theological and cultural narrative shifts in the Catholic Church are addressed to provide a context which can be easily referred to. As noted previously, Ireland provides contextual evidence of a society and culture that has recently been subject to the sociological changes taking place in the West. As stated above, the Republic also represents a nation recently emerging from economic turmoil to economic strength, accompanied by the Continental traits associated with globalization and financial success. Third, an examination of the post-metaphysical theology Marion and Vattimo offer considering the narrative shifts. This then permits the fourth: a re-examination of the Catholic Church considering the iconic understanding of God (Marion) and the historical inheritance of the Church (Vattimo), while solidifying the place of charity as that which unites (or should unite) culturally diversified Christians, despite any narrative shift. The virtue of charity, as offered by these two philosophers, aims to ground the postmodern Christianity that finds itself immersed in the many sociological, religious, and cultural shifts of the West.

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1. Sociological Narrative Shifts in Traditional European and Christian Communities

Addressing the sociological shifts in theology, belief, and adherence to an institution or Church, Lieven Boeve prefaces his text, *Interrupting Tradition: An Essay on Christian Faith in a Postmodern Context*, stating:

In many traditionally Christian European societies, Christian faith no longer enjoys the monopoly it once had in giving meaning to human existence. The processes of secularisation and pluralisation have seriously restricted the all-inclusive importance of the Christian horizon of meaning. Postmodernity’s criticism of so-called master narratives have undermined the so-called absolutist and universalist truth claims of religious traditions and modern ideologies. The postmodern context challenges today’s theologians, requiring them to engage yet again in theology’s age-old project of *fides quarens intellectum*, ‘faith seeking understanding.’ The master narratives which have been so prominent in Western theological discourse have been uprooted, allowing the questioning and formation of ‘new’ theological ideas that fit the changing ‘horizon’ of Western society. Boeve’s work explores religious belief and adherence, reflecting the postmodern trend of individuals preferring an undefined religious or spiritual identity. These new identities do not necessarily fit within the confines of authoritative religious institutions.10 The sociological exploration of religion is an example of the shifting horizon Europe and ‘the West’ has experienced as a collective culture.11 Boeve, Enda McCaffery, and Vattimo will argue that there is a clear link between Christianity and Western culture, including Europe’s former colonies. Catholicism and Christianity cannot separate itself from ‘the West.’ It is culturally and sociologically bound to its place of development (despite the local influences of culture and indigenous traditions in non-European cultures).

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11 The cultural changes referred to in this context reflect the work of Kathryn Tanner. See Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), esp. 36.
In support of Boeve’s religious and faith claims, the collaborative research projects of Harvey Cox and Jan Swyngedouw,\textsuperscript{12} as well as Tom Beaudoin and J. Patrick Hornbeck,\textsuperscript{13} further elucidate the Euro-centric development of Christianity, while also substantiating the global shifts in Christian-faith adherence. As noted in chapter two especially, Post-War Europeans drove the continent in a new direction, preferring governments with secular ideology.\textsuperscript{14} The result, as the aforementioned scholars have demonstrated, indicates a rapid rate in which Roman Catholics are leaving the institutional church in favor of either nothing, individual spiritualism, or in some cases, the faith of their non-Catholic spouse.\textsuperscript{15}

I wish to suggest that part of the rejection of the faith by many in the postmodern era is a response to conservative exhibitions of theology which has been prominent for centuries. By first framing the sociological research of these scholars, the project then permits an examination of the desire by many for ‘something else,’ thereby allowing the work of Marion and Vattimo to enter the conversation. Marion’s focus on an iconic understanding of God whereby the metaphysical traditionalism of the Church is at minimum questioned, offers an opportunity for theologians to engage their work beyond the limitations of metaphysics. Likewise, Vattimo’s philosophy, which seeks to explore theology in light of Nietzsche and Heidegger, invites the reader to consider an overcoming of the systems of authority or the metanarratives he questions throughout his work.


\textsuperscript{15} Beaudoin, 255-62.
2. Challenging Metaphysics: Jean-Luc Marion and Gianni Vattimo

Jean-Luc Marion and Gianni Vattimo each present an alternative body of work in response to the metaphysical theology and the postmodern era. Here, I offer introductory reflections on Marion’s postmodern approach to the Divine. Though Marion’s *God Without Being*, is presented as an alternative to *Being* and *God* as understood through metaphysics. Several of his other texts will also be employed in order to articulate a post-metaphysical hermeneutic of the Divine. Secondly, Vattimo’s invites us to reconsider the authoritative and metaphysical language of the Roman Catholic Church and its corresponding theology.

By way of introducing Marion’s phenomenology and well aware of his critique of metaphysics existing within several different places, his text *Sur le prisme métaphysique de Descartes (On Descartes’ Metaphysical Prism)* defines metaphysics as the, “‘divine science or theology’ inasmuch as it considers the aforementioned ‘substances’—namely ‘… those things which are the most separate from matter…not only rationally, like the mathematical [idealities], but also Being, as God and the separate intelligences are.’” It is called “‘metaphysics,’ inasmuch as it considers being the attributes which naturally accompany being.” Being, substance, and science—the common understanding of *physics* considered here—remain interconnected to the Thomistic understanding of Aristotelean metaphysics. Critical of the traditional applications of Aristotelean metaphysics to the Divine, Marion provides a phenomenological view that does not

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19 Horner, 19.
rely on the aforementioned principles. Marion’s emphasis on icon versus idol, articulated in *The Idol and Distance*, positions a different concept of God, one that overcomes the traditional *causa sui* metaphysical conception.

Marion’s presentation of the divine is in part grounded on his distinction between icon and idol, insisting on the centrality of distance between the two concepts: “The icon properly manifests the nuptial distance that weds…the visible and the invisible—that is, the human and the divine. The idol tries to abolish that distance…” The alternative, of course, is the metaphysical idolatry committed via proofs that “do not lead absolutely to God.” Likewise, *The Idol and Distance* offers an additional critique of metaphysics by focusing on proofs found in theology and philosophy. This phenomenological exercise conducted by Marion de-emphasizes theological Being, in terms of proof-theory, common to theology (“onto-theology”). Whereas traditional Christianity continues to place emphasis on metaphysics as the frame from which theological narratives are defined, a phenomenological approach seeks to escape the metaphysical systems

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22 Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, 9.

23 Ibid.

24 “To take seriously that philosophy is a folly means, for us, first...taking seriously that the ‘God’ of onto-theology is rigorously equivalent to an idol, that which is presented by the Being of beings thought metaphysically; and therefore it means that the seriousness of God cannot begin to appear and grab hold of us unless, through a radical reversal, we claim to advance outside of onto-theology...It is not a question, as with everyone, of ‘overcoming metaphysics,’ but of at least posing the question correctly: does the onto-theological idol, triumphant or ruined...close all access to the icon of God as ‘icon of the invisible God’?” in ibid., 14-15.
previously relied on. Marion uses “phenomenology to complete [an] alternative theological methodology” which avoids metaphysics’ tendency towards idolatry.  

In *Being Given*, Marion writes of the challenges metaphysics poses to phenomena:

I often assume that phenomenology makes an exception to metaphysics…It should, therefore, be admitted that phenomenology does not actually overcome metaphysics so much as it opens the official possibility of leaving it to itself. The border between metaphysics and phenomenology runs within phenomenology—as its highest possibility, and I stick with the phenomenological discipline only in search of the way that it opens, and, sometimes, closes.  

These initial remarks indicate a certain respect for metaphysics, as it relates to phenomenology. Additionally, Marion offers a critique of the philosophical system via his description of the giver, the gift, and givenness. In this later section, speaking of “revealed theology,” Marion questions the role of *theologia rationalis* and its relationship to *metaphysica specialis*.  

He contends that the rightful place of theology (i.e., “Revelation of the Wisdom of the Word”) “should be opposed to [metaphysics],” thereby allowing for the givenness of theology or the givenness of Revelation. Marion’s understanding of theology would allow the given (theology/Revelation) to exist without justification (i.e., by an authority such as metaphysics), as it “is never defined as a principle or ground precisely because it delivers the given from any demand for a cause by letting it deliver itself, give itself.” In short, Marion’s understanding of theology—as articulated in *Being Given*—exists without metaphysics which requires ‘proof’ of existence.  

While *Being Given* (2002) and *The Idol and Distance* (2001) both offer a more favorable opinion of metaphysics as a parity to phenomenology, Marion’s highly critiqued earlier text, *God

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25 McCaffery, 135. See also Marion’s discussion of the Athenians’ deities in relation to Paul’s “invisible God” in Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, 23-6. Marion notes, however, the importance of metaphysics in terms of history and theological development; see ibid., 13.


27 Ibid., 72.

28 Ibid., 72-73.

29 Ibid., 73.

30 Ibid., 74.
Without Being (1991), offers a stronger challenge to metaphysics in its more traditional forms. According to Marion, the tools of metaphysics, in God Without Being, limit the Divine thereby constricting it to something less-than infinite. He argues that such philosophy presupposes limitations on God that should not exist and are therefore a concern. Marion’s thoughts on God extend beyond the metaphysical and idolatrous definitions found in the *causa sui* definition often attributed to Thomistic theology. The result is an overcoming of metaphysics favoring a phenomenological look at God, avoiding Aristotelean proofs and idolatry.

Marion’s work is not without criticism. For example, his examination of Aquinas in God Without Being, Tamsin Jones explains, received a good deal of criticism, resulting in Marion publishing later revisions. Additionally, Marion’s work, according to Christina M. Gschwandtner, has received criticism due to his lack of hermeneutics and affiliation with the Catholic Church. And while Jones and Gschwandtner offer critiques in their own right, one of Marion’s more outspoken critics—speaking from the side of phenomenology—is fellow countryman, Dominique Janicaud who accuses Marion of treating the post-metaphysical philosophy of phenomenology incorrectly. For instance, Janicaud remains highly skeptical of Marion’s use of ‘givenness,’ suggesting that phenomenology and theology cannot converse effectively with one another. More importantly, however, is his claim that Marion and phenomenology remains grounded in metaphysics thereby causing an “imperiled thesis.” Janicaud

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32 Ibid., 35-35.
33 Ibid., 37.
35 Gschwandtner, 117.
37 Ibid., 5.
notes, “ought we to add, more categorically perhaps, that phenomenology, radically implemented and methodically conducted, can only be metaphysical.” 38 Nonetheless, Marion continues to explore theology without the assumptions a Thomistic or Aristotelian narrative encourages. 39

Gianni Vattimo’s critique of metaphysics is addressed in his attempts to overcome the traditional hermeneutics, which has shaped the church, state, and culture for centuries. In his analysis of Vattimo’s consideration of metaphysics, Santiago Zabala notes the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, and Hans-Georg Gadamer in Vattimo’s work, specifically on the philosophy of Being. 40 Vattimo’s work highlights a coterie of philosophers who agree with his overarching concern(s) regarding metaphysics. More specifically, Vattimo is concerned with how metaphysics relates to structures, including the Catholic Church. Additionally, by emphasizing Christianity’s existence within a culture, allows Vattimo to focus on the secularized shift the faith finds itself within. His hermeneutical reading of the Church is unique, insofar as his idea of secularization is one that does not accept a complete dismissal of the religious, but a change in the way the Christian narrative responds to the world. 41

Vattimo’s progressive view offers a rejection of absolutes found in dogmatic teachings and an opportunity for such communities to exist in a postmodern context. Vattimo understands any sort of “transfiguration of religion,” to take place only when the traditional forms of authority are

38 Ibid., 55-56. Janicaud will go on to insist that even Husserl remains within the guise of metaphysics.
39 For an example of Marion’s continued theological investigations using phenomenology, see Jean-Luc Marion, In the Self’s Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine [Au lieu de soi], trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012). In his introduction to this text, Marion outlines his continued interest in applying his phenomenological ideas in a theological context, thus the interest in Augustine’s Confessions. See ibid., iii-xvi.
overcome, especially considering the various socio-cultural and narrative shifts in the twenty-first century. Vattimo’s view of dismissal of metaphysics and the “transfiguration of religion,” is a natural progression of the faith, arguing, “The recovery of religion is not a return to metaphysics but an outcome of metaphysics’ dissolution.” This follows much of what is offered in McCaffery’s analysis of a ‘return to religion’ and Vattimo’s understanding of a renewed engagement with religion. Vattimo adds, “To be faithful to the end of metaphysics, which makes [religion’s] renewable possible, the religion that presents itself anew in our culture must abandon the project of grounding religious ethics upon knowledge of natural essences that are taken as norms, observing instead the freedom of dialogic mediation.” Such a review of metaphysics is viewed as a natural progression of religion. This progression opens the doors for a post-metaphysical community, which traverses the authority of an institutional Church. More importantly for Vattimo, this shift in faith is a process of weakening: “Increasingly, the outcomes of science are irreducible to the unity of a ground, making metaphysics implausible. The structures of society have become more flexible, replacing the natural community with a more heterogeneous and divided society where the single individual is less identifiable.”

Vattimo, however, is not inviting a form of atheism. There is no dismissal of a religious tradition. Instead, there is an opportunity for individuals to reengage a narrative and the possibility of religious experience(s) via conversations grounded in a dialogue between philosophy and theology. A dialogue between the two disciplines delivers an opening in which the kenotic God

43 Ibid., 90.
44 For example, McCaffery, 113.
45 Vattimo, 90.
46 Vattimo offers Heidegger’s ontology as an articulation of the “end of metaphysics” in ibid., 64-66.
47 Ibid., 68.
48 Ibid., 90.
provides a basis upon which such dialogue may take place. “Despite its limits, this vision might well define the horizon for resuming the dialogue between philosophy and religion in the Western world.” ⁴⁹ In short, Vattimo hopes to offer traditional Christianity, and specifically Catholicism, a philosophical foundation for theology, one that escapes the limitations of metaphysics.

Vattimo’s metaphysical and ecclesiological analysis of metaphysics then leads to arguments regarding institutional structures and violence. In short, he contends that metaphysics leads to various forms of violence, those that are visible and others which are less pronounced. Such violence can be evident in Catholicism’s traditional approaches to different Christian denominations, war, and sexuality. ⁵⁰ In its place, Vattimo emphasizes the importance of pensiero debate (weak thought) and charity versus institutional dogma. “Christianity is marching in a direction that can only be that of lightening and weakening its burden of dogma in favor of its practical and moral teaching. In that sense too, charity takes the place of truth…The future of Christianity, and of the Church, is to become an ever more refined religion of pure charity.” ⁵¹ Any such metaphysics which limits or deemphasizes charity leads to structures of power, including authoritarian systems within the Church itself. As a result, authoritative bodies develop an attitude in which it asserts its function as the interpretative body of theology and more importantly, Revelation. ⁵² This assertion misses what remains at the core of Christianity: caritas.

Vattimo too encounters his own critics with regard to his philosophical works. Most notably Thomas Guarino objects to his exposition of metaphysics, explaining that such

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⁴⁹ Ibid., 90-91.
⁵⁰ Ibid., 113-14. Ibid. 113-4. Vattimo offers an additional critique of Catholicism’s approach to natural law, writing, “Contemporary Catholic teaching is in line with this when it demands that the laws of the state must conform to the laws that the Church claims to be ‘natural,’” ibid., 115.
⁵² Vattimo, After Christianity, 117. Vattimo does note the inherited political and religious power the Church assumes, given the Roman system it existed within prior to its demise (ibid., 115-16.).
interpretative thoughts results in the “[repeated] mistakes tendered by Plato, Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, and Husserl, thereby ignoring the vicissitudes of history, the clarion affirmation that we live in a center-less, post-metaphysical epoch; it would ignore the ontological difference between Being and its determinate epochal manifestations.”53 Nevertheless, Vattimo’s work is proposed as a sound critique of the authoritative structures within the Catholic Church. His review of metaphysics accompanies the postmodern narrative and cultural shifts taking place throughout Europe, and perhaps the ‘West’ in general.

3. An Outline of this Project

The primary focus of this chapter is to examine the changes Christianity, and specifically Western Catholicism has experienced, and to offer the philosophical theories of Jean-Luc Marion and Gianni Vattimo. To do this, I continually argue against the need for metaphysics as the necessary tool for theological discourse. Overcoming metaphysics requires an examination of the sociological trends, institutional changes, the Church’s ratification of metaphysics in various forms, and an historical overview of those philosophers who have influenced both Marion and Vattimo. Finally, emphasizing the importance of caritas in both authors’ works suggests a basis for a theology that seeks to escape the confines of an authoritative and metaphysically-based system. If there is a ‘renewal of religion,’ it would originate in this final point; it would be grounded in caritas.

My project proceeds in this manner. Chapter one first defines the cultural shifts taking place throughout the ‘West’ and postmodernity, as a whole. Defining what is meant by the term ‘postmodernity,’ the chapter highlights the sociological changes that have taken place globally throughout the past few decades, relating to the practice of religion. Secondly, the chapter would

present the demographic shifts in faith adherence and Roman Catholic Church attendance throughout the past half-century, in light of the socio-cultural shifts that have taken place. This follows research done by many contemporary sociologists, who highlight the many changes taking place in various religious traditions (most importantly for this project, Christianity and Catholicism). Third, a brief examination of Ireland is offered as a contemporary example of the socio-cultural changes that have taken place. Lastly, the chapter offers broad definitions and statistics pointing to the overarching shift in religious and cultural changes in Europe as well as North America (i.e., the West, generalized). Importance is granted to these three topics in order to identify the possibility of a post-metaphysical and post-secular theology that may offer a ‘return to religion’ for many of the disaffiliated faith adherents.

The second chapter addresses classical definitions of metaphysics and the connection these have to the authority in the Church. The chapter also focuses on the cultural changes the Church finds herself immersed within, briefly surveys pontifical documents relating to metaphysics, and examines the Church’s adjustment(s) to cultural changes, most notably those which affect the Church’s teachings. In order to place the Church within the narrative shifts of the post-secular and post-metaphysical world introduced in chapter one, an illustration of the historical context is necessary. This chapter thus introduces the metaphysical preferences of the two previous pontificates: Benedict XVI and John Paul II. The chapter will further address the Church’s concern with new theological trends it faces, especially those emerging in the modern and postmodern eras. The role of the institutional Church is critical for understanding the role it has relative to its people and the culture(s) it finds itself immersed within. The chapter will introduce the historical tension between the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and theologians engaged in non-traditional theological projects and social activism. The introduction of this ecclesial body introduces a
roadblock to new theological ideas, several of which are introduced in chapters three and four. Thus, the chapter addresses the difficult challenges both the Church as an institution and theologians exploring new (and post-metaphysical) ideas, face in a community facing drastic narrative, cultural shifts.

Chapter three is divided into two parts. The first addresses those philosophers who have helped shape Jean-Luc Marion’s phenomenology. The in-depth examination of his predecessors—René Descartes, Edmund Husserl, and Emmanuel Lévinas—helps provide a foundation for the remaining portion of the chapter. The first half also offers further commentary by Marion’s most notable critic, Dominique Janicaud. The second half offers an overview of the phenomenology of Jean-Luc Marion. Though grounded in the faith and tradition of the patristics, the post-metaphysical critique Marion offers initiates new narratives for discovery of the Divine. Marion’s work presents a unique theology of God, demonstrates his concept of the ‘saturated phenomenon,’ and provides a series of definitions for the idol and icon. Marion’s phenomenological presentation of theology is offered in order to propose a theology that compares to the metaphysically-driven definitions popular in other forms of Christian theology. The chapter aims to present Marion’s thought as a worthwhile supplement to the Thomistic theology, providing a narrative which offers faith adherents an opportunity to engage theology in a phenomenological, intuition-flooding format. Lastly, this chapter provides an overview of Marion’s understanding of caritas.

The fourth and final chapter focuses on the philosophical theology of Gianni Vattimo, who offers several challenges to the current status of the Roman Catholic Church. Vattimo’s suspicion of metaphysics, the Magisterium, and the authoritative interpretations which have long dominated the Roman Catholic Church are reviewed in this chapter. Additionally, the chapter offers an articulation of Vattimo’s historical hermeneutical reading of Christianity and Catholicism, which
ultimately questions the role of metaphysics and the function of the Magisterium as an authoritative structure. Subsequently, this chapter outlines Vattimo’s insistence on the importance of Christ’s historical *kenosis* as an underlying principle for Christianity and the post-metaphysical significance of this act of humility. This of course differs from the dogmatic principles which have long governed the theological development of the Church in the centuries since the Easter events. Lastly, and similar to Marion, the principle of *caritas* is presented as an important part of the Christian life.

As a whole, this project seeks to add to the discussion of postmodern theology. Both of the philosophers addressed herein offer a glimpse into theological ‘pathways’ that are not metaphysically driven. I propose that both Marion and Vattimo continue to evoke new conversations in various areas of postmodern theology. Their work continues to contribute to postmodern faith insofar as they invite us to move beyond the limitations of authority and metaphysics. They offer their own pathways for a renewed interest in religion, flirting with traditional interpretations of scripture, challenging linguistic analyses of revelation, and scrutinizing the Catholic Church’s affection for metaphysics.
CHAPTER ONE
APPROACHING THE THEOLOGICAL NARRATIVE SHIFTS IN POSTMODERNITY

St. John’s Catholic Church, located at the far end of Pittsburgh’s Italian Bloomfield and Lawrenceville neighborhood, has been transformed into a microbrewery and restaurant. “The Church Brew Works” has attracted thousands of tourists since it opened in 1999, the crowds eager to see how a Catholic Church could be converted to a brewery. Large copper kettles rest on the former altar, welcoming guests to the once-sacred space. Recently, the Wall Street Journal highlighted the sale of Europe’s churches with a picture of one transformed into an indoor skating park.54 This transformation of churches, prayer houses, and other former religious sites highlight the religious changes occurring across the Western hemisphere. It is, perhaps, evidence of the postmodern changes society is currently experiencing. Nevertheless, one may also contend that religious discourse never ceases to remain a part of the cultural narrative.

This chapter focuses first on defining the cultural shifts taking place throughout the ‘West’ and postmodernity, as a whole. Defining what is meant by the term ‘postmodernity,’ the chapter will highlight the sociological changes that have taken place globally throughout the past few decades, relating to the practice of religion, highlighting the presupposed reasons for the changes: immigration, globalization, the syncretization and ‘pluralization’ of religion, technology, and other relevant issues. Second, the chapter will present the demographic shifts in faith adherence and Roman Catholic Church attendance throughout the past half-century, in light of the socio-cultural shifts that have taken place. This draws upon the research of contemporary sociologists, who highlight the many changes taking place in various religious traditions (most importantly for this project, Christianity and Catholicism). Third, a brief examination of Ireland will be offered as a

contemporary example of these socio-cultural changes. And finally, though connected to these issues, the chapter will offer broad definitions and statistics pointing to the overarching shift in religious and cultural changes in Europe as well as North America (i.e., the West, generalized). These three topics will be examined in order to identify the possibility of a post-metaphysical, post-secular theology—one that may offer a ‘return’ to religion for disaffiliated faith adherents.

1. Exploring ‘Postmodernity’

The difficulty in attempting to surmise a definition of ‘postmodern,’ (along with variants ‘postmodernity’ and ‘postmodernism’) is the variety of theses related to the concept. The term itself extends beyond the scope of philosophy or theology, allowing analysts of all sorts to use it to judge art, film, literature, the sciences, architecture, etc. This dissertation will focus on three scholars exploring the fields of philosophy and theology in an attempt to illustrate the meaning of postmodernism in relation to these aforementioned academic subjects. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Christina M. Gschwandtner, and Gerard Mannion are scholars engaged with postmodernism. Each approaches postmodernity in a particular context focusing on the contributions postmodernity has to his or her work and the field at large. Additionally, I intend to follow these general descriptions of postmodernity with a brief analysis of the works of Jean-François Lyotard, Gianni Vattimo, and Jean-Luc Marion, while also demonstrating Martin Heidegger’s influence on postmodern philosophy and theology.

1.1 Postmodern Generalities

Beginning with Vanhoozer and systematic theology as a whole, ‘postmodernity’ is acknowledged as an elusive term, a phenomenon too large to encompass within a few pages of
theology or philosophy. In his reading of postmodernity, Vanhoozer understands the concept to be too contextualized, broadly interpreted, and personal for application in theology or philosophy:

A definition of postmodernity is as likely to say more about the person offering the definition than it is of ‘the postmodern.’ Second, postmoderns resist closed, tightly bounded ‘totalizing’ accounts of such things as the ‘essence’ of the postmodern. And third, according to David Tracy ‘there is no such phenomenon as postmodernity.’ There are only postmodernities. Given these three points, the task of writing an introduction may seem to be well nigh impossible. Vanhoozer is right, insofar as the diversity of definitions given to postmodernism as a theory is concerned. His claim certainly matches a good deal of the literature in postmodern philosophy and theology. In some regard, Vanhoozer prefers David Tracy’s understanding of the ‘postmodern condition,’ rather than the oft-used term, ‘postmodernity.’ This condition, which rejects “‘totalizing’ accounts,” emerges out of an era in which society at large questions the given narratives of the previous generation(s). The resulting stylistic changes in art, clothing, literature, music, etc., and philosophy, theology, the sciences, and other academic subjects provided a verbose body of work labeled ‘postmodern.’ The common trait, if there is in fact such a thing, is the challenge to existing (master) narratives, the same narratives which have long governed a given society or culture. In this case, the narratives of theology and religion are questioned in postmodernity. Thus, in Vanhoozer’s review, postmodern theology aims to challenge existing (master) narratives within the Christian tradition. However, Vanhoozer remains skeptical of Jean-François Lyotard’s critique of master narratives and other postmodern approaches to theology, which consider the postmodern era to be presently ongoing. Vanhoozer will insist on a

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56 Ibid.
57 Ibid., 3-5.
return to a classicist interpretation of scripture and theology, because of the ‘not-yet’ reality of postmodernism.\footnote{Vanhoozer, in The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology, 22-25.}

Others who exclusively explore postmodern theology and philosophy approach the subject in more favorable ways. Christina M. Gschwandtner, for example, begins with a brief reflection on the postmodern:

The meaning of that term will also emerge more fully in the course of the discussion, but I take it loosely to refer to what comes after the modern and is sufficiently different from or even opposed to it, to require a separate term. More specifically, I use it roughly synonymous with what has come to be called ‘continental’ philosophy (as opposed to ‘analytical’ philosophy), usually including twentieth- and twenty-first-century French and German thinkers, often occupied with such philosophical occupations as existentialism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and deconstruction (although there are others).\footnote{Gschwandtner, xviii.}

The variety of philosophical ideas is emphasized here, suggesting the ambiguity associated with the root, ‘postmodern.’ Gschwandtner’s analysis is clearly more favorable than Vanhoozer’s, noting the impact the concept has had on the development of philosophy and theology, specifically in Europe or ‘Continental Philosophy.’ Gschwandtner suggests there are common threads among the thinkers her book discusses: a general suspicion of traditions, narratives, and/or systems of thought. Additionally, Gschwandtner explains,

Postmodernism, then, challenges the idea that there is one overall coherent version of the truth, that access to such Truth is through…rationality, and that it is possible to get to some objective position from which to see the world in a neutral fashion. Instead it stresses the importance of listening to many different voices and perspectives, especially those oppressed or marginalized by authorities of whatever sort. It also recognizes that we always speak from within a particular…context and that truth is thus always embodied and particular.\footnote{Ibid., 11.}

And, unlike Vanhoozer, who frames Lyotard’s analysis of grand narratives as negligent, Gschwandtner supports the suspicion of narratives—in this case, ‘Truth’—as something that requires and is open to a variety of inquiries. Beyond the changes in thought, the arts, and other facets of life, Gschwandtner contends that the Euro-American society at large has changed
dramatically: “Where does all of this leave us today? It leaves us with an intellectual society and culture that is predominantly secular, often agnostic, if not atheistic. This is true of much of European culture and it is certainly true of American intellectual life.” She goes on to say that the twentieth century, and its intellectual achievements in technology and the sciences, has in large part dismissed the “‘God hypothesis,’” thereby dismantling the need for religious experiences. Contemporary thinkers back such intellectual achievements as they acknowledge evolution and the origins of the universe, continually questioning the place of God in such a vast cosmos. Gschwandtner’s focus on these contemporary trends highlights a general view of postmodernism, a period in which communities reject the religious and cultural narratives of earlier generations. Thus the monolithic approach of Vanhoozer, along with other fundamental analyses of the Christian tradition, appears insufficient in the postmodern era. Vanhoozer supports the continued emphasis given to proofs of God’s existence, ultimately preventing contextual reviews of the faith through a postmodern lens. Gschwandtner, by contrast, maintains the understanding that academics and other aspects of society may reject or question traditional approaches to the religious narrative. And while Vanhoozer may support more traditional avenues of theological development, others have moved away from the classicist approach favoring postmodern explorations that break free from the classic ways of theological development: “Many thinkers accept the contemporary scientific and philosophical worldview, but seek to demonstrate that Christian belief at the very least is not incompatible with it and possibly even provides the best explanation for it.” One such academic field addressing the contemporary worldview, alongside philosophy and theology, is that of phenomenology. Contemporary thinkers such as Emmanuel

62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., 11-2.
64 Ibid., 12.
Levinas, Jean-Luc Marion, Michel Henry, and Jean-Luc Nancy, have, according to Dominique Janicaud, engaged in a ‘theological turn’ in phenomenology (something Janicaud rejects), which has provided a space in which the aforementioned contemporary concerns can meet theology. In response to Vanhoozer’s objections, phenomenology, as demonstrated in subsequent chapters, serves as a postmodern developmental tool for theology and philosophy, which may appease those who question the legitimacy of classical, dogmatic, and metaphysically developed theological narrative.

Postmodernity’s influence on the Roman Catholic Church is of essential concern to this dissertation. Specifically, this project is concerned with how postmodernity might allow an overcoming of traditional systems of church (e.g., Dulles’s Models of Church), such that the narratives in the faith tradition might converse more effectively with the postmodern philosophies and theologies alluded to above. An important aspect of this approach to ecclesiology requires an understanding of postmodernity as being highly localized. As Gschwandtner highlights Janicaud’s observations of French phenomenology, an examination of the ecclesiological changes is also necessary. Writing with a bend towards ecclesiology, Gerard Mannion explains, “The postmodern era is thus marked by a shift from belief in certainties and truth claims to more localised and piecemeal factors. The individual is seen as creating his or her own meaning to a certain extent, rather than receiving it from without.” Elsewhere, Mannion will go on to note the variety of postmodern, localized theological bodies of thought, including feminist, liberation,

postmetaphysical, philosophical, radical orthodoxy, and mujerista theologies, to name a few.\textsuperscript{67} Theologians engaged with these and other subjects, Mannion explains, “are attentive to the valuable insights from and potential pitfalls of the postmodernisms.”\textsuperscript{68} In his opinion, the terms related to postmodernity elicit several different understandings, several of which are contentious and many others of which are positively challenging to the long-held traditions of Christian theology.\textsuperscript{69} In short, postmodernity finds itself within an intellectual shift—a challenging conglomeration with varied approaches to how and where postmodern hermeneutics can be applied or engaged.\textsuperscript{70} This dissertation aims to approach postmodernity mindful of Vanhoozer’s concerns, accepting of Gschwandtner’s articulation of the societal developments which have shaped postmodernity, and with an awareness of the localized and debated components of postmodernity within the Church as presented by Mannion. Before progressing, however, understanding postmodernity as it relates to grand narratives is important.

1.2 Jean-François Lyotard

Attempts to define postmodernity would be remiss if they did not align, at the most fundamental level, with Jean-François Lyotard’s definition. In the introduction to his 1979 report on knowledge, originally commissioned by the government of Quebec, Lyotard (1924-1998) offered a definition of ‘the postmodern,’ writing:

The object of this study is the condition of knowledge in the most highly developed societies. I have decided to use the word \textit{postmodern} to describe that condition…it designates the state of our culture following the transformations which, since the end of the nineteenth century, have altered the game rules for science, literature, and the arts.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 15. The variety of “postmodernisms” Mannion addresses is of particular concern, insofar as they relate to the cultural changes taking place in Euro-America today and the developments seen in postmodern philosophy or theology.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 24.
\textsuperscript{71} Lyotard, xxiii.
He continues, arguing that science has often objected to the rules of given narratives, suggesting that narratives are often found to be fables when faced against scientific discovery and fact:

Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it. To the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it. The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements—narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on.72

Throughout the first chapter, Lyotard’s interest in postmodernity is focused on language and narratives. Novels, poems, and other pieces of literature maintain a certain language and narrative style, so too does the information age led in by postmodernity. As one of the framing devices for this chapter, he focuses on the rapid development of technology and the language that has come out of these scientific discoveries in juxtaposition to narratives found in other facets of society or academia—including those found in philosophy or theology. Critiquing society’s impulse to commodify knowledge (scientific, technological, etc.) and sell it accordingly,73 he then asserts that the same value cannot be given to narratives, which lack the value of scientific knowledge.74 Placing a value on knowledge raises a number of questions, especially as it pertains to the development of societies in the fields of technology, the sciences, etc. He suggests in his argument the need for a dismantling of “bureaucratization,” which has historically limited free-thought and expression.75 Lyotard is suggesting a turn from the commodification of knowledge, supplanting it with individual or localized identity often associated with wealth and its accumulation, while also promoting the value found in narratives. Addressing Lyotard’s analysis of knowledge allows for the acknowledgment of one explicit characteristic of postmodernity: the metanarratives are no longer sufficient as governing statements for society. In fact, they have fallen victim to

72 Ibid., xxiv and Taylor, 716-17.
73 Lyotard, 3-4.
74 Ibid., 26-7.
75 Ibid., 17.
postmodernity’s common commodification and general suspicion(s), preferring instead a personal approach to creation, discovery, and analysis as noted below.

In addition to the value assigned to knowledge, specifically scientific and technological data, Lyotard’s concern with metanarratives demonstrates his belief that everything “received” is or can be suspect. His understanding of postmodernity includes a sense of apprehension toward the given knowledge or narrative; rather, people tend to rely on self-discovery and analysis more than handed-down traditions. Likewise, the product delivered by a postmodern artist, composer, writer, or in this case a philosopher, steps outside the boundaries of “pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work.” The postmodern work produces its own set of rules or sets out to discover the categories the product might fit within. Pertaining to religion, as noted by Gschwandtner, several Continental philosophers and theologians have followed this model, challenging the pre-established rules of theology. For example, Jean-Luc Marion will question the metaphysical language Christianity has used historically to define God.

Lyotard’s concerns regarding metanarratives (‘grand récits’) can be seen through his political statements. As Stuart Sim notes, “[Lyotard’s] The Postmodern Condition argues that knowledge is now the world’s most significant commodity, and that it may well become a source

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76 Ibid., 14-5 and 31-41. For example, Lyotard grants special attention to the processes of manufacturing, the inevitable technological developments associated with product creation, and the sharing of knowledge with databases, computer systems, and other technological achievements. Though writing in the twentieth century, Lyotard’s projections regarding technological advancements are certainly enlightening and forward thinking as it relates to the twenty-first century. His point, I suggest, is to not only predict the developments in 1979, but to state his concerns regarding the passing on of knowledge to systems that lack oversight, control, or connection(s) to a master-narrative.

77 Ibid., 81.

78 Ibid. Lyotard offers Picasso’s work as an example of self-determined rules.

79 Marion, God without Being: Hors-Texte.
of conflict between nations in the future." Control and authority over knowledge is especially concerning, as the knowledge may be disseminated in a way that is only favorable to those in power. Knowledge, according to Lyotard, is governed by the elite few, without input from the masses (as seen in his political concerns with the 1950s and 1960s Algerian revolt). Postmodernity finds itself concerned with the traditional narratives society is given, often by those in an authoritative position. Ultimately, according to Sim, Lyotard is questioning the foundational systems that have governed societies, proposing instead, “antifoundationalism: a rejection of the idea that there are foundations to our system of thought, or belief, that lie beyond the question, and that are necessary to the business of making value judgments. Postmodernist philosophy has proved to be resolutely antifoundational in outlook, and unwilling to accept that this renders it dysfunctional in any way as philosophy.”

Lyotard’s concerns and suspicions regarding authority and master narratives serve as a primary concern for this project. I contend that societies have likewise acknowledged Lyotard’s suspicions of authority, foundational systems of thought, and the metanarratives that have long served as the underlying tenets of organizations or institutions. Likewise, these suspicions find distinction in the philosophical and theological projects noted in Gschwandtner and Mannion, for example.

Additionally, Kevin Hart’s assessment of Lyotard focuses on the philosopher’s understanding of ‘image’ and ‘being.’ Having outlined in previous chapters the social, technological, and linguistic changes in Euro-American society, these concepts appear as central

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81 Sim, 7-8.
82 Ibid., 9-10. See also, his discussion on Marxism, in Lyotard, 12-14.
topics of debate among postmodern scholars, including Marion and Vattimo. Lyotard’s angst towards traditional metanarratives regarding these ideas is important. As Hart writes, “For Lyotard, the postmodern is what is most radical and irritating in the modern, what offends the canons of good taste: it insists on presenting what we cannot conceptualize, what we cannot find in our experience."\(^{83}\) The artwork alluded to in the works of Lyotard, Jean-Luc Marion, Jean-Luc Nancy, Jean-Yves Lacoste, and many others in the French phenomenological tradition, echoes the concerns Hart notes. This work may appeal to the senses of one person (e.g., Mark Rothko’s *Subway Scene*),\(^{84}\) while offending another.

If the Christian faith is viewed as a metanarrative, defined by an underlying story found in Scripture, the tradition itself is subject to the postmodern criticism Lyotard and others offer. This begs the question of how postmodernity responds to or engages with the Christian faith. In his review of Lyotard, Lieven Boeve writes, “If the strategy of the master narrative no longer functions, however, which role, if any, can we continue to ascribe to the Christian tradition, to the Christian narrative?”\(^{85}\) The implication of such scriptural suspicion, assuming one accepts Lyotard’s argument, has found itself connected to the cultural and sociological changes found in traditional Christian communities. The resulting shifts in society have led to the break from master narratives, which have ultimately led to the detraditionalization of and personalization of religious traditions.\(^{86}\) However, as noted above, the cultural personalization, detraditionalization, or complete break from faith traditions has not hindered theological development. Several thinkers

\(^{83}\) Hart, 2.  
\(^{86}\) Ibid., 52.
have begun using philosophy or phenomenology to connect Christianity to postmodernity, often facilitating such discussions by relying on Martin Heidegger’s phenomenology and focus on ‘image’ and ‘being.’

1.3 Martin Heidegger

Heidegger’s collective body of work goes beyond the scope of this dissertation, but his influence is undeniably essential in any attempt to define the term ‘postmodern.’ In fact, this section does little in terms of scratching the surface Heidegger scholars have conducted; rather, it simply introduces ‘being/Being’ as a postmodern theological and philosophical focus. His influence in philosophy, phenomenology, and theology is of particular importance, insofar as his ideas challenge the conceptions found in onto-theology. Of particular importance are his thoughts relating to the use of metaphysics in philosophy and theology. Heidegger’s texts dedicated to onto-theology note the problem(s) metaphysics has in relation to ‘being.’ In *Being and Time*, Heidegger writes of the question of being, “This question has today been forgotten—although our time considers itself progressive in again affirming metaphysics…But the question touched upon here is hardly an arbitrary one. It sustained the avid research of Plato and Aristotle but from then on ceased to be heard as a thematic question of actual investigation.” Critical of the progress that had been made since Plato and Aristotle’s questions, Heidegger goes on to articulate a philosophy dedicated to the question of being, without the contemporary limitations of metaphysics.

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89 Heidegger addresses ‘Being’ as follows: “‘Being’ is the most ‘universal’ concept,” “‘being’ is indefinable,” and “‘Being’ is the self-evident concept,” in ibid., 2-3.
Heidegger recognizes several contentious points while exploring the metaphysics outlined in the works of Descartes, Suarez, and Kant. Namely, the place of metaphysics as the determinate science for Heidegger is of concern. The unquestioned role of metaphysics insofar as it determines or establishes categories of substance is suspect.\textsuperscript{90} Furthermore, Descartes’ emphasis on the pretexts of being, “ego cogito, subject, reason,” etc., is problematic for Heidegger, as it limits an understanding of being in multiple ways. Specifically, Heidegger argues in \textit{Being and Time}, Descartes neglects “the question of being altogether,” a problem in Heidegger’s study of any philosophical tradition.\textsuperscript{91}

As Gschwandtner notes, the “question of Being (Sein)” is the focal point of all philosophy, despite the aforementioned neglect the subject has endured of late.\textsuperscript{92} Heidegger’s text addresses the notion of “being, as the foundation for ontology,”\textsuperscript{93} in part by relying on the use of “Dasein” in order to describe human beings throughout his early work.\textsuperscript{94} ‘Dasein’ is described as, “the one for whom Being is an issue, the being we are and whose own being (or existing) is closest to us, but often forgotten or ignored.”\textsuperscript{95} Heidegger’s arguments regarding being/Being are underlined via his overcoming of the traditional descriptions often attributed to Aristotelean metaphysics. To this

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\textsuperscript{90}“Within the limits of its [metaphysics] dogmatic adoption of the fundamental Greek conceptions of being, this systematity contains a great deal of unpretentious work which does make advances. In its \textit{scholastic} mold, Greek ontology makes the essential transition the \textit{Disputationes metaphysicae} of Suarez into the ‘metaphysics’ and transcendental philosophy of the modern period; it still determines the foundations and goals of Hegel’s \textit{Logic}. Certain distinctive domains of being become visible in the course of this history and become the primary leitmotives for the subsequent range of problems (Descartes’ ego cogito, subject, ego, reason, spirit, person), but, corresponding to the thorough neglect of the question of being, they remain unquestioned with respect to being and the structure of their being. But the categorical content of traditional ontology is transferred to these beings with corresponding formalizations and purely negative restrictions, or else dialectic is called upon to help with an ontological interpretation of the substantiality of the subject,” \textit{ibid.}, 21.
\textsuperscript{91} \textit{ibid.}, 23 and 33-7. Robyn Horner offers additional observations regarding Heidegger’s reading of Cartesian metaphysics in relation to Marion’s phenomenology. See Horner, 38-41.
\textsuperscript{92} Gschwandtner, 19.
\textsuperscript{93} Dahlstrom, 53.
\textsuperscript{94} Heidegger, 7 and 9.
\textsuperscript{95} Gschwandtner, 20 and Heidegger, 10-3.
\end{flushleft}
point, Gschwandtner offers a reflection on Heidegger’s understanding of Dasein, in which the concept has been described in monolithic terms, thereby removing the variety the term naturally implies. In order to rediscover or simply arrive at the other modes alluded to, a process of deconstruction is required for metaphysics, something his successors will develop in varying forms. Overcoming onto-theology is a central idea in Heidegger’s argument for the post-metaphysical, and thus postmodern philosophy. Thus, Gschwandtner offers Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics, which is essentially an analysis of “onto-theology”:

One of Heidegger’s most important insights into the nature of metaphysics is what is called the ‘onto-theo-logical constitution’ of metaphysics…Metaphysics, Heidegger contends, is historically constituted as an ‘ontology’ (a history of being) and always also as a ‘theology.’ This means that the various modes of being that metaphysics acknowledges are generally grounded in a ‘highest being’ or a divine being. This supreme being tends to be called ‘God’ and is something like a first cause or even an uncaused cause, the causa sui. This is not the God to whom Christians…pray, but it is the philosophical concept of the divine, which grounds all other entities within the world, believed to be created by this supreme being. Ontological and theological grounded are thus always wrapped up with each other, and the history of metaphysics is defined by this intermingling and mutual grounding. The highest being must not necessarily even be called ‘God,’ strictly speaking, but it has the connotations of a divine being by providing the ultimate ground and cause for all other existence.

By introducing one of its influential thinkers and his theological concerns regarding metaphysics, being and Being, and God, a number of postmodernity’s issues come to light. These topics have become some of the central concerns for several Continental Philosophers, including Marion and Vattimo, who have employed Heidegger’s ideas, his deconstruction of metaphysics, and his theological concerns articulated by Gschwandtner.

96 “Dasein is thought to permit some sort of access to Being as such: Dasein is the space (or one of the places) where Being might manifest itself. Yet Being is (as Aristotle, a philosopher very important for Heidegger said) ‘spoken of in many ways’ and Heidegger is particularly concerned to ensure that the meaning of Being would not be reduced to only one version or interpretation thereof. According to Heidegger, this is precisely what has happened in the history of philosophy: Being has been described in one particular mode of being…while other modes have been ignored. Such monolithic definitions of Being, although they are certainly revelatory in some fashion, also cover over much by ignoring the many other manifestations of Being.” Gschwandtner, 20.
97 Ibid. This is especially true of those who critique metaphysics and do so through theology, in Ibid., 21.
98 Ibid. See also, Dahlstrom, 53-56.
Again, exploring Heidegger’s works in their entirety goes beyond the scope of this study, but it is important to emphasize the impact his work has had on postmodern philosophy and theology. To reiterate the point made at the outset of this section, any further immersion into Heidegger’s thoughts would detract from the attempt to define postmodernism. Most importantly, is the challenge Heidegger offers to the metanarratives, namely the historical development of metaphysics and ‘onto-theology.’ Martin Heidegger’s Being and Time precedes the work of Jean-Luc Marion and Gianni Vattimo who, likewise, challenge the metaphysically established norms relating to ‘being.’ Heidegger’s work would challenge the ways in which God is discussed. Specifically, the role of philosophy as it relates to theology would become the life’s work of several thinkers:

Onto-theology becomes the shorthand way of talking about all these various problems in the history of philosophy, but especially of the implication of God into the history of philosophy. And in the thinkers most critical of the contemporary turn to theology [e.g., Janicaud], one at times has the impression that any mention of God within philosophy is, by definition, onto-theological (and therefore to be rejected). Thus we must be entirely silent about God in philosophy. It is precisely this assumption that many of the authors...try to combat it [e.g., Marion]. The concern with Being in its various modes and the connection (or not) between beings and God (or even Being and God) is important to most of the contemporary thinkers, especially Marion, Lacoste, and Kearney.99 Heidegger’s influence, as noted above, extends beyond the classroom lectures and texts he wrote decades ago; his view of onto-theology challenged the metanarratives of modernity and has allowed subsequent philosophers to expand on his work further. I suggest that postmodernity has allowed Heidegger’s successors to speak on these issues, as they are no longer engaged with the dogmatism the earlier centuries encountered with Scholasticism, Neo-Scholasticism, and Thomism as its forefront. Rather, Vattimo, Marion, and several others have offered significant contributions in the postmodern era, despite the apprehensions associated with the ‘secular’ or ‘secularism.’

99 Gschwandtner, 21.
1.4 Gianni Vattimo

Martin Heidegger’s impact on Gianni Vattimo’s philosophical inquiry is prevalent throughout the latter’s work. Like Lyotard and Heidegger, Vattimo encounters the postmodern by questioning the role of metaphysics as the system by which many explore philosophy and theology. Additionally, and related to the question of metaphysics, Vattimo focuses on the metanarratives, especially those relating to Christianity, law, and society at large. Subsequently, Vattimo’s focus on secularism—or more precisely, post-secularism—also addresses the cultural phenomena found in postmodern Euro-American culture.

Thomas Guarino, in his exploration of Gianni Vattimo’s work, offers a lengthy description of postmodernity as it relates to the philosopher’s collective works:

If the ‘modern’ placed a pronounced stress on the homogeneity of thought, culture and practice, the postmodern response has been to celebrate discontinuity and pluralism. It has argued that modernity, in its rush to canonize the ‘foundationalisms’ of positivism and empiricism, has failed to account for essential dimensions of actual historical life such as our embeddedness in determinate societies, cultures and practices, our traditioned and situated reason, our contextualized knowledge, our historicity and finitude. As such, postmodernity exhumes from Enlightenment obsequies notions such as alterity and difference, rupture and breach…In sum, postmodernity argues that there is more in heaven and earth than modern conceptions of human reason can hope to understand.\footnote{Guarino, 6. See also, Gianni Vattimo, \textit{The Transparent Society} [La società trasparente], trans. David Webb (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 1-11.}

Gaurino’s reading of Vattimo fits a description of philosophical discovery in the postmodern era.

But, he goes on to explain, Vattimo’s exploration of postmodernity as an identifiable period of time is found much earlier than his counterparts, who suggest it emerges well into the later half of the twentieth century. Following Nietzsche’s infamous claim, ‘God is dead,’ \footnote{Friedrich W. Nietzsche, \textit{The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs}, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrian Del Caro (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).} Vattimo understands the shift to have taken place late in the nineteenth century.\footnote{Guarino, 6. Also, Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala, ”'Weak Thought' and the Reduction of Violence: A Dialogue with Gianni Vattimo,” \textit{Common Knowledge} 8 (2002): 462.} This philosophical shift
is important, insofar as it articulates epistemology in the postmodern age; a period in which “God is no longer available to us as the unchanging and immutable first principle...In the postmodern age, we must live with endless contingencies rather than with secure and available foundations...Our understanding of God is...also an interpretation.” Guarino’s understanding of Vattimo articulates a shift in theological thought and development alluded to by Gschwandtner and in other studies relating to Heidegger’s work. In other words, postmodernity carries a certain skepticism as it relates to theological discourse, whereby the metaphysical language and reliance upon an abstract figure as God is suspect. The metanarrative of Christian theology is questioned by Vattimo and is likewise considered postmodern.

Though Vattimo’s philosophy remains grounded in postmodernity, he certainly champions the progress made in the ‘modern era.’ This blend of modernity-postmodernity, Guarino notes, results in an important term found throughout Vattimo’s work: Verwindung. The term, he notes, is defined loosely as “‘twisting,’” “‘convalescence,’” or “‘alteration.’” It contrasts with Überwindung, meaning overcoming, which, in this case, is the overcoming of modernity. Nonetheless, his philosophy, especially his idea of pensiero debole (‘weak thought’) will evolve from his understanding of Verwindung, arguing that postmodernity cannot simply accept that which is given: “the world is not simply ‘given’ to us as pure, uninterrupted, unmediated reality.”

In addition to Verwindung and pensiero debole, Vattimo positions his understanding of postmodernity within the context of (European) history, progress, and communication. His

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103 Guarino, 7.
105 Guarino, 9.
understanding of history is centralized on the idea of a unilinear reading of history and development. For example, he notes the importance fifteenth century artists had in reshaping the expectations of art from previous eras.\textsuperscript{106} Fifteenth century Italian art would differ greatly from that of the prior century, which in Italy tended to be oriented toward humanism and followed the Byzantine style of gold backgrounds focused on the spiritual nature of the painting.\textsuperscript{107} Such greats as Brunelleschi, Alberti, Castagno, and Leonardo focused, in the later century, on the requests of “wealthy patrons.” They were highly decorative with great detail.\textsuperscript{108} By highlighting these shifts in history, Vattimo makes the claim that progress in the West (i.e., Euro-America) has moved past the unilinear reading of historical events, and toward a history that is largely fragmented. To demonstrate this, he offers a brief analysis of the ‘typical’ reading of history: “We think of history as ordered around year zero of the birth of Christ, and more specifically as a serial train of events in the life of peoples from the ‘centre,’ the West, the place of civilization, outside of which are the ‘primitives’ and the ‘developing’ countries.”\textsuperscript{109} Referring to Walter Benjamin’s 1938 essay, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Vattimo highlights the fact that history courses only highlight the “relevant” historical figures, battles, treaties, and revolutions, and leave behind the poor, the peasants, the “base” of society.\textsuperscript{110} Certainly Cicero, Napoleon, Eleanor Roosevelt, Anne Frank, Pol Pot are among the many recognizable individuals, identified for a place in history; however, the people affected by these historical figures, are the “base” Vattimo and Benjamin refer to. When one understands history in this way, the world may no longer be seen as unilinear or one-dimensional. Approaching history in this way causes a break in the metanarrative structure, which

\textsuperscript{106} Vattimo, \textit{The Transparent Society}, 2.
\textsuperscript{109} Vattimo, \textit{The Transparent Society}, 2.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 2-3.
allows for a broader perspective of socio-political actions. The shift to postmodern thinking therefore takes place, as the metanarratives are broken to include the fringe, the outsiders, those who were not Roosevelt or Napoleon.

Secondly, progress as a concept breaks the unilinear model by calling attention to the technological, scientific, and religious developments in the world. No longer is Europe understood as the only source of contributions to the world; rather, societies once understood as ‘primitive’ are now recognized as important for the global conversation on human development. And lastly, the unilinear understanding is broken via the media and the dissolution of metanarratives. The influence of “telematics,” creative fiction, and other means of communication have broken the propaganda, state-endorsed news and slogans, and other unilinear modes of expression commonly found in the twentieth century (e.g., Fascist state-sponsored systems of communication). Vattimo’s reading of history—that is, a model no longer understood as unilinear—speaks to the cultural changes addressed above:

With the demise of the idea of a central rationality of history, the world of generalized communication explodes like a multiplicity of ‘local’ rationalities…that finally speak up for themselves. They are no longer repressed and cowed into silence by the idea of a single true form of humanity that must be realized irrespective of particularity and individual finitude, transience and contingency. The opening of “‘local’ rationalities” permits society to move beyond the metanarratives, allowing for the multiplicity of ideas to emerge within the postmodern context (similar to the emergent theologies offered by Mannion). However, without the clear and authoritative system that existed prior to postmodernity, the now “pluralistic world” Vattimo defines emerges as one where the individual may feel ‘disoriented’ and without ‘belonging,’ a side effect of the freedom given in

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111 Ibid., 3-4.
112 Ibid., 9.
postmodernity. Hence, there is often a return to the historic inheritance,\textsuperscript{113} and as others have argued, a return to the religious experiences of one’s parents or grandparents.\textsuperscript{114} Vattimo’s work, therefore, sits well within the attempted definitions of postmodernity, insofar as he too questions existing narratives, understands the difficulties associated with unilinear philosophical thought, and yet, remains grounded in a historical system such as European culture, religion, etc.

1.5 Jean-Luc Marion

Jean-Luc Marion’s phenomenology and theological expositions may be labeled “postmodern,” if one accepts his break from the traditionalism embraced by the metaphysical systems within the Church. For example, Marion’s discourse with Anselm’s theological proofs in \textit{Cartesian Questions: Method and Metaphysics} offers a break from the metaphysical tradition of the Church, favoring a phenomenological or theological understanding.\textsuperscript{115} Nevertheless, there is a great deal of difficulty identifying Marion as a postmodernist, especially given his often referred to conservative Catholic background, writings focused on the Church Fathers, and support of the role of the bishops as theologians. In short, these traits separate Marion from the more progressive postmodernists engaged with theology who prefer a complete separation from the traditional systems found in systematic theology. Nevertheless, by focusing on three aspects of his writing, I intend to illustrate his place as a postmodern intellectual. First, similar to Vattimo, I suggest that Marion maintains a certainly historical foundation, referring to the patristics throughout several of his written works. Secondly, a good deal of Marion’s work addresses being/Being similar to the work of Martin Heidegger introduced above. And lastly, the use of theology in conversation with phenomenology matches the postmodern intellectual pluralism discussed by Vattimo, Mannion,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 10-1.
  \item \textsuperscript{114} For example, McCaffery, 1-2.
\end{itemize}
and others. This section is in no way comprehensive of Marion’s work or a complete description of how he might be defined as ‘postmodern;’ however, it does serve as an introduction to the many facets of his (postmodern) work, much of which will be expanded upon in chapter three.

Throughout Marion’s well-known texts (e.g., The Idol and Distance and God Without Being), one can identify the roots of his theological explorations. Notably, as both Tamsin Jones and Andrew Prevot have presented, the Christian patristics have heavily influenced Marion’s writings. Specifically, Dionysius the Areopagite and Augustine of Hippo are central figures found in his philosophical writings. This would include one of Marion’s more recent publications, In the Self’s Place (Au lieu de soi), Marion’s reading of Augustine’s Confessions. The historical recovery Marion undertakes serves the dialogue he offers between phenomenology and theology, despite the rejection of some of his contemporaries. Notably, Marion’s Catholic faith can be identified through several articles in the French journal, Résurrection. Marion frequently references the Fathers of the Catholic Church in Résurrection and elsewhere because of their staunch opposition to “‘heretics.’” As Jones demonstrates, one of Marion’s theological arguments for God is grounded in Dionysius and the notion that God cannot be identified by name, a central theme in several of his theological, “and by extension…his phenomenological,” writings. Additionally, Dionysius and Gregory’s influence can be found in Marion’s understanding of ‘icon.’ The influence of the patristics in Marion’s God Without Being and The

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116 Jones.
118 Specifically, both authors note Marion’s famed Résurrection articles in which he references the patristics often. See Prevot, 255 no. 10 and Jones, 17.
119 Marion, In the Self’s Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine.
120 Jones, 18.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid., 19.
Idol and Distance, two of Marion’s more well known texts, gives further support to his conservative faith tradition and the historical foundation upon which he operates.

Nevertheless, Marion’s constant references can be problematic for theologians. In this case, one such problem is Marion’s focus on the Greek word, αἰτία (“to ask, beg, or demand”), and his use of it in The Idol and Distance. Whereas Marion refers to αἰτία as a non-Platonic or non-Neoplatonic concept that Dionysius the Areopagite uses, Jones asserts that no such claim can be supported. “αἰτία” is most certainly grounded in Platonism. More specifically, she explains, Marion’s adoption of αἰτία as a Dionysian term to ‘explain’ God may in fact be an exaggeration of the intended use of the word. Likewise, Marion’s God Without Being is explored alongside Denys, Dionysius, and Gregory of Nyssa. In this highly contentious text, Marion’s reference to the Eucharist (chapter six, “The Present and the Gift”) in which he relies on Gregory and Jean Daniélou in order to present the “perpetual progress’ of the soul,” is questioned in terms of its relationship to more traditional theological discourse centered on the Catholic celebration of the Eucharist. According to Jones, this “interesting reference to Gregory” has Marion describing a “metaphysics of presence,” a period not subject to normal concepts of time. In other words, Marion situates the Eucharist as a memorial with future implications: “This future is not simply a historical ‘end time’ for which the Christian waits, but in reality already interrupts the present and governs it.” The unique reference (credited to Gregory) permits the metaphysics Marion

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123 Ibid., 22.
124 Ibid., 23-4. See also, Gschwandtner, 110-11.
125 Jones, 24.
126 Marion, God without Being: Hors-Texte, 161-82 at 73-4.
127 Jones, 31 and 126-7.
128 Ibid., 30.
129 Ibid., 31. See also, Marion, God without Being: Hors-Texte, 173-74.
attempts to overcome earlier in the text to remain because of the unique relationship temporality has to his understanding of the Eucharist.  

Marion’s more recent focus on Augustine of Hippo further demonstrates his historical foundation and his on-going phenomenological dialogue with the Christian faith. As Jones notes, this is an entire text dedicated to one patristic author versus the piecemeal references noted earlier. Here, Marion’s text, *In the Self’s Place*, “continues Marion’s exploration of subjectivity…begun in *Being Given*” and presents Marion’s argument that “self is something discovered or decided upon primarily…in the face-to-face encounter with God.” Relying on Augustine’s *Confessions*, Marion’s treatise is focused on “a blunt dichotomy” resulting in a choice: either love or hate. Marion, in the third chapter of *In the Self’s Place*, outlines his reading of Augustine’s text. He concludes Augustine’s true happiness—and perhaps any human’s happiness—is born from the desire for God, thus causing the “*vita beata*,” the good life. However, the one searching for God—the one desiring happiness—has before him or her the dichotomy of love and hate, a challenge Augustine overcame only when he truly desired God. Arriving at this conclusion required Augustine, and therefore those who adopt Marion’s *Confessions* template, to recognize four stages: excess, refusal of the ordeal, relief, and choice. More, Marion offers this reflection of the final stage, the (choice) dichotomy:  

It is necessary, therefore, at the end of these four stages (excess, refusal of the ordeal, relief, and the choice) to be decided about the truth: either deny its evidence and hide from it, or admit its

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130 Jones notes that while this reference is found in Gregory of Nyssa’s work, Marion neglects to credit the patristic with a proper citation. Jones goes on to address this further in chapter four of her text. See Jones, 31 and 109-29.
132 Jones, 39.
133 Ibid. and Marion, *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, xv.
135 Ibid., 101.
136 Ibid., 116-9.
radiance by confessing it. So long as I refuse to choose, I will contradict in myself the desire for a happy life…The contradiction, indicated by my impossibility of choosing for or against truth, attests that knowing the truth is no longer enough, here, for admitting it, since, sometimes, the more I know it, the more I reject it. The truth, in the unshirkable excess of its evidence, can make itself seen and accepted only by he who loves it and therefore might also hate it.\(^{137}\)

The point of offering Marion’s theological assessment of Augustine in this section is to demonstrate first, the postmodern approach to metanarratives, insofar as Marion chooses to explore *Confessions* outside the given research by Augustinian scholars, choosing instead to contextualize the text using his system of phenomenology. Grounding his most recent philosophical piece in an historical text is similar to the historical grounding Vattimo conducts in his postmodern work. By highlighting Marion’s more recent theological turn focused on Augustine’s *Confessions*, the notion that he remains grounded in the historical inheritance, despite his postmodern work, can be clearly identified. The patristics serve, in other words, as a basis upon which Marion operates, similar to the nostalgia Vattimo and other postmodern thinkers maintain in their own work.

Secondly, Marion’s focus on being/Being highlights the philosophical shift Gschwandtner and others have addressed in postmodern French thinking.\(^{138}\) While the philosophical question of ‘being’ has been present since antiquity, the phenomenological presentation of the concept in Husserl, Heidegger, Levinas, Marion, and countless others, is central to postmodern philosophy. Specifically, and through the lens of Catholicism, John Caputo offers the following on Heidegger’s presentation of being:

> When Heidegger criticized Descartes’s idea of a wordless subject and his reduction of the world to *res extensa*, when Heidegger said that the question of the existence of the world when it is raised by a being whose being is being-in-the-world makes no sense, when Heidegger said that as soon as Dasein comes to be it finds that it is already there, that made instant sense to Catholic realists. They had been critical of modern Cartesian epistemology for decades, and here was Heidegger putting that argument on the map of contemporary philosophy in an original and magisterial way. When

\(^{137}\) Ibid., 120.
the ‘later’ Heidegger offered a critique of what he called ‘onto-theo-logic,’ when he said that an atheism about God of metaphysics, about the *causa sui*, was closer to the truly divine God, Catholics knew from firsthand experience what he was talking about. They had enough of the neo-Scholastic manuals, and they wanted to ‘overcome’ them. Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, in particular, provided a postmodern platform from which philosophers and theologians could explore the concepts of being and Being outside the confines of the Neo-Scholastic hypothesis of God. Marion’s understanding of being/Being follows this post-metaphysical understanding proposed by Heidegger. Metaphysics, Marion argues, misinterprets being and Being, thereby using it for its own purposes:

Metaphysics thinks Being, but in its own way. It does not cease to think it, but only on the basis of the beings that Being sets forth or in which Being puts itself into play. Thus Being, which coincides with no being (ontological difference), nevertheless gives itself to the thought only in the case of a being. Aristotle’s ‘science,’ at least according to his own declaration in book Γ of *Metaphysics*, explores “‘being as being’ (το ον η ον)” relative to “the regional science that encompasses it.” The contextual understanding of ‘being,’ at least in the first section of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, ignores categories often assigned by language or otherwise:

However, the universal science that studies being as being (and the singular gives here decisive information) does not remove it from any of these beings, precisely because there are no beings in general, but always things that are from the outset qualified according to their respective essences…in short, rocks, plants, animals, humans, and gods. Yet in the entire appearing of the ὑπόσ [type; form; nature], there are no things that would appear as being at first glance. Being only appears by a doubled such as, actually redoubling the first as of the eidetic reduction, as a grounded act that presupposes grounding acts…In short, here the science of the second degree, in other words, the establishment of the topic, is accomplished before that of the thing destined to become later its object, when this still anonymous science of being as being will take the modern name of *ontologia*. In other words, the problem with metaphysics and ontology is the categorizing of things so they fit within a language system or philosophical body of work; hence, the common theological approach of defining God as a ‘being,’ often with human-like attributes (i.e., human and male).

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140 Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, 13.
142 Ibid.
The essence of being (οὐσία) in Aristotle’s work has been interpreted through the lens of ontology and results in the framework of a certain motif: the Being of beings. This interpretation, Marion notes, has led to a metaphysical theology in Christianity which is grounded in an ontology of God as supreme being, much to the chagrin of the original Aristotelean ‘science.’

“This reciprocal play between the Being of beings in general (ontology, general metaphysics) and the supreme being (special metaphysics, theology) does not define the onto-theological constitution of metaphysics but results from it and, in a sense, marks its profound conciliation (Austrag, as Heidegger says).”

In short, Marion’s concerns with being/Being are central to the theological work he will explore. The challenges introduced by Heidegger are found throughout Marion’s work, and echo the postmodern questions outlined by Vattimo, Gschwandtner, and Enda McCaffery.

Lastly, Marion’s diverse works—philosophical, phenomenological, and theological—match the pluralism and diversity common to postmodernity. More specifically, writes Kevin Hart, “Jean-Luc Marion…commands our attention for three interrelated reasons: for his historical work on René Descartes, for his essays on the borderlines of philosophy and theology, and for his reformulation of phenomenology in terms of what he calls ‘saturated phenomena.’” Marion’s work thus far has been a wide scope of books, essays, and speeches centered on phenomenology, while also exploring the dialogue between Cartesian thought, philosophy, and theology:

That a historian of the preeminent French philosopher, the seventeenth-century author of the arresting claim that everyone knows, cogito, ergo sum, should also become a historian of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, the two major German phenomenologists of the early twentieth century, is not an accident. For one can easily make a case that Descartes is himself the father of phenomenology, a negligent father perhaps, since he seems to have introduced it and then forgotten it, but the father nonetheless.
Likewise, as Hart notes, this permits Marion to fit within his own system or his own phenomenology, a statement alluded to by Heidegger: “‘There is no such thing as the one phenomenology’…‘and if there could be such a thing it would never become anything like a philosophical technique.’” Nevertheless, Marion is critiqued for his phenomenology, most notably by Dominique Janicaud, because of his willingness to discourse with fields typically seen outside the scope of Husserl and Heidegger’s intention. Thus, I contend that Marion, despite his patristic references and classical approaches to theology (e.g., *In the Self’s Place*), offers a challenge to the metanarratives Lyotard presents, and does so in multiple ways.

### 1.6 Peroration on Postmodernism

As noted at the outset of this first section, it is extremely difficult to define postmodernism as a concrete concept. However, Lyotard’s analysis of knowledge and metanarratives is certainly a focal point in the works Heidegger, Vattimo, and Marion have explored in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Their challenges to the metanarratives, as I have suggested in this first chapter, can be found through many treatises dedicated to metaphysics, ontology, onto-theology, philosophy, phenomenology, and theology respectively. Additionally, by situating these thinkers as postmodernists, one acknowledges, as Gschwandtner states, their willingness to listen and participate in scientific discovery. It bears repeating again that Marion, Vattimo, and others, “accept the contemporary scientific and philosophical worldview, but seek to demonstrate that Christian belief at the very least is not incompatible with it and possibly even provides the best explanation for it.”

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149 Gschwandtner, 12.
The approach these scholars take is one that engages the metanarratives in such a way as to question how they are challenged by postmodern conceptions and modern scientific discovery, seeks to propose new questions using philosophy while remaining grounded in their historical heritage, and at times, works to overcome the metaphysical tradition which has been dominant for centuries particularly in the field of theology. Meanwhile, other scholars repeatedly state that secularism presents, at minimum, a challenge to traditionalism, and at maximum, a threat to religious identity or culture. In order to distinguish religion from theology, and vice versa, in the postmodern era, a brief overview of the two is necessary first. In doing so, this project introduces the possibility of a ‘return to religion’ within the context of postmodernity, aware of the challenges secularism puts forth. In short, by recognizing the cultural changes occurring throughout Europe, and at times America, this dissertation suggests that postmodern thinking may lend itself to a religious rejuvenation by refocusing the (meta)narratives on postmodern philosophical thought. It also turns to the emphasis Marion, Vattimo, and others place on the lived-virtue of charity (caritas), as a possible centerpiece for postmodern Christianity. This does not imply that people will return en masse to the pews, the altar, or Sunday school; rather, the return suggests a renewed appreciation of the religious and cultural roots of Western civilization.

150 This is a phrase used throughout McCaffery’s text, which implies an appreciation of the religious and thereby theological heritage France and other European nations had, following Christianity’s birth from the Roman Empire. Certainly, continental wars, secularism, and postmodernity have all influenced the place of religion in Europe, with many citizens now preferring a life free from religious obligation or identity. McCaffery’s point, similar to Jugo Meynel, John D. Caputo, Jeffrey Stout, Régis Debray, Paul Valadier, and others noted herein, is the continued influence and interest religious language has had on Euro-American society; specifically, the influence of Christianity is identified as a binding agent throughout these nations and cultures. Nevertheless, the phrase “return to religion” does not imply a return to the pews, an affirmation of, or adoration for the religious institutions in postmodernity. There is certainly enough evidence through cultural surveys and national census results to indicate that many people are content without religious institutions meddling in their daily affairs or influencing politicians and public policy. By reiterating this phrase throughout this project, I merely refer to Christianity’s historical role as a binding factor in Euro-American society. Thus, postmodern philosophy and postmodern theology, à la Marion and Vattimo, offers a discourse that historically reminds society of its roots and introduces post-metaphysical language for those who may be spiritually or theologically inclined to engage with those religious roots once again. Hence, a “return” should only be read insofar as it acknowledges the more recent theological and religious interest in Christianity as a sociological and socio-cultural phenomenon.
Secularism, as an influential byproduct of postmodernity, must also be recognized insofar as it has shaped the discourse of both religion and theology throughout Europe, North America, and beyond in the postmodern era. First, and before establishing the role of secularism in postmodernity, it is necessary to outline the subjects of religion and theology. It must be noted, however, that attempts to articulate a definition of religion remain ambiguous, given the influence (Christian) theology has had on it. Moreover, secularism has had an influential role in shaping religious language, ideas, and institutions in recent decades. In many instances, theology and religion have become intertwined, in large part due to Europe’s historical role as a colonizing force. Elsewhere, the term religion was applied to an indigenous population’s practices and rituals, without consent or full appreciation of the native population’s culture. Before moving onto the philosophical possibilities Marion and Vattimo offer theology (and to some extent, religion), understanding these two aspects of society and secularism is necessary.

2. Religion and Theology: Establishing the Differences in an Era of Secularism

Postmodernism, if centered on the disregard for or distrust of master narratives and institutional bodies of authority, can be connected to the growing trend of secularism found in Europe and North America as well. Whether or not societies and individuals need or desire religion is the continuous debate within postmodernity. Likewise, when referring to that which is “secular,” most understand it to mean the complete avoidance of religion. Whether one is discussing a secular university, secular politics, or a secular institution, most would accept this to mean the absence of religion or of religious identity. The point here is to demonstrate the continuing arguments in favor of a growing secular attitude in Europe and beyond, while also acknowledging the lasting and historical impact of traditional religious institutions, like the Roman Catholic Church or the smaller Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Saxony. As noted later in this chapter, secularism’s influence on
postmodern religion, faith institutions, and the faithful has been observed through social and parochial surveys. Briefly, the influence religion and religious institutions historically had on society is dwindling. Many now consider themselves (1) spiritual, but not religious or (2) they believe in something, but refrain from participating in traditional forms of religious worship via religious institutions. Before moving on to these distinctions, it is necessary to first identify religion and theology in light of postmodernism and secularism.

Secularism’s impact on various Christian denominations and individuals notwithstanding, attention must first be given to the affect secularism has had on theology versus religion. The distinction between the two is problematic for several reasons including, (1) the ambiguity between the two in academic circles, (2) the postmodern tendency to dispense with narratives, and (3) postmodernity’s influence on the two.

I am particularly aware of the tendency to conflate religion and theology, especially considering the interconnectedness of the two following Europe’s colonial expansion in the Americas, Africa, and Asia. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza has observed that the terms theology and religion are used interchangeably, especially as they relate to the academic study of each, thereby diminishing the role of theological narrative for a given community (e.g., hermeneutical readings of Christ’s miracles in light of the Sacraments in the Catholic Church) or applying religious language to non-theist or polytheist faiths (e.g., the common acceptance of Buddhism as a religious tradition). The connection has also remained a deeply contested issue for academics; however, making the distinction is crucial. The conflation of these two terms proves problematic for theologians engaged in the systematic formulation of a tradition; a tradition like Roman

Catholicism. Conventionally understood, “religious studies” examines overarching elements, practices, and themes among various religions traditions (e.g., Christianity, Islam, Hinduism), theology examines particular confessions using language unique to that confession (e.g., Roman Catholicism, Greek Orthodoxy, Orthodox Judaism).\textsuperscript{153}

2.1 Religion

Attempts to differentiate religion from theology have often resulted in the observation that Christian theology has deeply influenced the reading of other cultures, including an understanding or interpretation of an indigenous philosophy. This approach, which developed in the colonial era, has left religious scholars like Michael Bergunder,\textsuperscript{154} questioning the complexities associated with ‘religion’ as an academic study, differing from theological inquiry. The resulting complexity offers two areas worth review in an attempt to solidify the meaning of religion in the postmodern, post-narrative era.

Western thought historically defined examinations of indigenous philosophy or cultural phenomena as religion. In Bergunder’s estimation, many indigenous cultures may not have chosen this approach; rather, they would have acknowledged a pantheism in which humans, nature, and the divine were intimately connected. He offers instead a compelling case in which defining religion from the context of Western Christianity has granted power to those eighteenth and nineteenth century sociologists, theologians, and politicians aiming to identify aspects of indigenous culture that matched their own. William James’s twentieth century study of Buddhism


fits this type of religious analysis. Seeking to understand, and inadvertently undermine, the Eastern philosophies of the Buddha, James presented the phenomena as a religion because it had “‘the usual associations of the word “religion” or what religion signifies “for common men.’”\(^\text{155}\) The analysis conducted by James has resulted in the false application of ‘religion’ as an identifier, despite the appearance of what he interpreted as rituals, traditions, and prayers.

Likewise, colonialism permitted the examination of cultural practices through the lens of the Christian religion, thus defining practices, rituals, prayers and philosophies as religious systems (e.g., Zen Buddhism). According to Bergunder, such readings of other cultural norms are controversial. Given Christianity’s monotheistic influence on the study of religion from the colonial era to the present, it is easy to understand the significant exploitation and subaltern treatment of non-Christian aboriginals. Similarly, addressing monotheism’s influence on religion, Bergunder notes Benson Saler’s “polythetic model” which has fused together the monotheistic understanding of Western theologies and the academic study of other cultural traditions.\(^\text{156}\) What is clear in this case is the influence of Western thought regarding religion and culture in the study of religion.\(^\text{157}\) Christian hermeneutics—here, reading colonized and foreign cultures in a subaltern way—has effectively diluted the importance of other systems of thought, cultural rituals towards

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\(^\text{156}\) “For [Benson] Saler ‘our most prototypical cases of religion’ are ‘the Western monotheisms,’ by which are understood ‘Judaism,’ ‘Christianity’ and ‘Islam’… The defined contents of these ‘Western monotheisms’ are directly assigned to the ‘western’ anthropologist of religion and the ‘western’ scholar of religion as part of the process of socialization. This key formative notion, together with that of a connected consensus of ‘many contemporary academic students of religion, brings Judaism and Christianity into the stated prototypes, which provide the polythetic model with their empirical reference.’ Islam is added by Saler as a third prototypical exemplar, since it is looked upon also as ‘fundamentally Western,’ with its ‘theologies,’ ‘eschatologies,’ and ‘rituals,’ as well as mentioned ‘personages,’ all standing in close relationship to Judaism and Christianity…He combines these three prototypical exemplars together, then, as the ‘Western monotheisms,’” Bergunder, 250.

Bergunder goes on to state that these traditions viewed as strictly monotheistic is also problematic. See also, Michael Bergunder, “‘Ösliche’ Religionen Und Gewalt,” in *Religion, Politik Und Gewalt*, ed. Friedrich Schweitzer (Güterslow: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006).

a deity, etc.\footnote{Ibid., 258.} Thus, the polythetic understanding of religion requires a dismissal of a hermeneutical system—Western monotheism—in order to delineate the cultural and traditional aspects of a religious body. This move beyond religion, so to speak, permits the discovery of traditions and cultures unclouded by Christianity. Unfortunately, the West’s influence on studies relating to cultural phenomena, such as the indigenous practices of a given people or philosophies of another, has also made the term ‘religion’ or ‘religious tradition’ more common than it should be.\footnote{Referring to the work of Ernesto Laclau, Bergunder suggests that religion has become an “empty signifier,” void of significance: “[the empty signifier]…cannot be a concept, for the relation it establishes with the instances it regroups is not one of conceptual subsumption…” In ibid., 264.}

Caroline Schaffalitzky de Muckadell recognizes the difficulties developing a definition that cleanly provides a description of ‘religion’ in postmodernity. Addressing the multiple calls for a definition, Schaffalitzky de Muckadell believes a suitable explanation of religion can be surmised only when one moves beyond the metanarratives commonly associated with previous definitions.\footnote{Schaffalitzky de Muckadell lists the work of Jim Stone, Thomas A. Tweed, and Ann Taves as scholars who have recently attempted to define ‘religion’ in postmodernity; in Caroline Schaffalitzky de Muckadell, "On Essentialism and Real Definitions of Religion," \textit{Journal of the American Academy of Religion} 82, no. 2 (June 2014 2014): 496-7.} Her argument is framed around four different types of definitions, which ultimately fail in providing a conclusive understanding of this eighteenth and nineteenth century idea. In her approximation, a functional approach to religion aims “to uncover the role religion plays in society and in the lives of individuals in terms of, for instance, stability, power relations, or values.”\footnote{Ibid.} Functional relationally—how belief in a higher power might interact with a given society—limits an understanding of religion insofar as the produced definitions appear too broad. Simply put, religion cannot be defined simply by its appearance or connection to a group of people.
By restating Marx’s pronouncement, “‘religion is the opiate of the people,’” Schaffalitzky de Muckadell acknowledges addictions people acquire by existing within a society. For example, “other things, such as gambling or TV shows, might equally serve as opiates of the masses without thereby becoming religion.” Additionally, the attempts at providing a functional definition fall short when one attempts to connect the idea of fulfillment practices, noted in the work of Émile Durkheim:

Durkheim sees religion and its rituals relative to sacred things as something that unites its adherents into a moral community…This account has specific difficulties…but it also shares the general weakness of definitions from purely functional elements: first, they tend to be too broad because the functions they describe can be fulfilled in various ways…and secondly, fulfilling the function of something is arguably not always the same as being that thing. At best, the functional attempts at defining religion present theories versus a definitive statement regarding the observed socio-cultural phenomena.

Second, stipulative definitions are inaccurate, given their propensity to apply standards or norms, despite the general acceptance of such practices. To use Schaffalitzky de Muckadell’s example, stipulations are applied to non-theist traditions including Buddhism and Scientology, but can be found in other aspects of culture, such as ice skating, golf, or astrophysics; each carries a set of standards that help present what it is. Simply put, there is some pre-existent understanding of what each of these systems include (e.g., golf requires a certain type of iron-club, a certain ball, etc.).

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162 Ibid., 498.
163 Ibid.
164 Ibid. See also, Émile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 11.
165 Muckadell, 499-500.
Third, Schaffalitzky de Muckadell offers the “prototype approaching to defining” religion, in which a combination of relevant elements—”overlapping traits”—attempts to define religion.\textsuperscript{166} Relying on the “polythetic” approach Bergunder uses, Schaffalitzky de Muckadell writes,

The polythetic approaches account for vagueness roughly by arguing that there are various elements that religions often have in common, but that there is no set of necessary and sufficient conditions that must be met. Rather, these elements are more or less overlapping traits, and this means that something can be more or less religion-like depending on how many of the relevant elements it has.\textsuperscript{167} The application of categories for religions is subsequently established, separating pieces of culture from one another in order to define a religious system. For example, the acceptance of Sacraments within the Roman Catholic Church differs from the ritual practices found in other global traditions (e.g., Hinduism), thereby separating two culturally bound traditions. The prototype method critically separates cultural practices directed at a higher power, nature itself, or another focus of a society’s devotional piety.

Finally, the essentialist approach asserts that there are “essential properties of religion that make it what it is, or, more technically, ‘the stipulation of some set of necessary conditions or features that govern class membership.’”\textsuperscript{168} Relying on categories or properties limits the true possibility of what religion is or what a particular cultural phenomenon consists of: “If one expects a definition of religion that will provide a once-and-for-all, clear-cut definition that is similar to definitions of gold or Platonic solids, one is bound to fail. But, fortunately, the ideal definition of religion will both be fallible and allow for gray areas.”\textsuperscript{169} Relying on approximations of what religion is permits the essentialist an opportunity to identify a religion or religious system. The difficulty in permitting these categories, however, is threefold: first, the generalization of a group

\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., 500-1.
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., 500.
\textsuperscript{169} Muckadell, 503.
of people and their ritual practices; second, the politicization of religion for government purposes (e.g., colonial applications of religion on indigenous people); and third, observing religious traditions as social constructs versus divinely inspired or “discovered in the world.”\(^{170}\)

I would propose that any definition of Christianity as a religion would rely on a mix of the approaches Schaffalitzky de Muckadell presents. It’s role as a binding factor for Europe, at least according to Bergunder and Vattimo,\(^{171}\) allows one to accept the functional and essentialist approaches to understanding Christianity as a religion. Nevertheless, accepting the proposed definition of Bergunder (religion is a colonial-era construct that has misconstrued indigenous thought systems) or Schaffalitzky de Muckadell (religion relies on pre-conceived notion and thereby falls short of actually representing an idea of the divine), acknowledges that postmodernity has only weakened notions of other religions, because of its overwhelming suspicion of such established norms or metanarratives. Postmodernity continues to challenge the given metanarratives that have long defined society.

An understanding of religion using stipulations or categories is disputed, resulting in a re-examination of traditional understandings of religious rituals, practices, Sacraments, and otherwise common to systems of theology within one given religious tradition (e.g., Roman Catholicism). Secularism has an equally devastating role in the transformation of religious and theological narratives, because of its preferred avoidance of religion/theology altogether. As this section will demonstrate, the commonly held definition of secularism is sort-sighted, as it provides limited space for a broad understanding of religion and therefore a ‘return to religion’ to exist.

\(^{170}\) Ibid., 502-7, quote at 06.
\(^{171}\) Vattimo, After Christianity, esp. 69-82 and 93-102.
2.2 Theology

Differentiating between *theology* and *religion* is also necessary for this project. As I intend to argue, this distinction permits a space in which Jean-Luc Marion and Gianni Vattimo contribute to the theological narrative of one tradition in particular, Roman Catholicism. Here, I have chosen to highlight the definition of theology Fiorenza offers in the well-respected two-volume, *Systematic Theology*. Theology, as articulated by Fiorenza, is historically understood as a term emerging out of the thirteenth century and the academic study of Christian thought.\(^{172}\) He continues, “the term primarily referred to the pagan philosophical speculation about God rather than to Christian discourse about God, for the latter focused on the divine plan or economy of salvation. Christian discourse, called Christian doctrine, was not simply theology; it was not just another philosophical doctrine about God alone. Instead Christian discourse explicated God’s economy.”\(^{173}\) The thirteenth century theological development would then lead to additional considerations, including the development of theological doctrine based on three “constants:” Scripture or sacred text, community, and “the reliance on some basic approach, procedure, or method to interpret Scriptures, tradition, and experience.”\(^{174}\) Each constant is important in the intellectual analysis of, in this context, Roman Catholic theology.

Postmodernity, however, tests the systems of theology, given its general propensity to question the legitimacy of a singular approach to the idea of God and, as chapter two will expand upon, the notion that one body of knowledge (metaphysics) can stand as the definitive basis for theological and spiritual reflection. Modernity, as Michael Scanlon writes, moved theology beyond the traditional “’hermeneutics of authority,’” preferring “’hermeneutics of experience,’” but

\(^{173}\) Ibid.
\(^{174}\) Ibid., 7.
postmodernity has questioned these linguistic tools by insisting on the “social, cultural, and political contexts” in which theology happens.\textsuperscript{175} In other words, postmodern thinkers have introduced methodologies which move beyond the confines of metaphysics, which arguably has limited any understanding of God outside of the philosophical tradition of Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, and countless others. Scanlon, referring to Marion’s \textit{God Without Being}, applauds this approach writing, “Marion is in close conversation with Jacques Derrida whose ‘religion without religion’ has brought him to a rigorous exploration of both negative theology and the prophetic/apocalyptic strands of the Bible…Postmodern theology with its new forms of language, rendering excess, gift, desire, prayer, has mediated with return of God to the center of theology.”\textsuperscript{176}

Scanlon’s analysis of a postmodern Roman Catholic theology acknowledges the disapproval of metanarratives Lyotard and others highlight as a characteristic of this time. Theology, I suggest, can benefit from Marion and Vattimo’s projects insofar as the discipline accepts new approaches, many of which incorporate the historical inheritance of the previous centuries, while permitting new ideas that break from the traditionalism metaphysics espouses.

The proposed postmodern theology within this project is defined as a type of philosophical and theological exploration of traditional Christian ideas (e.g., a description of God) through the lens of postmodernism. The overcoming of metanarratives (Lyotard) and metaphysics (Vattimo’s \textit{Verwingdung})\textsuperscript{177} that results in an understanding of theology is not bound to traditional Christian understandings of God. This post-Heideggerian view of Catholic theology, according to Anthony

\textsuperscript{176} Ibid., 68-9.
\textsuperscript{177} Vattimo, \textit{The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture}, 11, 52, 60, 64, and 172-3.
Godzieba, has resulted in a theology that is no longer subject to metaphysics. Accepting this post-Heideggerian theology necessitates a reexamination of theological discourse, even in an environment driven by secularism. In this instance, a Catholic theology of God develops via the overcoming of metaphysics, an important distinction of postmodern theology.

Reactions to Heidegger’s argument within Catholic philosophical theology and the Catholic theology of God have run the gamut from early anxious attempts to defend Thomistic metaphysics and Thomas’s theology of God from the charge of ontotheology, to sophisticated attempts to use Heidegger’s thought to bring transcendental philosophy and ontotheology into a closer union and thus provide a basis for transcendental theology, to more recent attempts to read the biblical narratives of creation and redemption in dialogue with the claim of the ontological difference. The theological development Heidegger’s philosophy offers opens the doors to new ideas of theology, addressed in subsequent chapters. This project then suggests that these new forms of theological developments may lead to a renewed interest in religion or theology, insofar as they invite a non-metaphysical reading of the Divine. It does not, however, suggest that the rising influence of secularism, and therefore the absence of religion for most people, will be completely overcome. Rather, and like Vattimo, I accept the trend of secularism and the dissolution of religious institutions, but remain hopeful that Christianity remains, at minimum, a socio-cultural component of people’s lives.

3. Secularism in Postmodernity

3.1 Secularism

Having established postmodernity as an era in which the historical metanarratives are challenged, met with new ideas regarding metaphysics, and accompanied by historical retrieval in several instances, this project intends to address another component of the contemporary age:

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178 “No Catholic theology of God which comes after Heidegger can claim to be metaphysical without a rigorous argument which demonstrates how its fundamental conception of being escapes the Heideggerian definition of metaphysics as objectifying, controlling, stultifying representationalism. But no Catholic theology of God can simply follow Heidegger’s subsequent path and take up his rather diluted apophatic nation of das Heilige,” in Anthony J. Godzieba, “Prolegomena to a Catholic Theology of God between Heidegger and Postmodernity,” Heythrop Journal 40, no. 3 (1999): 323.

179 Ibid.
secularism. Similar to the difficulty in defining postmodernism and religion, there must also be the recognition that secularism is likewise difficult to assess or summarize. Additionally, a number of scholars suggest that the age of secularism begins at various points and places in history. For example, one might easily associate Nietzsche’s ‘God is dead’ with a shift in the secular-religious narrative.\(^{180}\) This would suggest that secularism emerged from a philosophical exercise in which one of the prominent thinkers of nineteenth century Europe questioned the place of God in a society, which no longer thought it logical to include a divine, benevolent figure. This idea suggested the separation of God from society completely (at least in one reading of Nietzsche’s claim). In light of this, Peter Berger defines secularization as “the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols.”\(^{181}\) Bryan Wilson agrees, effectively separating religion as the main catalyst for a society in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Whereas religious institutions were once identified as institutions concerned with the health, well-being, and education of the populace, secularism has since removed this responsibility to that of private and state funded institutions.\(^{182}\) In effect, this is laïcité in practice—it is the separation of the religious and the political, a development common in many Western Euro-American democracies.

Developing out of the French Revolution and the development of the Third Republic, the French notion of laïcité established a clear separation between state and religious institutions. As Enda McCaffery explains, the principle permits the existence and freedom of religious traditions,

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but limits its involvement in government or secular affairs. “Religious ‘cultes’ have continued to
exist freely in France but they have been shorn of legal and political influence.”183 As an influential
modern and postmodern concept, laïcité has resulted in a clear divide between the state and
religious institutions. Since its inception, France has witnessed a rise in individual consciousness
and challenges to the religious establishment, especially the Roman Catholic Church.184 The result,
as Marcel Gauchet, Zygmunt Bauman, Jean-Paul Williame, and Danièle Hervieu-Léger, argue, has
been a dismissal of the Roman Catholic Church as a legitimate social institution in postmodernity.
Gauchet goes so far as to identify this divorce as a new beginning separating the metaphysical
basis the Church has relied on for centuries, from the social preferences of rising individuality.185
Social issues relating to sexuality, issues of culture, and individual freedoms are now questioned.
The result, as Patrick Claffey notes, is that laïcité and secularism ideally divides the responsibilities
between state and individual as they relate to religion: “The State assumes its responsibilities;
religion becomes largely an affair of personal conviction and is effectively relegated from public
spaces and as a feature of correct public discourse.”186 Nevertheless, there are those including
America’s John D. Caputo and Jeffrey Stout, and France’s Régis Debray and Paul Valadier, who
identify the need for the “return to a meta-narrative of Christianity as an equally valid and more
appropriate rationale for the indeterminacy of postmodernity.”187 The question remains as to
whether or not this return will reach beyond the halls of academia and into the homes of the
religiously disinterested.

183 McCaffery, 14.
184 Ibid.
185 Ibid. Originally, Marcel Gauchet, La Religion Dans La Démocratie. Parcours De La Laïcité (Paris: Gallimard,
1998), 125.
186 Patrick Claffey, "Are We Following France: Patterns of Secularism in Ireland," Doctrine and Life 59, no. 7
187 McCaffery, 14-5.
The divide between church and state has made an impact on modern and postmodern societies that cannot be altered. Williame and McCaffery argue that this divide has thereby privatized religion “so much so that the gap between ‘the institutions of religion and migrant religiosity’ has widened.”188 The role of the Catholic Church as an influential institution has certainly dwindled; however, it has not completely disappeared, especially as a social phenomenon.189 Certainly, laïcité has aided modern individuality and personal freedom by erecting a boundary between an influential religious body (i.e., the Catholic Church) and the secular state. While some argue that there still exists a religious tête-à-tête among the people of Europe and beyond, the affinity for the Roman Catholic Church as an institution of moral and spiritual authority has faded to a mere whisper. French sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger believes, nonetheless, that these whispers should be the starting point for a renewal of Europe’s Christian heritage and by extension, Europe’s former colonies and a rebirth of religious narrative (similar to Stout and Jugo Meynel).

Charles Taylor, and others, however, have disputed the likelihood of a full return to Christianity in postmodern Europe and other Western societies. Rather, they recognize a secular shift that is in part a reflection of the church-state separation (laïcité) but also the result of any number of other cultural changes. The exact moment of these narrative shifts is also a debated issue. Nietzsche may have recognized the cultural shift in religious narratives in the nineteenth century; others place the timing of a cultural-narrative shift much earlier. Charles Taylor and others

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189 Christophe Boureuex has argued that the Church in France and beyond must accept that part of its decline is due to the way it has cut itself off from the broad net of Western culture and pursued a unilateral line of indiscriminate and doctrinal ‘inculturation’ of other cultures and ways of life. And yet, the decline of the Catholic Church and religious institutions in general since the 1960s has not eclipsed religious belief altogether. One of the ironies of our postmodern condition...is that religious belief has flourished in the context of religious pluralism and cultural relativism. In fact, it is claimed that postmodernity has contributed to an increase in religious belief, albeit as [Jean-Louis] Schlegel has said, in ‘beliefs that are less and less messianic,’” McCaffery, 15.
mark the seventeenth and eighteenth century changes in Europe as the shift in the narrative, especially given the rapid ability to explore new philosophical ideas through intellectual exchange, technology, and travel. Likewise, these centuries were witness to the Reformation and the religious battles that were fought over international, national, and individual faith practices. The intellectual changes during this time period introduced the possibility of a world without transcendent spiritualism, favoring “profane time without any reference to higher times.”\textsuperscript{190} And yet, as Taylor argues, despite the interest of some to break from the religious institutions and the powers of persuasion they held over emerging nation-states, secularism would not take off for another century. “Those who imagine a ‘secular’ world in this sense saw such claims as ultimately unfounded and only to be tolerated to the extent that they did not challenge the interests of worldly powers and human well-being. Because many people went on believing in the transcendent…it was necessary for churches to continue to have a place in the social order.”\textsuperscript{191} Western Christianity developed a secular-transcendent divide that would shape both political and religious ideas in the centuries to follow. The divide often led to bitter public disputes between the two and, historically, state leaders attempting to control the role of religious institutions. Eventually, such disputes would lead to, as mentioned above, \textit{laïcité} in France during the Third Republic and similar divisions around the globe. Taylor believes that such a separation was built on the premise that the state would act morally along the lines of the theological decrees disseminated from the likes of Rome.\textsuperscript{192}


\textsuperscript{191} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{192} Ibid., 33-4. Regarding the ‘best interest morals’ of France, Taylor notes the recent historical example of public outcries against the Muslim head scarf, to which the government responded with a forceful hand, Ibid., 34.
Religious practices have since moved more to the individual and private practices versus the earlier public practices common to Greco-Roman society in the West. As an example, the Sacrament of Baptism as a public practice in Roman Catholic France reached its pinnacle around 1880, long after the French Revolution and laïcité’s establishment as law in the Republic. Separation between church and state, ideally, infers religious individuality and the freedom to practice as one sees fit. Secularism emerged out of the religious and political changes following the conflicts of the Reformation, the nation-state revolutions of the eighteenth century and their emerging democracies, and the general accessibility to non-religious, non-dogmatic values derived from humanist philosophy, poetry, and more. Whereas the Catholic Church identified itself as the authority in Europe in previous centuries, the emergence of secularism, particularly on the Continent, provided religious freedom, at least to some degree. Certainly, the Church continues to hold influence on theologies it finds suspect and speaks out against issues it finds morally treacherous. Yet, European societies are no longer beholden to the decrees and dogmas of the Church as they were historically. And while there is certainly room here for the Church to simply disappear, especially as people prefer other social venues—one might even include internet-based platforms here—it remains an institution that holds great influence, opinion, and power, especially as it relates to moral issues. What has become manifestly clear is that the Church is undergoing a cultural shift, affecting its population and, on another level, its theological narrative. To this effect, Taylor’s “Western Secularity” offers an analysis of human development, or human maturity, in which the transcendent, the ‘supernatural,’ or the Divine and the lives of mortal human beings are

\[193\] Ibid., 37 and Taylor, A Secular Age, 424.
\[194\] One of the most recent examples in the United States has been the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops investigation of Fordham’s Sr. Elizabeth Johnson. Her book, Quest for the Living God (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007), was scrutinized in large part due to its use of interreligious, political, and liberation theologies in order to explore traditional approaches to the Christian concept of Trinity.
separate and distinct; they no longer have a connection the way early Christendom suggested.\textsuperscript{195} The narrative shift in this instance has Taylor observing the possibility of a human-shift towards ‘Deism,’ a theory that can be derived from theological development in both Western and Eastern religious discourse.\textsuperscript{196}

Religious discourse, coupled with postmodernism’s influence on theologians and philosophers, illustrates the shifting narratives in the cultural approach many have taken in light of globalization, immigration, and technological achievements. Each of these socio-political factors has contributed to religious narrative shifts differently: globalization has introduced a variety of cultural elements to a continent that historically met other religious traditions informally, through colonization and trade or as adversaries of religious truth; immigration has sparked new religious narratives, in part because of Europe’s need for cheap labor and the collapse of colonial empires;\textsuperscript{197} and the technological achievements of the last century have enabled more rapid communication and exchange of ideas than in any other historical period.\textsuperscript{198} The result is a changing understanding of religious narrative, and hence, the question of whether or not Europe and the West are shifting towards either secularism or post-secularism.

Taylor also suggests the influences of other religious traditions on Latin Christianity (e.g., the possible influence of Buddhism as a ‘Deist’ philosophy) have caused many to rethink the place of religion at the heart of Euro-American life. Though many scholars dispute the timing of the so-called secular age, several scholars agree with Taylor’s attention given to the 1960s.\textsuperscript{199} Using this

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\textsuperscript{195} Taylor, "Western Secularity," in Rethinking Secularism, 50.
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid., 51-2.
\textsuperscript{199} Taylor, A Secular Age, 424. The timing of when secularism came to the forefront of cultural and religious studies is disputed; however, Taylor accepts the 1960s model as the preferable one in A Secular Age.
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model, Taylor’s presentation of the ‘secularization theory,’ explores the possibilities of religious change that would completely transform the religious narratives Christianity built itself upon. Comprised of three facets that highlight the ideological changes occurring within secularism, Taylor writes:

Here we enter onto the terrain of ‘secularization theory.’ This has been mainly concerned with explaining various facets of secularity 1 (the retreat of religion in public life) and 2 (the decline in belief and practice), but obviously, there is going to be a lot of overlap between these and secularity 3 (the change in the conditions of belief). In particular, the relation of this latter with secularity 2 is bound to be close. This is not because the two changes are identical, or even bound to go together. But the change I am interested in here, (3), involves among other things the arising of a humanist alternative. This is a precondition for (2) the rise of actual unbelief, which in turn often contributes to (2) the decline of practice. Nothing makes these consequences ineluctable, but they cannot happen at all unless the original pluralization of alternatives occurs.200

The theory’s suggestion can be seen in postmodern discussions of religion, particularly as it relates to the general decreased role of religion in public life, the decline in Church attendance, census data indicating disbelief, and/or alternatives to traditional forms of religious belief, adherence, and practice.

Focusing on Britain and France, and occasionally the United States, Taylor observes that the process of ‘secularization’ mimics the Reform movement of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; the people were enamored by new (theological) ideas and practices. In the case of secularization, these new ideas and practices were more ‘humanist’ in definition than religiously affiliated. These humanist shifts, in Taylor’s assessment, serve as a continuation of the Protestant Reformation, as they succeeded in attracting the disenfranchised found within traditional religious institutions.201

These ‘missions’ fit the context of the postmodern concerns regarding the theological and philosophical metanarratives addressed above: “In the British and French cases, one clear aim of

201 Taylor, A Secular Age, 424-25.
those who sponsored these [secular] missions in, roughly, the nineteenth century was to prevent the diffusion of the fractured metaphysical-religious culture of the upper crust and intelligentsia, for whom unbelief was a real option."\(^{202}\)

Two examples are offered by Taylor as a demonstration of the (secular) developments in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. First, as literacy and higher education became available to the masses and the eventual emergence of media, journalism, and other forms of social communication, religion’s prominence decreased.\(^{203}\) The second example can be found in Church-sponsored institutions, such as hospitals and schools, which were free to impose their religious ideology on their patients and pupils, respectively. As nation-states developed, and education became a social concern for many in the Western hemisphere, state-sponsored schools took the place of religious schools and universities. In both of these instances, Taylor notes, religion can easily be pushed to the margins, but it never completely disappears from the public square. The point here is to demonstrate the continued possibilities within an analysis of the ‘secularization theory’ that religion could completely disappear from public discourse, cultural narratives, and academia. The theory fails, Taylor argues, in establishing a complete decline or disappearance of the faith tradition.\(^{204}\)

Citing José Casanova, Taylor concedes the fact that religious traditions remain in a series of ‘spheres,’ separate from the spheres of science and economics, areas in which religious institutions once operated.\(^{205}\) And yet, despite the theory that the religious spheres may become privatized,
Casanova believes they have actually become deprivatized, “[today] we are witnessing the ‘deprivatization of religion…Religious traditions throughout the world are refusing to accept the marginal and privatized role which theories of modernity as well as theories of secularization had reserved for them.” Still, the role of God and/or religion can be questioned in terms of its relevance and actual place in cultural narratives. Certainly, as history has demonstrated, religion played a role in the instruction or explanation of era-specific phenomena (e.g., the Catholic Church’s scientific explanation of the Bubonic Plague) and political acts, such as the installation or punishment of a nation’s ruler (e.g., the Pope’s treatment of Henry II of England following the death of Thomas Beckett). Postmodernity’s separation of the religious and non-religious—economics, science, etc.—is perhaps more pronounced, as individuals prefer to distance themselves from authoritative bodies. Taylor acknowledges the distance individuals desire from the belief that God, in this case the Christian idea of God, has power over one’s life, once again alluding to Deism versus traditional Christian understandings of belief in God.

And yet, despite Taylor’s suggested narrative shift to Deism, the term ‘secular’ is most often understood as the non-religious or the other-than-religious. Simply, ‘secular’ refers to the absence of religious discourse or narrative. Taylor, Matthew Scherer, Jeffrey Stout, and several others refer to the presence of religion in Euro-American politics, culture, economic theory, art, and other facets of life. Thus, despite the general renouncement many have claimed on census forms, online forums, lack of attendance at institutional churches, etc., religion remains part of the cultural narrative in Europe and North America.


207 Taylor, A Secular Age, 431.
“Secularization” is generally thought of as the name for some kind of decline in religion. So you can question whether religion has really receded in our era as much as appears; or while accepting that it doesn’t occupy all that much space, you can wonder whether it ever did. You can question, in other words, our images of a post golden age of religion, an ‘age of faith’; perhaps things are after all not that different, beneath a changed exterior.\textsuperscript{208} The exterior changes are exactly those cultural shifts in religious practice and belief. As noted in chapter four, Vattimo and others will instead identify this postmodern trend as post-secularism; people denounce claims to their family’s traditional faith (e.g., Roman Catholicism), but their cultural situation makes this impossible in its totality. To conclude an examination of Taylor’s remarks regarding the ‘secular,’ I offer the following, which encompasses his general assessment of the shifts in postmodern religious narratives:

What do we mean when we speak of Western modernity as ‘secular’? There are a ll sorts of ways of describing it: the separation of religion from public life, the decline of religious belief and practice. But while one cannot avoid touching on these, my main interest here lies in another facet of our age: belief in God, or in the transcendent in any form, is contested; it is an option among many; it is therefore fragile; for some people in some milieus, it is very difficult, even ‘weird.’ Five hundred years ago in Western civilization, this wasn’t so. Unbelief was off the map, close to inconceivable, for most people. But that description also applies to the whole of human history outside the modern West.\textsuperscript{209} Whereas other thinkers accept the notion of a post-secular era, a time in which religious traditions have undergone a process of revitalization, Taylor understands the contemporary epoch to be simply a secular one. Thus, it is impossible to label a society as secular, void of religion, theological narrative, or religious discourse in the public square. Instead, humanity presently exists within an era of secularism such that society once again becomes deeply tied and influenced by its traditional religious values (e.g., pre-eighteenth century) or post-secular (i.e., witnessing a revitalization on a periphery level of religious traditions).\textsuperscript{210}

Understanding the vitality of religion in the public space, despite the fears of secularism completely dismissing it, may therefore point to a revival of religious faith. As an example, I turn

\textsuperscript{208} Ibid., 427. See also, Steve Bruce, Religion in the Modern World (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 26.
\textsuperscript{209} Taylor, "Western Secularity," in Rethinking Secularism, 49-50.
to France whose relationship with religion, highlighted by McCaffery, articulates the resilience of religious traditions—though in many ways, transformed traditions. McCaffery introduces the notion of religious revivalism, addressing first the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s. This was an event in which the failed “scientific experiment” of secularism “on large populations” became evident to the liberal Western powers in Europe and North America.\(^{211}\) The institutionally imposed secularism of the U.S.S.R., and its satellite states, in other words, ultimately failed. The collapse of the Soviet empire led to a rebirth of religiosity throughout Europe and parts of Asia where Communists had gained a stronghold against Western-backed democracies.

The resulting rejuvenation of religious traditions and corresponding institutions resulted in two possibilities: first, the revitalization of religious institutional bodies (e.g., the Roman Catholic Church in Poland and the Taliban throughout parts of Asia, most notably, Afghanistan) and second, a re-examination of traditional forms of thinking within faith traditions (e.g., the role of Thomistic theology in Roman Catholicism and Sharia law in various regions). Whereas the newly developed democratic governments found throughout the former Eastern-bloc opened doors to new religiously-oriented governing bodies, democratic liberalism did not, in effect, change the already existent parliamentary systems throughout Europe. How and where, for example, the Roman Catholic Church holds influence in the function of the state, was not an over-emphasized political issue. The majority of the European governments contained a provision similar to the United States’ ‘separation of church and state.’ Once again, the concept of laïcité demonstrates this division.

McCaffery suggests that this separation is largely responsible for the return of religion in both the public and private discourse. Because of the freedom democracies entail, specifically

\(^{211}\) McCaffery, 3-4.
those democracies that hold laïcité in some form, secularism has provided a context in which faith is reexamined, providing a venue in which theoretical ideas may be developed. Most importantly, however, and a hallmark of the freedoms democracy entails, is the way people are free to experience or express their own faith: “Furthermore, democratisation meant that religion was to be experienced in a new way as a heightened expression of individual right and personal conviction, and less as the embodiment of a collective institution.”  

Nevertheless, the Catholic Church as an institution, for example, does not simply disappear under these socio-political changes, but is encouraged to adjust: “This is not to say that the institution of Catholicism…did not matter anymore. It was more the case that this institution, if it were to survive, had to adapt to new individual logics and a consensual relativism.”

France’s place as one of Western Europe’s prominent democracies notwithstanding, the point here is to illustrate the relationship found in “the twin spires of faith and reason,” especially in McCaffery’s recognition of the ‘return’ of religion in France and other parts of Western Europe (despite the rise in secular tendencies). Does this type of return mean a reinstitution of the Catholic Church (or another denomination) as the influential institution it was prior to the Fifth Republic? No. Rather, a range of surveys, research, and publications indicate a renewed interest in Europe’s cultural heritage, including its importance in the development of Christianity as a global religious tradition. Nevertheless this has not meant that the Roman Catholic Church and other Christian institutions have remained on the sidelines of public policy; several examples can be referenced in Europe and America, especially those relating to life, human sexuality, and other social issues influenced by various hermeneutical readings of Scripture. And while secular

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212 Ibid., 4.
213 Ibid.
214 Ibid.
governments have become the overwhelming norm in Western Europe, North America, and several other places around the world, the issue of individualized religious identity is still important. This is indicated by the number of human rights declarations, inclusion of such identities into national and international constitutions, and iterations of them found in treaties that have emerged following the Soviet collapse. Although laïcité defines the separation of church and state in the context of France, the idea of secularism remains complex, given the powerful influence religious institutions continue to possess.

Subsequently, secularism itself is understood differently as it relates to theological discourse and the (re-)establishment of religion in various areas of life. These include the cultural changes affecting different communities and the revitalization of a culture through the lens of history (e.g., Vattimo’s historical references). Society’s cultural changes following the end of the World Wars, the civil rights movements of the 1960s, and the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1980s, are of even greater importance. As Europe emerged from decades of conflict, often with a religious tinge, the decade of the 1960s, with its freedom movements and desire for individuality would disrupt the normalcy found in traditional religious practices and belief. In other words, individuality, the freedom to worship or not, and a bitter divide between East and West, would shape religious narratives in numerous ways. Analogously, McCaffery suggests a late twentieth century revival of religion highlighted in the revival of religious discourse that insisted on a change in the Church’s ideology if it were to survive the swift changes brought about through postmodern culture.

The emphasis placed on the separation of church and state, as well as the rise of individualism throughout the postmodern era, are just two of the issues confronting the narrative shifts in the secular era. In response to these shifts, theologians have been engaged in a

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“revitalization of Christianity” and a culture in which many have chosen what to believe or what to practice. As I will articulate later in this chapter, philosophers have begun to explore their fields through postmodernity and have likewise met, at least in the case of Marion and Vattimo, the revival of Christianity within their own contexts. Nevertheless, this reanimation of religion encounters other obstacles, including, but not limited to, the political systems of a given society.

McCaffery also presents secularism as a cultural development connected to the politics of a given society. Two examples are offered to illustrate this point. First, the issue of gay marriage has clouded the strict division laïcité intended to construct. France’s public debate on this issue and others has been contentious, to say the least. Civil rights activists and conservatives, often connected to the Roman Catholic Church, have been outspoken through protests, news commentary, and public debate. The political strength of a religious tradition popular in France (Roman Catholicism) has been amplified and speaks to the revitalization of the faith, in a country whose constitution demands political separation. Another example outside of France is the Austrian Church tax, which highlights the politics of secularism in a country where religious roots are deeply identified with Catholicism. Researchers found that a large number of Austrian men and women, the majority of whom indicated they were middle aged, reported no religious affiliation. The research determined that this lack of membership was due in large part to the tax associated with church membership. Both of these contextual issues help diagnose the postmodern understanding of secularism in terms of a socio-political construct, that is, the larger

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216 McCaffery, 24-28.
217 McCaffery offers a chapter entitled, “Theology and Sexual Ethics,” focused on issues relating to secularism, sexuality, and politics in France. Ibid., 48-79.
issues that drive people away from the traditionalism associated with church membership or religious identity.

Individually, however, the ways in which one identifies as a religious person may differ greatly. Individuals tend to establish their own norms regarding religious identity, traditions, and so forth. Church authority is no longer revered as the source of information relevant to one’s life and/or ethic; rather, authority is “self-generative.” As noted above, the issue of gay marriage, for many in the Western hemisphere, is a secular issue, insofar as it highlights the individuality associated with the topic (i.e., the socio-political divide based on loosely affiliated religious grounds) and the dismissal of established authority in favor of individual assessments (i.e., the Roman Catholic Church’s stance on the issue is replaced or affirmed by the individual’s self-issued acceptance or rejection of gay marriage).

In summary, McCaffery’s position regarding secularism reflects the larger issues France and other Western societies have experienced. As such, two “significant trends” mark the postmodern experience of secularism: “Firstly, secularisation has contributed to the re-invention of a context in which religion is reproduced in postmodernity, including the ways in which religion is practised.” Therefore, the self-determined authority and/or self-determined assessment of an issue, tends to determine how one’s religious identity is practiced. “Secondly, and crucially, secularisation remains faithful to the search for a religious authenticity despite and by virtue of its embrace of eclecticism.” The second claim by McCaffery goes without clarification, other than the possibility of including other non-traditional practices into traditionally Christian households. The “eclecticism” highlights a return to religion insofar as it has allowed individuals to express

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219 McCaffery, 30-31.
220 Ibid., 31.
221 Ibid. Emphasis original.
themselves in somewhat non-conformist ways, breaking from the dictates of a society driven, especially, by consumerism. Religion remains, nevertheless, at the forefront, either in a secular form or via fundamentalism, especially on sensitive ethical issues; it remains an influential part of the human narrative, of culture, and specifically, the Euro-American discourse. What has since occurred following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the return of religion has, by some, been declared the era of “post-secularism,” in which religion exists as part of the narrative, but has taken on forms that resemble variations of the traditions previous generations knew. Specifically, the millennial generation’s narrative on religion varies greatly from that of their grandparents, a topic to which I now turn.

3.2 Secularism to Post-Secularism

Religious identity is intimately connected to particular societies and cultures. Religious narratives are likewise formed by the language and philosophies of a given place. Formed alongside conflict and war, language, literature, art, and other aspects of society, religion finds itself a part of the underlying fabric of any culture. In this sense, the Euro-American Christianity emerges following tribal warfare, the rise and fall of empires and nation-states, the development of language, literature, and art, and so forth. It therefore differs from other culturally driven religious traditions, such as African-Christianity, which maintains some indigenous influence, despite Europe’s historical role as a colonizer. The postmodern shifts in religious narrative therefore raise a number of questions relevant to the religious-secular debate: Is religion still relevant and prominent? Has religion varied in form over the past few decades? Has religion helped shape public policy or have people rallied against its role in the public square? Regardless of how religious traditions have previously existed, the influence of secularism has outright changed it in each one of these scenarios. For instance, the debate over the so-called 9-11 mosque in New York
City incurred vocal responses throughout the City and across the nation, despite the constitutional right to practice one’s faith freely. Likewise, the recent assertions of outspoken Muslim clerics in Great Britain and France have elicited rallies and protests in cultures largely respected because of their civil liberties, including the right to worship. Likewise, Catholics, led by the USCCB, have verbally protested against the so-called contraceptive mandate in the 2008 Affordable Care Act. In other words, the religious discourse in the public square, despite the secular label applied in many instances, has not retreated to the whispers of a pub or dinner table. They have become part of the everyday dialogue. And, despite these public displays of frustration, they are often guised in traditional religious values, despite language that is contrary to their faith tradition. Religious discourse never ceases to remain a part of the narrative. As McCaffery has suggested, the narrative has shifted, and quite dramatically. In this case, post-secular religion is one in which people identify themselves in a particular culture with deep-seeded religious roots, while also witnessing a narrative change as it relates to the belief and practice of the rooted faith. “Secularism,” understood as a challenge to the historical understanding of a faith tradition such as Christianity, has impacted the religious narratives in varying ways:

In many traditionally Christian European societies, Christian faith no longer enjoys the monopoly it once had in giving meaning to human existence. The processes of secularisation and pluralisation have seriously restricted the all-inclusive importance of the Christian horizon of meaning. Postmodernity’s criticism of so-called master narratives have undermined the so-called absolutist and universalist truth claims of religious traditions and modern ideologies. The postmodern context challenges today’s theologians, requiring them to engage yet again in theology’s age-old project of *fides quarens intellectum*, ‘faith seeking understanding.’ Secularization, and subsequently pluralization, of religious traditions is of particular interest for the remainder of this project. Having previously addressed the postmodern context in which theological and philosophical norms are challenged, I will explore how the introduction of

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secularism and pluralism affects the ‘return of religion’ by re-contextualizing the already prevalent narratives found in traditional religious discourse. The master narratives that have been so prominent in Western theological discourse have been uprooted, allowing the questioning and formation of ‘new’ theological ideas that fit the changing ‘horizon’ of Western society. In part, these may legitimately serve as valid alternatives to the metaphysically dogmatic exhibitions of (Catholic) theology that have been prominent for centuries.

Such theological narrative changes in Europe, and in the U.S., Taylor would suggest, address the diminishing significance of Christianity, and, in this case, the influence of the Roman Catholic Church as an institution. This affects the practice of individuals in varying ways. Boeve goes on to present a typical approach to secularism, which suggests the disappearance of religion as humanity progresses through modernity; the more advanced humanity becomes in its technological and scientific achievements, the less impactful religious discourse is. According to Boeve and McCaffery’s assessment of postmodern society, this claim does not hold up, however: “Religion has not been banished; rather, it has again received a prominent place on the agenda, in Europe as well as in the world as a whole.” In this instance, the notion of post-secular is introduced, presenting a narrative in which the postmodern notion of pluralism is highlighted through a variety of religious practices and individuality through the turning away from traditional understandings of the Divine in favor of belief in ‘something’ or an amorphous version of doctrinally contrived deities.

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224 Boeve, God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval, 13. For some, Lieven Boeve’s work may be considered questionable, considering his place role of theology professor at a state-supported Catholic university. Boeve’s work, especially the aforementioned text that highlights the overwhelming belief in “something,” albeit not the metaphysical God of traditional Christianity, nevertheless illustrates the religious changes occurring in many Western societies. It must also be noted that Boeve’s experience in Belgium may differ from other European locales whose interest in spirituality, religion, or theology has dwindled even more extensively.
225 Ibid., 14.
226 Ibid., 139.
Boeve continues, offering two meanings that can be derived from the term ‘post-secular.’ First, using a chronological perspective similar to McCaffery and Taylor’s exploration of secularism, Boeve suggests that the Christian narratives are changing from a pre-modern context that relied on institutional structures to convey religious meaning (e.g., the Roman Catholic Church) to a secularized culture that separates itself from such structures. Indeed, the change continues to a post-modern and ‘post-secular’ society, with narratives focusing on the individual, often using humanism, rather than religious doctrine, as a starting point. Secondly, relying on a methodological analysis, ‘post-secular’ implies a process that transforms religious narratives naturally: “using the term ‘post-secular’ has to do with the discussion of whether the term refers to an historical description of the process from pre-modern to post-modern, which changed religion in Europe (the facts) or pertains rather to the way in which we analyze these changes, i.e., the history of our ways to describe this process (our view of the facts).”227 Post-secularism’s results can often include individual religious narratives that include practices not traditionally found in their ancestral faith, identified by Boeve as a type of consumer religion.228 Similarly, the collaborative research projects of Harvey Cox and Jan Swyngedouw,229 as well as Tom Beaudoin and J. Patrick Hornbeck230 further substantiate the global shifts Boeve presents. Collectively, their research illustrates the rapid rate in which Roman Catholics are leaving the institutional church in favor of either nothing, individual spiritualism, or in some cases, the faith of their non-Catholic spouse.231

227 Ibid., 14.
229 Swyngedouw.
231 Beaudoin, 255-62.
The historical presentation of religious discourse, doctrine, narrative, and practices are hence challenged by the postmodern influence of secularism’s impact on religious shifts. These changes have prompted Harvey Cox to question how religious identity might be measured in an ever-changing Europe. “Could Christianity in Europe be moving away from an institutionally positioned model and toward a culturally diffuse pattern, more like the religions in many Asian countries, and therefore more difficult to measure by such standard means as church attendance and baptism statistics?”232 Similarly, Yves Lambert understands the cultural turn of the mid-1900s caused Europe’s culturally driven faith to be led a new and secular direction.233 Older studies, such as Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi and Michael Argyle’s The Psychology of Religious Behaviour, Belief, & Experience, address the post-Cold War trends in religious adherence, noting the general rise in the preference for no religion, with few exceptions.234 More recently, evaluations conducted by the European Values Study and the International Social Survey Programme further address the overwhelming shifts in religious belief and adherence to a particular denomination. For example, the European Values Study rejects the absolutist claim that the continent is largely secular: close to fifty-percent of those surveyed admit to praying or meditating at least once a week, Church attendance varies across the continent but is certainly in a period of decline, and while atheism is thought to be overwhelming across Europe, it is not (France ranks the highest with fifteen-percent indicating they were atheists).235

232 Swyngedouw, 8.
233 For example, Lambert, 99-129.
234 Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi and Michael Argyle, The Psychology of Religious Behaviour, Belief & Experience (London: Routledge, 1997), 135-38. In their study, Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle write, “we can state that secularists are less prejudiced, less authoritarian, less dogmatic, and less suggestible, compared to religious individuals. This could be predicted from looking at data for lower levels of religiosity...The idea of individual choice and voluntary change in religious identity is in itself a relatively novel idea, tied to secularization and individualism,” in ibid., 138.
Boeve, Lambert, Cox, and Grace Davie have addressed these sociological changes throughout Europe, observing both the historical connection between Europe and Christianity as well as the shifts in faith adherence. Multiple characteristics and labels have been given to individuals who have opted to reject their parents’ or grandparents’ faith tradition, favoring individuality and other ‘spiritual’ systems. For Boeve and Lambert, these individuals have undergone a religious mutation, in which they believe in ‘something,’ but refrain from a denominational religious identity or systematic definition of the Divine.\textsuperscript{236} Europe has transitioned in large part from a society that was primarily Christian, grounded by religious institutions and their interpretations, to a society that is now focused on the individual’s “autonomous, subjective establishment of meaning.”\textsuperscript{237} Referring specifically to Christianized Europe, Davie will label these individuals, “un-churched,” as it relates to the steady decline in Church attendance and suspicion of the Church as an institution.\textsuperscript{238} Cox notes the tendency for many to have beliefs that “come and go, change, fade, and mature. The beliefs one holds at ten are not identical with the ones one holds at fifty or seventy-five.”\textsuperscript{239} Changing belief patterns have also led many thinkers to argue that the more appropriate label may be, ‘believing without belonging,’ which demonstrates the desire of many throughout Europe to maintain an individual spirituality but refrain from membership with traditional institutional churches. To reiterate, these post-secular approaches to religion demonstrate reluctance on the part of many to completely dismiss transcendental thoughts, spirituality, prayers, etc. In some instances, people might actually be

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\textsuperscript{237} Boeve, \textit{God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval}, 19.


\textsuperscript{239} Cox, 17-18.
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labeled ‘post-Christian,’ whereby individuals maintain a sense of identity as a (European) Christian and are usually initiated into the religious community (typically baptism), but refrain from other religious ceremonies and rites.240 The continent as a whole, suggests Boeve, is going through a process of “detraditionalization,” in which the passing on of the religious faith (i.e., Christianity) is no longer happening, the faith is no longer growing, and “Christianity is no longer a given and unquestioned horizon of individual and social identity.”241 Christianity’s role as a social institution, one that shapes the socio-political and moral policies of Europe, has been largely diminished. This is especially concerning, given Christianity’s cultural connection to Europe and the West as a whole: the religious tradition flourished and emerged as an intellectual system within the libraries, courts, and politics of the ancient continent. Thus, as individuals move beyond the traditional religious practices of Roman Catholicism and incorporate other practices, there is nonetheless a desire to remain connected in varying forms to their religious heritage.

For the purposes of this project, and since Marion and Vattimo are situated in the European context (though they both are seemingly aware of larger, global issues, especially in the United States), the discussion of secularism and post-secularism highlighted here centers on the religious shifts of Europe, especially France. Secondly, it must be stated that a good deal of the discussion on secularism finds itself intimately connected to both religion and politics, despite the Western constitutional propensity for separation between the two. As addressed in the next section, Ireland’s emergence from a devout Roman Catholic nation to a secularized and plural nation highlights the swift changes that have taken place on the continent since the 1960s.

240 Boeve, God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval, 20. Davie, however, explains that many men and women participate in religious events, including prayer services and weekly Sabbath celebrations, at times of individual or national tragedy, in Davie, "Religion in 21st-Century Europe: Framing the Debate," 282. See also, Lambert, "Trends in Religious Feeling in Europe and Russia," 111-13.

241 Boeve, God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval, 21.
4. An Example: Ireland’s Narrative Changes

Postmodernism, secularism, and post-secularism and their connections to theological narratives can only be complemented when paired with an example, such as McCaffery and Davie have done with France and England, respectively. Ireland, an island largely isolated from the politics of the continent until its acceptance as a member of the European Economic Community in 1973 and the European Union in 1999, provides a more recent example of the cultural and theological narrative shifts that have taken place in neighboring Europe. Generally speaking the social, political, and cultural upheaval of the 1960s, consequential in the U.S. and Europe, had comparatively little impact on Ireland, especially given the continuous tension between the Republic, Northern Ireland, and the United Kingdom (highlighted by ‘The Troubles,’ 1968-98). Roman Catholicism as the official religion of the Republic of Ireland, in fact, had for centuries served as the binding agent of Irish nationalism.\textsuperscript{242} The connection between Roman Catholicism and the Irish people allowed for a metanarrative which, if one accepts Lyotard’s reading of Irish society, dominated the thinking, knowledge, policies, and governance of Ireland for centuries. The authority of the Catholic Church has, in short, been met with suspicion since the 1980s, leading many to abstain from religious practice in a country once recognized for its devout population.

The postmodern Catholic Church in Ireland finds itself challenged by outside influences such as globalization, immigration and emigration, as well as the rise in spiritualism versus belonging to a faith community, trends common to secularism and post-secularism. The secular shift, which Davie and others place in the 1990s, is largely the result of an economic boom, the

Republic’s membership in the European Union, and a national policy that welcomed immigrant workers from across the Euro-zone. Davie notes the importance of the almost overnight change:

The shift was dramatic. Dublin, in particular, became a sought after place to live and work, attracting a wide variety of (often young) people, much less interested in the traditional ways of doing things. A heavily institutionalized Catholic Church was ill placed to respond given the speed of change, a situation that led in turn to a rapid decline in religious practice. This is best described as a speeded-up version of secularization: the process that had taken several generations in most of Europe occurred extraordinarily fast in Ireland.243 Despite these shifts, census data still indicates that a large number of Irish still identify as Catholics, albeit with a growing minority of individuals identifying themselves as areligious.244 Ireland’s place as a predominately Catholic nation, with a people who had for decades been loyal devout to the Church, finds itself deeply immersed in an ongoing religious narrative shift. “In Ireland, as elsewhere, this has shaken the confidence of both the Church itself and of the population it is called to serve…Ireland, in short, has become more like the rest of Europe.”245

The Catholic Church has faced internal struggles that have further exacerbated the external pressures brought on by immigration, globalization, and changing economics. These internal changes include a decrease in church attendance indicated in both national and international surveys, a decline in the number of ordained clergy,246 and the sexual abuse scandal that continues

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246 Eoin O’Mahony notes the projected net balance of priests in twenty-five of the twenty-six diocese in Ireland as -61 by 2015 and -65 by 2020; a potential 23% decrease in the number of serving priests between 2007 and 2015. These projected calculations account for 1,891 priests by 2015 and 1,574 by 2020. While the numbers here focus solely on the diocesan priests, and does not include those ordained belonging to the religious orders in Ireland, they indicate a decrease in the number of priests from decades prior. A subsequent 2013 commission was conducted by O’Mahony, but lacks the projected numbers given in the 2007 document. O’Mahony does, however, note the number of priests as of October 2013: 2,067. This number looks to exceed the 2007 projections, but follows a different and rather lucid definition of what an active missionary priest is. Nevertheless, it indicates a negative net balance from 2007 in which O’Mahony’s research indicated 2,464 priests were actively engaged in the diocese they
to haunt the Church. Similar to the Continent, Ireland’s church-going population has dwindled, and the Church itself is now marked by an aging population of widowed women and men.\(^{247}\) Additionally, Catholic rituals have been affected by the cultural changes, as individuals have generally turned away from such faith practices, with few exceptions.\(^{248}\) Culturally, Ireland has undergone its own ‘turn,’ similar to the issues addressed by Boeve, Cox, and others. Such changes permit Patrick Claffey and others to question the vitality of the Catholic Church in a postmodern society, such as the Republic of Ireland.

As people distance themselves further and further from their religious and cultural heritage, the role of the Church as an institution that can affect public policy, especially on issues relating to law and ethics, is questioned and reduced. For instance, questions of the religious connection to Ireland’s laws and the validity of the institutional Church gave rise amidst a transformative secular setting. Two recent cases reflect the challenge to the authority of the Catholic Church: (1) the case of Savita Halappanavar, whose death resulted after a request for an abortion was denied and subsequently, prompted national protests,\(^{249}\) and (2) the revelation in the early 2000s of the priest sexual abuse scandal.\(^{250}\) In each case, the role of the Church as an institution intent on having a

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\(^{248}\) "Involvement with churches for many people has been reduced to baptisms, weddings and funerals with more or less occasional Church attendance for major feasts and solemn occasions. Movements within the Churches, such as the sodalities, that were such a feature of Irish Catholicism have all but disappeared. Religious bodies struggle to influence events and public policy. Even within their own institutions they struggle to maintain their ‘ethos’ in the face of secularising forces. Finally, people’s behaviour appears to be less influenced by religious belief,” in Claffey, 5.


\(^{250}\) For an examination of twentieth-century abuse cases, see Claire McLoone-Richards, "Say Nothing! How Pathology within Catholicism Created and Sustained the Institutional Abuse of Children in 20th Century Ireland,"
role in public policy issues is examined, often with outspoken protests, as was the case with Ms. Halappanavar. Situations in which the Catholic Church in Ireland, and for that matter other liberal democracies across Europe, has asserted itself as a moral voice have been met with “strong anticlericalism” and, in many cases, the disaffiliation from the Church itself.\(^{251}\) Ireland’s ‘secular transformation,’ matching its British and French counterparts, has even prompted Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin to state that Ireland was now “post-Catholic.”\(^{252}\)

The example of Ireland highlights the overwhelming narrative shifts throughout Europe. Generally speaking, people throughout Christian Europe, and in varying forms, the United States, demonstrate an attitude of “‘believing without belonging,’”\(^{253}\) versus the traditional faith beliefs found in Christian Europe prior to the 1960s, and certainly, prior to both World Wars. Among those who self-identify as Catholics, the sense of their religious identity as an obligation and/or part of their family’s tradition has since been neglected or abandoned favoring individualistic theological preferences or spirituality.\(^{254}\) Nevertheless, as noted in several instances, individuals may seek religion for “vicarious reasons,” particularly in times of crisis or sadness.\(^{255}\) As

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\(^{251}\) Claffey, 10.


\(^{254}\) I offer this noting L. Philip Barnes’ analysis of the role of religion in the era of ‘the Troubles’ (1968-98) in Northern Ireland. Barnes writes, “Our discussion of the conflict in Northern Ireland has alerted us to the diversity of motivations, beliefs, and practices that go under the name of religion. The term ‘religion’ and cognate terms are used in strikingly varied ways, which, if left unqualified by other terms and descriptions, elide distinctions within religion and forms of religion, which should be made, as well as obscure the difference between moral, immoral, and amoral versions of religion,” in L. Philip Barnes, "Was the Northern Ireland Conflict Religious?,” Journal of Contemporary Religion 20, no. 1 (2005): 69. My point here is to illustrate the negative impact religion, specifically in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, throughout its history, has played in the formulation of each land, respectively. Additionally, Claire Mitchell contends that self-identification as Catholic or as Protestant aided the violence, despite the separation between Church (as in an institution) and self. See Claire Mitchell, "Behind the Ethnic Marker: Religion and Social Identification in Northern Ireland," Sociology of Religion 66, no. 1 (2005).

postmodernity finds a place in Ireland, as a system of thought and practice that questions grand narratives, the role of authoritative bodies, and influences on individuality, the Catholic Church and religious narratives look for a place in which they may remain relevant. The rise of secularism, if indeed a complete removal of religion, threatens to replace or dismiss a part of Irish culture. A similar threat exists to France, England, and other parts of Europe. While this dissertation is not a project focused on Ireland, the nation’s role as a recent example does help demonstrate global trends of religious change, secularism, and the idea of the post-secular, highlighting the shifts occurring in the religious narrative of a country once known for its devout parishioners. As the project moves on, the examples given in this chapter aim to highlight both the religious narrative shifts and the cultural connection religion has to many throughout the world, especially Europe.

5. Conclusion

The religious shifts in Ireland highlight the claims made throughout this chapter: Europe presently exists within a postmodern era, whose secular or post-secular attitudes toward religious narratives have questioned the legitimacy of religious institutions, theological thought, and metanarratives which had long governed society. The example of Ireland demonstrates the complications associated with postmodern religion: religious bodies are no longer competing against one another; rather, they are competing to stay alive, against the advances of postmodern society. In this era, postmodernity’s preference of individualized spirituality or no religion at all has cast a shadow on the importance of religious institutions as legitimate systems determined to add commentary on—or translation of—world events. Scientific development and an individual’s education, points addressed at the outset of this chapter by Lyotard, have provided the means for the overcoming of metanarratives, including religious ones determined by institutions like the Roman Catholic Church. The influx of immigrants to a society that was once closed upon itself as
Christian-only has further added to the postmodern religious narrative. Society is no longer monolithically Christian, but pluralistic and open to new interpretation and syncretic practices. Finally, the advances of technology have caused the once Christian-only marketplace of religious consumerism to be flooded with new information on a variety of religious traditions and spirituality. The so-called “millennial generation” of Europe is no longer beholden to the religious traditions of their parents or grandparents; rather, they have access to—and are influenced by—a web of information that does not fit the confines of traditionally Euro-American Christianity.

It would be naïve, however, to think secularism could be completely overcome in a project like this or via recommitments of the masses to traditions such as Roman Catholicism. The effects of immigration, globalization, and technology have taken Christianity well beyond the possibility of restricting Europe to a single faith tradition. Similarly, the Church finds itself immersed within its own modern and postmodern struggle: Pope Francis has been the subject of both praise for the reforms he has sought and criticized for the challenges he has offered traditionalism. Compared to his predecessor, Benedict XVI who desired a constricted Church grounded in metaphysical and historical roots, Francis has opened the doors of the Church to the many, even those once considered unworthy or, worse, sinful. The language of social responsibility, charity (caritas), and God’s love has become the central discourse in Francis’ homilies, proclamations, etc. The emphasis on doctrinal governance and metaphysical certitude has been muted, in favor of a language that expresses the humanist concern for the other, a trait common throughout Marion and Vattimo’s works.

This dissertation continues to explore the possibility of Christianity existing alongside the secular and post-secular changes and adapting to them. The implications associated with new theological narratives being incorporated alongside the influence of secularism, post-secularism,
and a so-called post-Christianity requires a reexamination of the existing systems of narrative, specifically those grounded in metaphysics. Overcoming the metaphysical system of theology, and I argue the system of traditionalism and governance within the Catholic Church, would provide an opportunity in which theological development may develop in ways that speak to the shifting Church. Jean-Luc Marion and Gianni Vattimo offer theological narrative systems—phenomenological and philosophical theology—which reintroduces the historical tradition of Christianity, opening a narrative that may hold meaning for Euro-American Christians who have otherwise stepped away from the Church. Challenging the influence of metaphysics on religious narrative permits Vattimo and Marion an opportunity to discourse with Christianity that is otherwise forbidden by the Church as an institution. The second chapter examines the influence of metaphysics in the Church, its doctrine, and so forth following the Second Vatican Council. Addressing the historically inherited metaphysics, and offering a new dialogical model vis-à-vis postmodern philosophy, may provide an open door for the faithful to reengage a weakened and dying Church.
CHAPTER TWO

FACING THE CHURCH

Since its proclamation in December 1965, *Gaudium et spes (Joy and Hope, The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)* has influenced the Church’s interactions with the world as well as its reflective processes. Specifically, paragraph four encourages the Church to reexamine itself in relation to the present era.\(^{256}\) Despite the document’s encouraging language, the complexities of a postmodern world make this a challenging process indeed, requiring constant interpretation and re-evaluation. The complexity of postmodernism, as suggested in the first chapter, makes it difficult to define as an “era,” especially as it relates to the Roman Catholic Church. Theologians and philosophers have difficulty simplifying a definition that suits the constant socio-cultural changes occurring within this context. Gerard Mannion’s *Ecclesiology and Postmodernity* explores these shifts as they relate to the Church by examining the philosophy of Jean-François Lyotard and theologians Peter Hodgson, Graham Ward, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Johann-Baptist Metz, among others.\(^{257}\) Each thinker complements the general concerns regarding metanarratives, an understanding that the Church progresses through historical epochs, and that the Church aims to traverse the evolving technological and socio-cultural achievements of the postmodern era. Mannion agrees with the general assessment made in chapter one: postmodernity’s impact on the Roman Catholic Church is ongoing and will continue to shape it.

\(^{256}\) “[The] church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics,” in Second Vatican Council, "Gaudium Et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)," Libreria Editrice Vaticana, accessed March 7, 2015. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

\(^{257}\) Mannion, *Ecclesiology and Postmodernity: Questions for the Church in Our Time.*
It helps, perhaps, first to frame postmodernism outside the confines of academic and theological discussion. As an abstract and general concept, postmodernism offers a separation from the metaphysically developed concepts commonly associated with philosophy and Christian theology. Art, drama, literature, film, etc., can also include traits common to postmodernism. On an individual level, postmodernity has encouraged individuality with little or no connection to the communal aspects once common to human societies; this is true despite the interconnectedness that the internet, social media, and technological advancements have created. James K.A. Smith addresses this transformation as a society once bound by its communal connection, but now personalized by faith-seeking individuals that has thus resulted in the breakdown of any form of religious community. In short, the personalization of faith traditions has led to an increase in syncretistic practices in which Catholicism, for example, employs elements or traditions common to other religious traditions. In response to these observations, Smith proposes that Christians no longer desire a communal religious or spiritual experience, but relate best to a faith tradition or spirituality at the individual level. In this case, the communal breaking-of-bread and prayer is no longer necessitated, precisely because it is a communal activity. For the postmodern Millennial, for example, the communal aspect does not provide a one-to-one consumer experience, where an individual could quickly pick up their ‘product’ (e.g., the Eucharist, a blessing, absolution and penance, etc.) before moving on to the next part of her life.\textsuperscript{258}

\textsuperscript{258} “If I am opposed to the epistemology, or theory of knowledge, that plagues modern Christianity, then I am also opposed to the ecclesiology (or lack thereof) that accompanies this modernist version of the faith. Within the matrix of a modern Christianity, the base ‘ingredient’ is the individual; the church, then, is simply a collection of individuals. Conceiving of Christian faith as a private affair between the individual and God—a matter of my asking Jesus to ‘come into my heart’—modern evangelicalism finds it hard to articulate just how or why the church has any role to play other than providing a place to fellowship with other individuals who have a private relationship with God. With this model in place, what matters is Christianity as a system of truth or ideas, not the church as a living community embodying its head. Modern Christianity tends to think of the Church either as a place where individuals come to find answers to their questions or as one more stop where individuals can try to satisfy their consumerist desires. As
Understanding the postmodern changes occurring within Euro-American societies and any theoretical return to religion must address two issues that have shaped the history of the Roman Catholic Church. First, the history and acceptance of *metaphysics* as a system of thought for the Magisterium and the theologies that have developed from this understanding, are concerning for most postmodernists. The concern, I argue, is grounded in the authoritative application of metaphysics by the Magisterium, executed through papal encyclicals and documents produced, for example, by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Second, the role of metaphysics, as the primary system of philosophical and theological development, when coupled with my observations regarding the authority of the institutional Church is concerning. Examining metaphysics in light of postmodernity offers a way forward, in which we can expand upon the concerns Lyotard expressed regarding metanarratives, as well as the issues arising from the secular tendencies evident in the work of Taylor, Mannion, Smith, and others.

In order to articulate these concerns, this chapter provides a literary-based analysis of the traditional theological metaphysics, Church authority and tradition, and language. The chapter is also deeply rooted in the nineteenth century cultural turn and Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophy. Nietzsche’s work, as was suggested in the first chapter, was formative in shaping the later philosophical projects of Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Marion, Gianni Vattimo, and countless others. Approaching metaphysics with concern, the way Nietzsche and his successors do, enables us to question the tradition of the Church. Specifically, I am to question the Church’s insistence on Thomistic theology, the Magisterium’s central authority such, Christianity becomes intellectualized rather than incarnate, commodified rather than the site of genuine community,” in James K.A. Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church, The Church and Postmodern Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 29. The sociological question nevertheless remains: do Millennials desire any type of community? Though not a subject of this project, social media and other online platforms may take the place of institutional communities such as a church, synagogue, or mosque.
derived from this metaphysical tradition, while also mindful of the postmodern, anti-metanarrative concerns outlined in the previous chapter. In order to explore these issues, however, we must first establish an understanding of what metaphysics is in theological and philosophical discourse.

1. Aristotle and Aquinas: A General Overview of ‘Traditional’ Metaphysics

I begin by offering a brief overview of the traditional metaphysics as articulated by Aristotle and Aquinas. While in no way comprehensive of either Aristotle or Aquinas’s collective works, this section provides a provisional understanding of the concerns postmodernity has for the classical approaches to metaphysics. In order to articulate their metaphysical projects, I have chosen here to give brief examples from their work that relate directly to the notion of God (or the Divine) but are in no way a comprehensive articulation of their works. Being, substance, and science—or a basic and common understanding of physics—remain interconnected in Aquinas’ understanding of Aristotelean metaphysics. Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* identifies what Aquinas later understands to be God, specifically as the description relates to movement.\(^{259}\) In his fourth book, “Gamma,” Aristotle introduces the notion of the unmoved mover (οὐ κινούµενον κινεῖ):

\[\text{[I]t is evident that those who say that all things are at rest do not speak the truth; nor do those who say that all things are in movement. For if all things are at rest, the same things will always be true and the same things will always be false. But this evidently changes; for the speaker himself at one time was not and again will not be. But if all things are in movement, nothing will be true; everything will therefore be false. But it has been shown that this is impossible. Again, only beings can change; for change is from something to something. Neither can all things be now at rest and now in motion, so that nothing is eternal; for there is always a mover of things moved, and the first mover is itself unmoved.}^{260}\]

\(^{259}\) Aquinas, for example, writes in this instance: “It should also be noted that Aristotle says here that the necessity of the first motion is not absolute necessity but necessity from the end, and the end is the principle which he later calls God inasmuch as things are assimilated to God through motion. Now assimilation to a being that wills and understands (as he shows God to be) is in the line of will and understanding, just as things made by art are assimilated to the artist inasmuch as his will is fulfilled in them. This being so, it follows that the necessity of the first motion is totally subject to the will of God,” in Aquinas, 890, no. 2535.

\(^{260}\) Aristotle, 86: Book Gamma, 8.
Aquinas will later acknowledge this description, the source of all movement, as God, “The first point, whence a thing’s movement proceeds.” Moreover, Aristotle continues his understanding of first movement in his twelfth book, or “Lambda,” in which he defines God as the “primary being.” Following the declarations he makes in the fourth and twelfth books, Aristotle also defines the “primary being” as that which “comprises the intrinsic objects of thought,” which is both “simple and actual.” For Aristotle, the “primary being” is that of the “first mover,” who is “a necessary being; that is, it is well that it is necessary, and it is thus a first principle. For necessity is attributed not only to what is necessary by compulsion because contrary to impulse but also to that without which there can be no good and to that which simply cannot be otherwise.”

Thus, for Aristotle, there can be nothing other than this first principle: the primary being or first mover. Building off of this idea, *Metaphysics* outlines the role that this first principle undertakes:

[Since] what is moved must be moved by something, the first mover must in itself be unmoving, and eternal movement must be induced by something eternal, and a unitary movement by something unitary, and since we observe, besides the world-movement as a whole which we say the first and unmoving being induces, other eternal movements, those of the planets...each of these movements must be induced by an unmoving and self-dependent and eternal primary being. For the nature of the stellar bodies is eternal, being a primary being, and the mover is eternal and prior to the moved, and what is prior to a primary being must be a primary being. It is evident, therefore, that there must be primary beings equal in number to such independent movements, eternal in nature, unmoving in themselves, and without magnitude, for the reason previously stated.

Though clearly not Christian in its development, Aristotle’s understanding of first principle and primary being resembles later Scholastic thought regarding the theology of God. Aristotle’s language in this case would become highly influential during the Scholastic period, wherein thinkers such as Aquinas adopt the ‘science’ as the theological language of God.

Aristotle’s influence on Aquinas is clear. The concept of motion, and more specifically, that of the unmoved mover, plays a role in Aquinas’ definition of God. For example, in his commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, Aquinas writes, “Now in the class of movers it is possible to reach a single cause, as has been

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261 Ibid., 87: Book Delta, 1.
262 Ibid., 259: Book Lambda, 7.
263 Ibid.
264 Ibid.
265 Ibid., 261: Book Lambda, 8.
proved in Book VIII of the *Physics*. Therefore, this first mover, which is one and the same for all, is the first principle of all things.” In short, Aquinas defines God in relationship to Aristotle’s metaphysical understanding of movement as that which acts as the first principle for all things. The “unmoved mover” or first principle, according to Aquinas, “remains that which causes motion,” it causes all other motion, but itself does not move: “For the Divine agent, who communicates being without motion, is the cause not only of becoming but also of being.” Aquinas’ metaphysics results in the Christian conceptualization of God, thereby confining God to notions of both movement and being, expressed analogously via kinesiology and human language.

Likewise, Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae* reaffirms this understanding, adopting the Aristotelian ideas of motion and first mover, beginning in the first part of his famous text. In the *Prima pars* Aquinas identifies God specifically in relationship to motion:

There is a God…The first and most obvious way is based on change. We see things changing. Now anything changing is being changed by something else…This something else, if itself changing, is being changed by yet another thing; and this last by another. Now we must stop somewhere, otherwise there will be no first cause of the change, and, as a result, no subsequent causes. (Only when acted upon by a first cause do intermediate causes produce a change; if a hand does not move the stick, the stick will not move anything else.) We arrive then at some first cause of change not itself being changed by anything, and this is what everybody understands by God.

Aquinas continues, offering ‘proofs’ based on the notion of cause and effect, the first cause (*prima causa*), and nature itself. The metaphysical language of movement employed here is both culturally connected and provides an analogous context for readers of the text to connect to an idea that should otherwise remain foreign. Aquinas approaches metaphysics in this form not only for its accessibility, but because of its

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266 Aquinas, 873, no. 2474.
267 Ibid., 873, no. 2474 and 614, no. 1661. Elsewhere, referring again to Aristotle, Aquinas writes, “That which is moved and causes motion is intermediate, there must be something which causes motion and is unmoved, which is eternal and both a substance and an actuality,” in ibid., 881, no. 1066.
269 Aquinas will go on to affirm this point, writing, “Aristotle says *words express thoughts and thoughts represent things.* So words refer immediately [sic] to things by way of our conceptions: we talk about things in the way we know them. Now in this life we know God only through creatures: as their non-creaturely transcendent cause. So our words for God do not express him as he is in himself…Our words for God then, express him in ways more appropriate to the material creatures we naturally know…Now God is
connection between nature and God. Accepting God as a ‘mover,’ or at least one who has motion understood in terms of physics, implies God must be the first cause of any similar movement in creation.\textsuperscript{270} Moreover, Aquinas maintains this thought as it relates to virtues and justice, attributes he conceives to have originated with God:

God never acts against nature, since \textit{the nature of things is what God does within them}; but he can act against the usual course of nature. In the same way God never commands things against virtue, since virtue and right consist primarily in accord with God’s will and response to his commands, even when that runs counter to the usual measure of virtue.\textsuperscript{271} Subsequently, language in the \textit{Summa} and theology is limited in its ability to portray God appropriately, relying on analogies and metaphor.\textsuperscript{272} Aquinas then turns to Aristotelean metaphysics to express God as a \textit{being}, though admits its analogical limitations,\textsuperscript{273} while asserting God as both \textit{omniscient} and \textit{omnipresent}—two characteristics common to the Christian understanding of God.\textsuperscript{274}

Aquinas’ influence on Christian theology is well documented, and beyond the scope of this project. However, understanding the concept of metaphysics cannot be avoided in postmodern approaches to theology. Embedded into Christian theology, magisterial authority, and Church doctrine, metaphysics remains a difficult subject to simply ‘overcome’—\textit{Überwindung}—despite the aforementioned postmodern desire for this. The inseparability of metaphysics from theology is something I will turn to regularly throughout this chapter. The continual references to Aristotle and Aquinas help shape my understanding of the Church’s historical and contextual reliance upon metaphysics in order to shape its body of theological doctrine and dogma relating to God and the Church. For example, Wolfhart Pannenberg suggests the inseparable nature between theology and metaphysics:

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\item both non-composite \textit{and} subsistent: so we must use abstract terms to express his lack of composition…Neither way of talking fully measures up to his way of existing, but this life we do not know him as he is in himself;” in ibid., I, 3, 13 ad 1.
\item “Everything in nature, therefore, is directed to its goal by someone with understanding, and this we call \textit{God},” in ibid., I, 2, 3.
\item Ibid., II-II, 104, 4. Emphasis original. See also, ibid., I-II, 9, ad 6.
\item Ibid., I, 3, 13, ad 2.
\item Ibid., I, 3, 5, ad 2 and I, 3, 13, ad 6.
\item Ibid., I-II, 3, 25, ad 1-5; I-II, 4, 14, ad 1-16; and I-II, 4, 17, ad 1-3.
\end{itemize}
More than anything else, theological discourse about God requires a relationship to metaphysical reflection if its claim to truth is to be valid. For talk of God is dependent on a concept of the world, which can be established only through metaphysical reflection. Christian theology must therefore wish for and welcome the fact that philosophy should begin, once again, to take its great metaphysical tradition seriously as a task for contemporary thought….a theological doctrine of God that lacks metaphysics as its discussion partner falls into either kerygmatic subjectivism or a thoroughgoing demythologization—and frequently into both at the same time! … A renewed concern with metaphysics is unlikely to take place unless one challenges the arguments upon which the thesis of ‘the end of metaphysics’ is based.²⁷⁵

Pannenberg’s point is reiterated in the critiques of several postmodern thinkers. Those who question postmodern philosophy and theology, especially that which introduces new ideas or new ways of thinking about God, argue that they do not completely overcome the metaphysics that has encompassed philosophy and theology over the centuries. Moreover, their attempts to ‘overcome’ metaphysics are often met by obstacles within a given culture and society (e.g., language) and within institutions (e.g., the Roman Catholic Magisterium). Their projects aim to offer a solid argument of philosophical systems that no longer necessitate the need of antiquated Aristotelean physics, rather incorporating a tradition that overcomes these language and institutional systems of thought.

2. Metaphysics & Authority in the Magisterium

Emile Poulat opens his essay, “Catholicism and Modernity: A Process of Mutual Exclusion,” by addressing the long-standing tension between the Catholic Church, the Magisterium, its people, and the concept and praxis of modernity. Poulat writes,

> It is generally accepted that the Catholic Church condemned and rejected modernity with an inflexible intransigence, at least up to Vatican II. Hence the historical model which Italian historians were the first to call ‘intransient Catholicism.’ This was opposed by those concerned for conciliation or moderation…they comprised a variety of different schools regrouped under the label ‘liberal Catholicism.’²⁷⁶

Largely a response to the historical events, the Church took this conservative approach in light of its changing political and authoritative roles in post-revolutionary Europe. In France especially, Poulat notes the division between the “ultras” and “liberals,” both of whom claimed their brand of Catholicism as authentic. These internal divisions between liberal and conservative would continue a back and forth until the French Concordat in 1801, which condemned the ideas of the ‘new order,’ thereby reasserting the role of the Magisterium as the definitive voice of the Church’s authority. The Revolution, however, kept the Church in its place: it was to remain the spiritual institution, no longer a political entity in countries who adopted laïcité. The Church in turn became a reactionary institution, opposing anything that challenged its particular ideology. In addition to the explicit response to those theologians and philosophers whose work challenged the traditional Church, the tension with modernity continued internally: “[the Church] became involved in a vast intellectual debate which tore it apart: the relationship between the reform of the old order and the affirmation of new principles, the ‘modern errors’ which Pius IX listed in his 1864 Syllabus.”

Labeling ‘modernity’ as the cause of internal disputes is a mistake, according to Poulat. Instead, acknowledging the global presence of Catholicism and the vast cultural differences influencing the Catholic Church places modernity as a byproduct of the every-changing community as a whole. The modern and anti-modern dispute, as noted above, has continued

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277 Ibid., 10–11
278 Ibid., 10.
279 “[There] is an ongoing situation in which the same patterns are reproduced in new circumstances. At all events, the debate is not Hamletian, ‘to be or not to be’ of one’s time. Each person is of his or her time, but there are many ways of being in a society which does not follow universal time but often its own clock,” in ibid., 13. Poulat goes on to offer an insightful reflection of the modern changes within the Church: “As a Catholic, one cannot celebrate the secularization and deplore its bulldozing effects, which lead to the alienation of the young from religion and the collapse of religious culture. The division among Catholics is the result of this situation, for which none of the three great currents has been able to find a remedy, a situation with which they could not have coped any better even had they achieved that union which has been so regularly desired. The hopes of Catholics, which were great and tenacious, have always been disappointed. Their failures, which have been numerous and severe, have always surprised them. Among them the roots of anti-modernity run deep and far even now, and not without strong reason, whose nature is to be in no way sufficient,” in ibid.
over the course of several centuries, leading to divisions among the faithful; furthermore, as noted here, the divisions are not simply left versus right.

Whereas Poulat’s essay aims to pave a path forward, one that moves beyond the anti-modern tendencies the Church has maintained and one that is focused on the individual’s conscience, the historical treatment of modernity—and therefore postmodernity—has been quite different. In short, the Church has continued to assert its place as an authoritative body, rejecting those institutions that offer a similar or supplementary faith tradition, and criticizing those theological ideas which aim to overcome or challenge the historical (metaphysical) theology. So that I might address the aforementioned obstacles, or theoretical hurdles within the Church, I offer a brief overview of the historical use of metaphysics by relying on three papal encyclicals: Pius X’s *Pascendi Dominini Gregis* (1907), John Paul II’s *Fides et Ratio* (1998), and Benedict XVI’s *Caritas in veritate* (2009). Additionally, because of his more recent theological and ecclesial contributions—for better or worse—two texts authored by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger’s *Principles of Catholic Theology* and *Dominus Iesus* (2000), demonstrate Poulat’s proposed conservative approach and the reliance on metaphysics as the ecclesiological language of the Church. Each document presents a vision of the Church, its theology, and the relation Christianity has to modernity, philosophy, theology, and metaphysics.

The commentary accompanying each document articulates a certain preference for metaphysics, while also affirming a model of church that is less communal and more authoritative. This last point is of particular concern, considering the socio-cultural trends outlined in the first chapter. The changes taking place in Europe, America, and other parts of the so-called ‘West’

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280 Ibid., 15-16.
281 These two texts were published prior to Ratzinger’s election as pontiff in 2005. *Dominus Iesus* was published during Ratzinger’s time as the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.
demonstrate the apprehension the majority of people have towards traditionalism and metanarratives. Moreover, as I alluded earlier, they also maintain a certain apprehension towards authoritative bodies, which rely on ideas that contradict science and technology, and often conflict with the increasingly cultural-driven globalized understanding of religion, spirituality, or philosophy. The lingering presence and influence of the documents outlined here contradicts the desire of many ‘post-moderns’ to move beyond the static metanarratives traditional Churches, like the Roman Catholic Church, impose on the masses to varying degrees. Acknowledging their content, however, provides an opportunity for the postmodern thinker to challenge the traditional status quo. Mindful of the historical and theological role these documents play, I suggest that the postmodern philosophy of Marion, Vattimo, and others opens the possibility of a theology that departs from the conservative, authoritative, and metaphysical one alluded to in this section.

Historically, the Church has chosen a more conservative approach, especially when pressed with modern and postmodern challenges brought before the tradition. *Pascendi Dominini Gregis* and *Fides et Ratio* serve as two examples that best demonstrate theology’s historical connection to philosophy along with the issues of faith and reason. Each encyclical emerged during a historical period in which the Church found itself facing various socio-political challenges. For example, *Pascendi Domini Gregis*, followed the abrupt suspension of the First Vatican Council, the events of the Franco-Prussian war, and the perceived threat modernity presented the headstrong Vatican. Likewise *Fides et ratio*, almost a century later, witnessed the aftermath of the Great Wars, the changes brought on by the Second Vatican Council, the rise and fall of the Soviet Empire, and a number of influential technological and scientific advancements. Each encyclical represents an epoch that was shaped by the historical events of the decades before. Additionally, each document has helped voice the Magisterium’s concerns regarding faith and reason during periods where
people are leaving the Church in favor of something else (e.g., nationalism, technology, government pressure, etc.). The documents reaffirm the role of the Church as a prominent teaching institution, holding fideism, rationalism, and new philosophical ideas at bay, preferring the traditionalism grounded in metaphysics. Each of these documents serves as an adequate representation of the Church’s steadfast reliance on Thomistic metaphysics as the basis for theological discourse and institutional authority. Grounding these documents in their historical context remains an important aspect of evaluating the texts as a whole. Additionally, recognizing the following documents—for example, the historical impact *Pascendi Domini Gregis*, would have on the later, *Fides et ratio*—is also important. The Church relies on its history to contextualize and affirm the present.

2.1 Pius X and Modernity: *Pascendi Domini Gregis, Lamentabili sane exitu,*

and *Sacrorum antistitum*

In *Pascendi Domini Gregis*, Pius X (1903-14) relies on philosophy to defend the faith against what he perceived as modern challenges to the Christian faith. In general, he rejects the notion of phenomena as a possible guiding principle in philosophical and theological thought. Instead, the encyclical emphasizes the importance of the historical accounts and theological tradition that has been present for centuries by reasserting the place of reason against the modernist ideas of agnosticism, atheism, and phenomena. Though largely a defense of traditionalism and

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282. “Modernists place the foundation of religious philosophy in that doctrine which is usually called *Agnosticism*. According to this teaching human reason is confined entirely within the field of *phenomena*, that is to say, to things that are perceptible to the senses, and in the manner in which they are perceptible; it has no right and no power to transgress these limits. Hence it is incapable of lifting itself up to God, and of recognising His existence, even by means of visible things. From this it is inferred that God can never be the direct object of science, and that, as regards history, He must not be considered as an historical subject. Given these premises, all will readily perceive what becomes of *Natural Theology*, of the *motives of credibility*, of *external revelation*. The Modernists simply make away with them altogether; they include them in *Intellectualism*, which they call a ridiculous and long ago defunct system. Nor does the fact that the Church has formally condemned these portentous errors exercise the slightest restraint upon them…But
historical theology, Pius X’s encyclical illustrates both the connection of philosophy and theology, as well as the metaphysical conventions of the twentieth century Church.

*Pascendi Domini Gregis* simultaneously rejects modern philosophy, fearful that it was damaging Christianity as a whole.283 Its affirmation of traditional modes of Christianity—that is, without the influence of modern ideas of phenomena, the influence of modern science and technology—led to suspicions of leading theologians and Church leaders (e.g., George Tyrell and John Henry Newman), many of whom were received back into the Church later or posthumously.284 Pius X’s concerns regarding modernism, highlighted in *Pascendi*, would lead to the 1907 *Lamentabili sane exitu* [Syllabus Condemning the Errors of the Modernists], which includes the condemnation of sixty-five ideas connected to modernism, and the Oath Against Modernism (*Sacrorum antistitum*), a document all priests, bishops, and theologians associated with seminaries were expected to sign.285 Thomas Rausch notes that both *Pascendi* and *Lamentabili* marked a “fifty-year period” of “suspicion and repression.”286 These suspicions required the signatures of many “seminary professors and...bishops” on the aforementioned *Sacrorum antistitum*. Pius X’s authoritative strike against modernity demonstrates the Magisterium’s fear of the emerging world and the teaching of non-Thomistic ideology or Neo-

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Scholasticism at seminaries and universities.\textsuperscript{287} The anti-modernist campaign of Pius X’s papacy was later challenged by Pius XII’s \textit{Mystici Corporis Christi} [1943], which would assert the role of Scripture over the magisterial powers of the papacy. The campaign was once again reaffirmed by John Paul II’s \textit{Ad tuendam fidel} [1998], which reasserted the Church’s role as an institution that stood against modern errors.\textsuperscript{288}

Placing Pius X’s anti-modernist campaign in its historical context illustrates the tension the Church had within an emerging, modern society. The document was released at the onset of the twentieth century, almost two decades after Nietzsche’s \textit{Die fröhliche Wissenschaft} (The Gay Science), its “God is dead” acclamation, and the contentious socio-political events that would lead to the First World War. This period of time also brought about advancements in technology and modern warfare. Certainly, Pius X showed concerns for the social and theological well-being of the Church; however, his documents also attempted to reassert the place of the Church as a political organization that stood against the democratic and liberal ideologies emerging at the time. Moreover, and of importance for this project, was the assertion of metaphysics as the guiding principle for Christian theology. Simply put, these were the primary socio-political and theological issues of the anti-modernist campaign. Whereas the modernists’ approach preferred, according to Owen Chadwick, the inclusion of the natural sciences and discovery in the education of the masses,

\textsuperscript{287} “The neoscholastic theology of the Roman schools, taught from Latin manuals, became the norm. Scripture and tradition were used ‘as an armory of authoritative statements to clarify and defend the teachings of the Church.’ Theology that did not conform to this model was suspect; scholars were not infrequently dismissed from their positions or had their books placed on the Index. In the Roman view, the role of theology was to analyze and clarify the divine truth taught by the magisterium,” in ibid.

\textsuperscript{288} McBrien, 121-2. On Pius XII, Rausch writes, “As late as 1950, Pope Pius XII wrote in his encyclical \textit{Humani generis} that the proper task of theologians was ‘to indicate for what reasons those things which are taught by the living magisterium are found in Holy Scripture and divine “tradition,” whether explicitly or implicitly (DS 3886). Thus the model for Catholic theology was a Roman theology based not on research or historical study of the received tradition, but on authority; it was largely deductive and speculative, expressed in the categories of scholastic philosophy,’’ in Rausch, 13.
the Church under Pius X aimed to ground itself in the pseudo-science of metaphysics, a tool even
“religious men” recognized the inadequacies of at the time: “they began to have a deeper sense of
that inadequacy; or, that truth was more difficult to find than their fathers supposed.” Pius X’s
Pascendi Domini Gregis and Sacrorum antistitum demonstrate a few of the post-Vatican I
documents that reiterated the Church’s belief that metaphysics is necessary for valid theological
discourse, a tradition that would undergird the decades of theological development in its aftermath.

2.2 Modernity, John XXIII, and the Council

Nearly a century after the abrupt ending of the First Vatican Council, Vatican II would
redirect the Church to an era that allowed the Enlightenment thinkers to reengage theological
discourse beyond the limitations of metaphysics and Church oversight. John XXIII’s call for the
Council, a shock to many in 1959, highlighted the pontiff’s desire to address the role of the Church
in the modern world. Aware of the challenges to humanity, most notably in his Humanae salutis
(1961), the pope maintained a sense of ambiguity as to what exactly modernity means, a drastic
shift from his predecessors who connected the term to anything that challenged the Church
politically, socially, and theologically. Though the ambiguity is certainly concerning, the pontiff
made it clear that there was to be no disagreement regarding where the Magisterium stood in
relation to its historical inheritance. Giovanni Turbanti explains, “In a speech which opened the
Council…John XXIII said that the church would have to remain faithful to the ‘heritage of truth
received from the fathers,’ but at the same time would have to ‘take account of the present, the

289 Chadwick, in The Oxford History of Christianity, 360.
290 Giovanni Turbanti observes the following as it relates to the ambiguity of modernity in Humanae salutis: “The
modernity which characterized this crucial point in history was an ambiguous category, because on the one hand it
represented the positive development of human potential, but on the other hand it ended up coinciding [sic] with the
contradictions of which the society of the time was a victim. At any rate it was part of human history, and was a
specific characteristic of a moment in its development,” in Giovanni Turbanti, "The Attitude of the Church to the
Modern World at and after Vatican II," in Concilium: The Debate on Modernity, ed. Claude Jefferé and Jean-Pierre
new conditions and forms of life introduced into the modern world’ which had opened up new ways for the apostolate.” This approach differentiates from the preparatory documents Cardinal Ottaviani’s commission put together, one that was adamantly anti-modernist, following the concerns John XXIII’s predecessors addressed and that many at the Council wished to reexamine. Cardinal Ottaviani’s preparatory documents (and those of other preparatory commissions) underscore the desire of many within the ecclesial leadership to reassert the role of the Church against modernist claims. However, as Turbanti and others have noted, the desire to have the Church engage the modern world was the primary concern of John XXIII’s initial call. Historically, however, the Church has demonstrated a tendency to—at minimum—question those who converse with modern and postmodern ideas relating to theology, human sexuality, and ethics. For example, several nouvelthéologie scholars engaged the historical and biblical tradition of the Church, moving beyond the confines of strict magisterial oversight. Several of these priests and theologians were removed from their posts at the behest of pre-Vatican II pontiffs.

Recently, under the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, theologians like Edward Schillebeeckx, Hans Küng, Leonardo Boff, Charles Curran, and Matthew Fox have either been censured or considered suspect by the Magisterium. Their theological projects, in short, challenge the Church’s teachings on sexuality, ministry, and Church authority. While these theologians have questioned the Church’s teachings on a variety of issues, John Paul II’s Fides et Ratio reengages the modern concerns regarding the topics of rationalism and fideism in the life of the Church. For the late pontiff, rationalism and fideism are not to be trusted.

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291 Ibid.
292 Ibid., 88.
293 Rausch, 18.
2.3 John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, and Metaphysics

In his essay, “Faith and Reason: From Vatican I to John Paul II,” Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J. outlines the historical concerns the Magisterium has long had against modernity, its propensity to explore non-metaphysical ideas, and its turn from theological dogmatism against scientific discovery.\(^{294}\) Simultaneously, Dulles suggests that John Paul II takes a completely different tone from his nineteenth and twentieth century predecessors, departing from the post-Vatican I predisposition to authority and magisterial oversight. Likewise, Dulles contends the pontiff refrains from endorsing one model of philosophy (i.e., Thomas Aquinas’ metaphysics) over another.\(^{295}\) Rather, *Fides et ratio*, and its central topic of faith and reason notes the long historical tradition of the two modes of thought, dating back to Sts. Anselm and Thomas Aquinas. More importantly, argues Dulles, the Church’s authority on the matter was argued by the First Vatican Council (1870) in its “Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith,” thereby establishing the role of philosophy in theological and Church teaching.\(^{296}\) Important in this historical portrayal is the understanding of what *source*, or foundation, the Church would rely upon in its discernment of appropriate faith and reason claims. This same source would equip it to respond to modern ‘threats’ found in science, technology, and elsewhere. It can be argued, in other words, that the Church necessitates a foundation from which to operate. Hence, and in response to this claim, Dulles offers the following analysis as it relates to the accepted philosophy of the Church: “Without actually mentioning Thomas Aquinas, Vatican I endorsed his position. A decade later, in 1879, Pope Leo


\(^{295}\) Ibid., 197, 98, 201, and 04-6

XIII published his encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, proposing St. Thomas as the thinker whose synthesis of faith and reason should be accepted as a solid foundation from which to grapple with more recent questions in philosophy and science. Therefore, without officially acknowledging Aquinas’ philosophy as the theological system in the Church, the tradition has identified it as the referred-to corpus when examining theological questions in modernity.

According to John Paul II, Medieval Aristotelians, including and especially St. Thomas Aquinas, separated the fields of philosophy and science from Revelation, thereby limiting the possibilities of theology in modernity. *Fides et Ratio* aimed to reestablish the unity between faith and reason, against the “systems which espoused the cause of rational knowledge sundered from faith and meant to take the place of faith.” John Paul II’s general concern with this historical separation was the dissolution of faith and reason expressed in the work of modern philosophers and theologians: “Deprived of what Revelation offers, reason has taken sidetracks which expose it to the danger of losing sight of its final goal. Deprived of reason, faith has stressed feeling and experience, and so runs the risk of no longer being a universal proposition.” *Fides et ratio* presents both the desire and necessity for philosophical reason to be in conversation with theological faith claims. Any other separation is thereby limiting the tradition of Christianity and the deposit of faith available to believers (at least according to the late pontiff.) So that the two may remain connected, the document and tradition presupposes a theology based on Aquinas’ philosophy.

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299 Ibid.
Later in his essay, Dulles expands on the centrality of Thomas Aquinas’ thought as the guiding philosophy of Catholic theology:

 Neither Vatican I nor Pius XII had words of praise for modern philosophies outside of the Thomistic, or at least the Scholastic, tradition. Leo XIII, in his encyclical on the study of philosophy, said that the “golden wisdom” of St. Thomas should be used for the defense of the faith, the advance of the sciences, and the refutation of prevalent errors. Pius XII, after calling for the instruction of future priests according to the method, doctrine, and principles of Thomas Aquinas, deplored the current tendency to denigrate the philosophy so long received in the Church as if the erroneous principles of immanentism, idealism, materialism, and existentialism could offset the limitations of classical metaphysics (DS 3878, 3894).301

Acceptance of Aquinas as the preeminent source of philosophical and theological reasoning for Catholic theology resulted in frustration among the Enlightenment philosophers, many of whom encouraged the separation of metaphysics, philosophy, and theology. Nevertheless, Aquinas’s influence would continue through the first half of the twentieth century, where “the popes issued a number of further condemnations and admonitions” towards those who challenged this established doctrine.302 As examples of this assertion, Pius XI condemned “Marxist Communism” for “its materialist determinism” and, again, Pius XII likewise criticized “nouvelle théologie” because of its “tendency toward historicism and dogmatic relativism.”303 Put bluntly, the Church’s leaders had various concerns with modern philosophies that challenged theology and the role of the Church in the world.

Moreover, Dulles’ reading of Pope John Paul II’s Fides et ratio suggests that the pontiff could have redirected the Church to a non-Thomistic approach to theology, but chose instead to reaffirm both the Constitution on Catholic Faith and Thomistic theology. The pope’s appreciation

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302 Ibid., 194.
of Vatican I, and its central focus on metaphysics, is evident throughout *Fides et Ratio*. The challenges John Paul II observes in modernity are highlighted in the divide between philosophy and theology, a byproduct of modernity, academia, and the separation of Revelation from other aspects of life. In John Paul II’s estimation, faith and reason are inseparable. Establishing the primacy of faith, as he does throughout *Fides et ratio*, the pontiff places Thomistic metaphysics at the forefront of reason. Reestablishing the authority of the Magisterium, the Pope therefore challenges other bodies that aim to undermine the traditionalism of the Church and its teachings. To reiterate this point, the pontiff consistently reaffirms theological metaphysics via the coupling of faith and reason as the source used to “establish the existence of God.”

Relying on reason, at least according to this understanding of metaphysical theology, permits an understanding of the divine. By reaffirming the role of faith and reason, the late pope dismisses rationalism as a source of knowing God:

> Also in the footsteps of Vatican I, John Paul II opposes both a rationalism that dismisses the input of faith and a fideism that distrusts the guidance of reason (§§52, 53). He repeats the teaching of Vatican I that faith and reason “mutually support each other” (§100).

Following the theological assertions, Dulles outlines the historical interpretation of *Fides et ratio*. In this case, he notes, John Paul II’s acknowledgement and acceptance of the philosophical tenets of the First Vatican Council while also dismissing the rationalism of German philosophers who argued faith was ultimately a resource that was both “unreliable and unnecessary for educated

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304 “[John Paul II] takes over from Vatican I the familiar ideas that reason has the power to establish the existence of God and the preambles of Christian faith (§§53, 67), that faith confirms truths that reason cannot grasp except with great difficulty (§43), that faith also embraces mysteries that lie entirely beyond the range of unaided reason (§§8, 9), and that reason can render even these revealed mysteries to some degree intelligible (§83). In line with Vatican I, the pope teaches that the Magisterium has the right and duty to condemn philosophical tenets that are opposed to truths of faith (§55, fn. 72), and that there can be no conflict between faith and reason, since both are gifts of the same God, who could never contradict himself (§§8, 53),” in Dulles, in *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides Et Ratio*, 195.

305 John Paul II, §48. See also, Dulles, in *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides Et Ratio*, 201.


307 Ibid.
people.” Likewise, the French application of fideism, with the perceived inadequacies of metaphysics as a worthy descriptor of the divine and the personal is considered suspect throughout the encyclical. The pontiff departs from the rigidness of Vatican I, however, by adopting a favorable approach to subjectivity, most notably adapting the Jewish philosophers Martin Buber’s and Emmanuel Lévinas’ thoughts regarding subjectivity, rejecting the Scholasticism explicit during and in the aftermath of the First Vatican Council, and refocusing the Church in a way that emulates a physician more than a magistrate. Dulles’ applauds John Paul II and the encyclical’s openness to history, culture, and diversity via ancient and modern philosophies (e.g., Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Greco-Roman, Indian, and Japanese). Nevertheless, the role of Revelation is asserted as primary and supported by the traditionalism that emerged from the Greek and Latin Fathers, Aquinas, Suarez, Bonaventure, etc.

Again, the philosophical dispute with metaphysics emerges as modern and post-modern philosophers question the legitimacy of the ‘science’ in all aspects of thought. Similar to his predecessors, including Pius X and Leo XIII, John Paul II is critical of various aspects of society threatening the faith of Catholics, including the results of materialism, rising inequality within capital markets, and the rise of individual subjectivity. Despite these changes, and the possibility of acknowledging the role each played in shaping society and the Church, metaphysics has remained a theological constant. By offering an historical context of Fides et ratio, and specifically, a history that relates to the systems of theology and governance within the Church,

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308 Ibid., 195-6.
309 Ibid., 198.
310 Ibid., 198-9.
311 Ibid., 196-8. Dulles’ observation here is certainly open to critique especially given the pontiff’s dismissal of Liberation Theology as a suspected form of Marxism, the diminished role of women in the Church as leaders in dioceses and parishes, etc.
312 Ibid., 199-200.
Dulles demonstrates the modern and post-modern suspicion of metaphysics: “The prevailing mood was one of metaphysical agnosticism.” Similar to Lyotard’s understanding of meta-narratives, the Enlightenment era philosophers and their successors found the use of metaphysics limited in its ability to reach beyond the limited horizon this philosophical system offered, something Vattimo and Nietzsche address accordingly. In Dulles’s summation, “Philosophy, for its part, has practically abandoned the pursuit of transcendent or metaphysical truth. It has narrowed its horizons to the spheres of shifting phenomena, linguistic study, the interpretation of texts, and pragmatic strategies for coping with radical pluralism.” John Paul II concludes, that philosophers “‘recover…valid philosophical tradition, the range of authentic wisdom and truth—metaphysical truth included—which is proper to philosophical inquiry’ (§106).”

Despite the fact John Paul II demonstrated a willingness to listen to the aforementioned philosophies and the thoughts of non-Thomists and his high regard for the phenomenological work of Max Scheler, Edmund Husserl, and Edith Stein, the pope remained steadfast in his admiration and approval of Thomistic metaphysics. However, with respect to those he does name, Dulles notes the absence of others (e.g., Rosmini) and the continued condemnation of past systems deemed suspect by the Church (e.g., “fideism, traditionalism, rationalism, and ontologism (§52)”). Metaphysics remains the more prominent theory and is further reverberated in his articulation of the role of the Magisterium: “The primary purpose of magisterial interventions, he states, is to ‘prompt, promote, and encourage philosophical inquiry’ (§53).” One may argue, therefore, the late pontiff may object to a postmodern ecclesiology offered by Mannion, Richard

313 Ibid., 196.
314 Ibid.
315 Ibid., 207.
317 Dulles, in The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides Et Ratio, 205.
318 Ibid., 206.
Gaillardetz, Bradford Hinze, or Vattimo and any such philosophical work that breaks from traditional metaphysics as a central component to Roman Catholic theology.

Offering an analysis from a philosopher’s point of view, Timothy Sean Quinn approaches the document in light of the Enlightenment’s philosophical tradition and the challenges this period’s philosophers offered. Quinn’s “Infides Et Unratio” addresses John Paul II’s encyclical by first assessing theological developments during the Enlightenment. He argues that the reliance on metaphysics, developed within the foundational work of Aristotle and Aquinas, is theologically problematic. Related to this claim, Quinn argues that philosophers during the Enlightenment disagreed with the connection theology had with philosophy. Quinn likens this disagreement to an epistemological division between Athens and Jerusalem, calling it the “most conspicuous arena of combat.” Of specific concern was “the Aristotelian doctrine of final causality, or teleology: the doctrine that things came to be or occur for the sake of an end or good.” Aquinas and others relied on this principle to prove the existence of (the Christian) God.

Quinn highlights several Enlightenment era philosophers, such as Francis Bacon, who disagree with the Aristotelian approach of merging theology and metaphysics. Bacon in particular suggested that such a blend is unfounded and cannot answer questions related to the supernatural. According to Quinn, Bacon understood metaphysics as, “in effect…code for theology. Liberation from any supernatural order would henceforth require a tandem liberation from a teleological natural order.” Replacing metaphysics in philosophy, on the other hand, requires the application

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320 Ibid., 181.
321 Ibid.
322 Ibid., 182. In his argument regarding the shape of theology in postmodernity or the post-metaphysics era, Jean-Yves Lacoste echoes Quinn’s presentation of Francis Bacon. Lacoste is attempting to codify theology and philosophy in the post-Enlightenment period, in which metaphysics is questioned and the
of modern natural sciences, a subject Quinn and Chadwick agree upon. Postmodern philosophers—for example, Husserl, Heidegger, Jean-Yves Lacoste, and Vattimo—in general agree with Bacon, Hobbes, and Locke that modern applications of science and scientific discovery can assist the philosophical process addressed here. Such an approach would lead Hobbes and Locke to apply this type of thought to their political treatises, specifically as they relate to “modern understandings of natural right and individualism.”\(^\text{323}\) The point here is to highlight the Enlightenment’s suspicion of philosophy, theology, and metaphysics as a meta-tool for philosophical and theological epistemology. Postmodern philosophy has led to a post-metaphysics that has begun to reshape the theological and philosophical landscape. Overcoming the use of metaphysics in theology has been, and remains, however, a struggle of sorts, highlighted in various encyclical, including *Fides et ratio*.

Though Quinn underlines the Enlightenment’s suspicion of metaphysics as a philosophical tool, he also addresses the perceived ‘ills of society,’ according to John Paul II, particularly that which affects the traditionalism the Church espouses. These issues conflict with the post-metaphysical and postmodern theories many of the aforementioned thinkers discuss. Quinn offers a lengthy assessment of six concerns John Paul II lists in the encyclical, while mindful of the importance metaphysics has had in Church history. The pontiff understands these six concerns—idealism, atheistic humanism, scientific positivism, pragmatism, eclecticism, and nihilism—as

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323 Quinn, in *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides Et Ratio*, 183. I would suggest that Vattimo has argued similarly in several of his text, especially in relation to human sexuality, justice versus injustice, and European law.
detrimental aspects of the modern world.324 Likewise, humanity’s advancements in technology and scientific discovery, both aspects of modernism, are questioned and understood as threats to the traditionalism Magisterium prefers. Exploring Quinn’s analysis of the six concerns offers us the opportunity to observe the preferences John Paul II and the Church have towards metaphysics, faith, and reason, over and against any modern and post-modern philosophical explorations of the faith.

Focusing on these six issues illustrates the centrality of metaphysics in theological thought as the basis for “fact” within the church.325 First, referring specifically to “scientific positivism,” the document suggests that these modern changes have led to the exclusion of “aesthetic, moral, and especially metaphysical issues…from the charmed circle of rationality.”326 The document’s subsequent focus on “pragmatism,” addresses the pontiff’s fear of liberalism within modernity, a concern that reduces “human beings to the level of machines, and human desires to strictly utilitarian or commercial ends.”327 Third, eclecticism, noting its tendency to confuse philosophical “method” by placing philosophical concepts out of context and merging them when inappropriate,

324 “Fides et ratio” diagnoses a sextet of malaises that by and large emerge in the nineteenth century, in consequence of the Enlightenment: idealism, atheistic humanism, scientific positivism, pragmatism, eclecticism and, finally, nihilism. The first case, idealism represents an attempt to “transform faith and its contents…into dialectical structures which could be grasped by reason” ([Fides et ratio]$^3$46). In this instance the pope most likely has in mind Hegel, for whom the phenomena of the Incarnation and Redemption represent Reason’s sovereign attempt to comprehend and heal the breach between its ‘otherworldly’ tendency toward self-conscious reflection, and its bondage to the particular and to natural necessities. Christianity comes less to be rejected out of hand than to be absorbed as a moment or stage of reason’s own self-disclosure—a view that, at best, places Christianity beyond any confessional differences, and at worst makes nugatory the very notion of faith. The evil twin of idealism, atheistic humanism, turns on the judgment that faith is simply alienating and therewith damaging to reason. This judgment, the pope observes, did not prevent various humanisms from appropriating the mantle of religion for themselves, presenting themselves as humane alternatives to Christianity and calling for a new sort of devotion to the project of human emancipation. The resulting parade of ‘disastrous totalitarianism projects of our own century’—Stalinism comes to mind—has its roots in these emancipatory humanitarian projects,” in ibid., 184-5.
325 Ibid., 185. See also John Paul II, §§46, 88, and 89.
326 Quinn, in The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides Et Ratio, 185.
327 Ibid., 185-6.
is disputed and dismissed.²²⁸ Fourth, historicism “effectively denies ‘the enduring validity of truth’ (§87). In theological reflection, according to the pope, historicism generally appears in the guise of ‘modernism,’ or in the unqualified preference for contemporary over traditional concepts and distinctions.”²²⁹ More importantly, Quinn’s reading of the encyclical identifies historicism with the fifth topic, nihilism, or “‘the denial of all foundations and the negation of all objective truth.’”³³⁰

Nihilism’s place as a postmodern concept is “inseparable from the goals of idealism, atheistic humanism, and scientific and political positivisms.”³³¹ The critique Quinn and John Paul II posit challenges a topic found throughout postmodern philosophy, including, for example, Vattimo’s texts.³³² John Paul II’s assumption that nihilism is nothing more than “philosophical attempts to liberate humanity from any overarching natural or supernatural orders that might fetter humanity’s control over its own destiny,” essentially limits the concept as it relates to theology and philosophy.³³³ Nihilism’s association with postmodernity or postmodernism becomes a concern in Fides et ratio, though the pontiff finds it difficult to identify postmodernism as anything beyond “‘a horizon of total absence of meaning,’ wherein ‘everything is provisional and ephemerical.’”³³⁴ The result was the pontiff’s observance that many individuals have turned to

²²⁸ Ibid., 186 and John Paul II, §86.
²²⁹ Quinn, in The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides Et Ratio, 186.
³³⁰ Ibid.nd John Paul II, §90.
³³¹ Quinn, in The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides Et Ratio, 186-7.
³³² For example, Gianni Vattimo, “Nihilism as Emancipation,” Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy 1, no. 5 (2009) and Vattimo, The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture. Vattimo, however does not accept John Paul II’s analysis of nihilism in Fides et ratio; rather, understands nihilism to be synonymous with hermeneutics, especially as it relates to the postmodern understanding of religion. For instance, Vattimo writes, “Hermeneutics is the thinking of accomplished nihilism, the thinking that aims at a reconstruction of rationality after the death of God, in opposition to any drift towards negative nihilism, that is, towards the desperation of those who continue to grieve because ‘there is no more religion,’” in Vattimo, “Nihilism as Emancipation,” 21.
³³³ Quinn, in The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides Et Ratio, 187.
³³⁴ Ibid. Originally, John Paul II, §91.
personal beliefs relating to the divine, God, spirituality, etc., without regard to any (metaphysical) foundation:

The regnant modern philosophical movements, having abandoned any provocation by faith, find no compelling reason to pursue metaphysical inquiries, especially when such inquiries jeopardize the apotheosis of the human latent in modern emancipatory projects. No faith, in short, no metaphysics; and with no metaphysics, faith comes to seek refuge in private experience.\textsuperscript{335}

The concerns John Paul II lists in \textit{Fides et ratio} relate directly to the metaphysical foundation upon which the Church and its theology is centered. In the pope’s estimation, the modern spiritual approaches to the divine are feeble, as they lack any connection to reason, and in this case, question metaphysics. Reemphasizing the Church’s reliance on philosophical reason is the basis for the remainder of the encyclical. A focus on the traditional approaches of philosophical theology is emphasized via metaphysics in the subsequent sections and paragraphs. This would also explain the Church’s suspicion of non-metaphysically based systems, including, I contend, phenomenology.

Though John Paul’s encyclical approaches the separation of faith from reason or theology from philosophy with great concern, especially in relation to its place as the guiding construct for belief in God, Quinn demonstrates this was never the concern for modern philosophers (e.g., Kant and Hegel). Rather, the concern was in relation to the issue of authority: “From its inception, the ‘modern’ philosophy understood itself less as a quest for wisdom than as a project of emancipation from any authority, natural or supernatural, to which human reason had allowed itself to become subject.”\textsuperscript{336} Quoting Kant’s \textit{Beantwortung der Frage}, Quinn insists that the authority for the modernists was the Church and the central role it played in the modern era was undeniable during

\textsuperscript{335} Quinn, in \textit{The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides Et Ratio}, 188.

\textsuperscript{336} Ibid., 178-9. This too validates John Paul II’s concerns noted above (ibid., 187.).
the Enlightenment.337 Noting the critique Descartes, Bacon, Hobbes, Locke and several others have of St. Thomas’s Aristotelianism, as well as the apprehension and later criticism of the Church, Quinn identifies the philosophical approach these modern scholars used.338 Simply put, they objected to the use of Aristotelianism and Averroism in philosophical discourse, particularly since the line between philosophy and theology had been blurred. Essentially, philosophy was blinded by the theological infusion these two systems brought with it.339

If Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophy (metaphysics) is understood as the underlying system of thought in Christian theology, and if one accepts the claim alluded to in Chapter One that metaphysics leads to knowledge and therefore authority, then Quinn’s historical reading of modern philosophy stands correct. Descartes and his contemporaries challenged the Church as the system of authority, a system that was grounded in metaphysics. The concern for Enlightenment philosophers was the ability of philosophy to extend beyond the scope of religion, theology, and religious authority under the guise of the institutional Church. Descartes’ preference for the inclusion of the natural sciences as part of the philosophical discussion clearly was suspect not only during his time, but evident in the stringent application of philosophy or reason in Fides et ratio and the Magisterial practices of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Though Quinn sides with Fides et ratio and the document’s propensity to establish a proper sense of reason and philosophy in modern theology discourse—understanding reason as necessary for theology—he

337 Ibid., 179.
338 Ibid., 179-81.
339 “By thus attacking theology’s rational core, theology would perforce collapse: reason would win its divorce from faith. But that meant that the modern philosophy could not simply return to a pre-Christian or ‘ancient’ mode of reason, neutral to faith, which was indeed an option for it. That Aristotle was no proto-Christian was perfectly evident from the polemic surrounding the rise of Averroism—and hence Aristotelianism—in the West during the thirteenth century. On the other hand, Aristotle could still stand accused by the founders of Enlightenment of having achieved a philosophical system that could not militate against takeover by revealed religion. If revelation and theology were to go, or at least be contained, Aristotle would have to go first,” in ibid., 181.
also acknowledges the historical implications of the Enlightenment; the ‘civil war’ between ‘Athens’ and ‘Jerusalem’ was reignited in the encyclical. He concludes, “Whatever else we may learn from this document, we should be grateful for its ability to awaken a question slumbering within the Western tradition. By inviting us to consider that modern science has not inevitably replaced God and that history has not replaced rational reflection, *Fides et ratio* performs as a great service for theology as it does for philosophy.” Quinn’s analysis holds in high regard the pontiff’s critique of modernism, while also offering the historical developments in philosophy, many of which chided away from the Church’s role as the definitive teaching body. John Paul II’s successor, Benedict XVI, would reiterate much of the anti-modernist sentiment outlined above, often relying on language that was even less favorable than what is found in *Fides et ratio*.

### 2.4 Benedict XVI: Historical Theology and Metaphysics

Reflecting on *Caritas in veritate*, Benedict XVI’s 2009 social encyclical and the first socially-centered document since John Paul II’s 1991, *Centesimus annus*, Drew Christiansen addresses the document’s aim of providing new language for an economy that should be centered on “‘gratuity and communion,’” while also offering Benedict’s “pre-occupation with Truth as the antidote to the ills of secular relativism.” The pontiff’s reliance on metaphysics, not only in *Caritas in veritate* but throughout his theological corpus, can also be seen as a shift from John Paul II’s philosophical approach outlined throughout his pontificate. It also was a shift from the John Paul II’s philosophy is deeply rooted in metaphysics and, as noted above, question the philosophical subjectivity addressed by some postmodern thinkers.

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340 Ibid., 192.
342 Ruszala, 138. I am mindful of the fact that John Paul II’s philosophy is deeply rooted in metaphysics and, as noted above, question the philosophical subjectivity addressed by some postmodern thinkers.
Paul II’s focus on the moral life—highlighted especially in *Veritatis splendor*—and the model Vatican II established, which aimed instead to ‘read the signs of the times,’ (*Gaudium et spes*, §4).

As Christiansen points out, Benedict understands the disillusionment many have towards metaphysics as a dialogic and methodological system.  

Nevertheless, he believes metaphysics should be the theological and philosophical system used to buttress discourse relating to modern socio-economic and socio-political systems: “metaphysics is found along with faith, theology and science among the underpinnings of Catholic social teaching.” Any rejection of this system, especially by the social sciences, “and the tensions between science and theology ‘are damaging not only to the development of knowledge, but also to the development of peoples, because these things make it harder to see the integral good of man in its various dimensions.’” The overarching presence of metaphysics throughout the document reasserts Benedict’s belief that metaphysics provides both a systematic language for theology when speaking about modern issues as well as a system that is able to critique the secular.

Favoring metaphysics as the system of thought in the encyclical further solidifies the foundation of the philosophy as the preferred method of discourse within the magisterium. Christiansen notes the pope’s reaffirmation of the tradition:

In support of its foundational turn to metaphysics, *Caritas in veritate* also explicitly rejects the notion that there are shifts in the trajectory of the Catholic social tradition, warning commentators and historical theologians to avoid noting the reemergence of a modified classicist approach to Catholic social teaching and drift from the magisterium away from using a historically conscious method. The encyclical rejects analyzing the tradition of social teaching into phases with distinctive emphases and methods.

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343 Christiansen, 8. See also, Benedict XVI, , §§55, 51, and 30-1.  
344 Benedict XVI, , §31.  
345 Christiansen, 8; Benedict XVI, §31; and Ruszala, 135.  
346 Christiansen, 8 and Ruszala, 140.  
347 Christiansen, 9. Emphasis added.
In short, there is to be no other interpretative way of delineating the Church’s message as it relates to social teaching outside of metaphysics. Establishing the historical place of metaphysics and the tradition of Catholic social teaching permits documents like *Rerum novarum* (1891), *Populorum progressio* (1967), *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987), and *Caritas in veritate* (2009) to be read as a collective corpus indivisible from one another and grounded in one magisterial body that relies on the aforementioned philosophy; to quote Benedict, “there is a single teaching, consistent and at the same time ever new.” Separating Catholic systematic theology, social doctrine, or other magisterial teachings from metaphysics, according to Ratzinger, would be in error. Then, the principles of metaphysics dictate theological discourse for the pontiff and the Church as a whole.

Turning to his role as prefect of the CDF, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, and his subsequent papacy, as Benedict XVI (2005-13), upheld the centrality of metaphysics for the Roman Catholic Church. Its place as the guiding principle of theological and ecclesiological thought can be observed in two ways: first, by way of theological discourse, especially relating to salvation history and the Resurrection, and second, by way of the now pope emeritus’ preference for metaphysical theology and an ecclesiology based on the philosophy as seen through his role as director of the CDF. Additionally, his role as leader of the Catholic Church reaffirms a stringent metaphysics characterized by a strict authoritative pontificate. Theologically, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger reaffirms the indivisibility of metaphysics from the Christian corpus, especially as it relates to

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348 Michael J. Ruszala agrees with this assessment, stating, “A key contribution of *Caritas in Veritate* is its grounding in Augustinian metaphysic as a source for social doctrine leading to social virtue in action. Our postmodern society has within it a longing for unity in its celebration of diversity. Yet it often pursues that unity via the love of the city of man, a love that can only end in disunity and the victory of special interests over the common good…Augustinian metaphysics emphasizes that metaphysics is not merely an abstract discipline but a walk with Truth himself, the Teacher who shows man God and shows man to himself,” in Ruszala, 145.

349 Benedict XVI, , §12. Emphasis original.
salvation history. In his estimation, the issue of salvation history is much like the ecclesiological and theological crises of the Thirteenth Century, insofar as there is a divide among Christians as to the significance and theology surrounding the role of the institutional church.

Ratzinger’s Principles of Catholic Theology begins by analyzing “salvation history,” noting the tension between “οἰκονομία and θεόλογία, or dispositio and natura,” a theme dating back to the “Church Fathers’ reflections on Christian reality.” The topic of salvation history, captured in the Latin expression “historia salutis,” has long since been debated among modern Protestant and Catholic scholars. Ratzinger’s text—portions of which are dedicated to the refutation of prominent Protestant theologians—rejects an understanding of metaphysics as it relates to Christian history, a central theme the Protestant scholar Oscar Cullman introduces in Christ and Time. Ratzinger explains Cullmann’s error in believing Catholicism to be the bastard of both Hellenistic metaphysics and Christian revelation, and thus a product that few accept and understand. Additionally, Ratzinger refutes Cullmann, Karl Barth, and Emil Brunner, who understood Catholicism to be an ahistorical and purely metaphysical interpretation of theology. Ratzinger instead presents Catholic theology, via metaphysics, as an affirmation of the link “between history and faith” or “the link between faith and the factum historicum of the saving act of God in Jesus Christ and in the whole history of God’s covenant with man.” He continues, noting the work of Gottlieb Söhngen (1934) who established salvation-history as a meta-event, the occasion which goes beyond the norm of human history and can only be demonstrated via

351 Ibid., 172.
354 Ratzinger, 173.
Certainly, one can accept the pope’s historical place of Christianity as a global faith and a socio-cultural phenomenon grounded in human history. Moreover, the reliance on metaphysics as the guiding philosophy can certainly be recognized as a necessity for Ratzinger, as he attempts to meld myth, event, mystery, and history together.

Ratzinger continues, offering an explanation for the inseparable link between salvation, scripture, and history, all of which are components of Christianity:

Salvation-historical theology [here]...is to be defined as a theology that knows itself bound to Scripture as to the witness of the historical acts of God that are man’s salvation. In other words, two concepts are combined here that will later be separated: the link to Scripture is essentially also a link to the events it records and to the historical character of these actions, which are the bearers of salvation and, consequently, truly, “salvation-history.”

Metaphysics remains central to Ratzinger’s argument against the presentation Barth, Brunner, and Cullmann offer in response to Catholicism. The pope defines the role of metaphysics in conjunction with the salvific history presented above. The two philosophical models (metaphysics and the historical approach) are complementary of one another, insofar as they provide the bases for historical summarization or “reactualization.”

By reaffirming the role of metaphysics as a theological language, in conjunction with the salvation-historical assertion articulated above, Ratzinger understands twentieth century Catholicism to be deeply grounded in both the historical and metaphysical models; the two appear inseparable. At the heart of Ratzinger’s historical-salvation and metaphysical diatribe is St. Thomas Aquinas, who sits as the central philosopher between metaphysics and theological

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355 Following salvation-historical thought, Söhngen states emphatically that the truth of Christianity is not the truth of a universally accepted idea but the truth of a unique fact. The sharp distinction from myth that is expressed in the following statement is thus made possible: “The logos of myth is beyond human history, and the mythical event is meta-history in a more than human domain. The mystery of Christianity, however, raises a claim that must be historically substantiated,” in ibid., 174.
356 Ibid.
357 Ibid., 174-5, at 75.
358 Ibid., 178.
mystery. Similar to Dulles’s argument above, Aquinas is regarded—along with Plato, Augustine, and Bonaventure—as central to the historical understanding of Christian theology, especially theology that emphasizes Christ’s salvation.\footnote{Ratzinger’s point here is to dispute the idea that Catholicism is primarily centered on interpreted metaphysics and not the historical events drawn from Scripture and taken as historical fact. Challenging Cullmann and others, Ratzinger establishes the dualism found in Catholicism, a dualism that incorporates both metaphysics and history.}

Second, the relationship between metaphysics and history is likewise demonstrated in the theological understanding of Resurrection. The importance of this theological concept is foundational for Christian theology:

It is clear that all Christian theology, if it is to be true to its origin, must be first and foremost a theology of Resurrection. It must be a theology of Resurrection before it is a theology of justification of the sinner; it must be a theology of Resurrection before it is a theology of the metaphysical Sonship of God.\footnote{In other words, because the Resurrection “is an eschatological action of God,” it remains outside of metaphysics.\footnote{The Resurrection event cannot be categorized in the same manner salvation-history can be or, as Ratzinger later notes, described similar to the concept of the living God.\footnote{His claims indicate a clear reliance on metaphysics, especially when the Church aims to present the idea of the ‘living God’ as well as the incarnate historical Jesus of Nazareth. The use of metaphysics is required in order to properly establish the Christian God historically and in the Christian redemptive form.}}}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Ibid., 178-80.}
\footnote{Ibid., 184. Though the final statement in this passage is concerning, I understand it to mean that all other theological concepts are secondary to the importance of the Resurrection as an \textit{actio Dei}, an act of God (ibid., 185.). Also, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, \textit{Introduction to Christianity} [Einführung ein Christentum], trans. J.R. Foster (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1969), 301-10, at 07.}
\footnote{Ratzinger, \textit{Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology}, 186.}
\footnote{Ibid., 190, cf. fn. 72.}
\end{footnotes}
Ratzinger’s Christology, at least as he articulates it in *Principles of Catholic Theology*, concerns humanity in both the past and present:

In Scholastic as well as in patristic theology, Christology has two basic points: one in the past, which finds its expression in the doctrine of original sin; the other in the future, which has its critical constant in the biblical concept of Christ as the “last man,” that is, as the revelation and the beginning of the definitive mode of human existence.\(^{363}\)

Important here, however, is the pontiff’s dismissal of Cullmann’s accusation that the Church only operates via metaphysics. On the contrary, Ratzinger is establishing a salvation-history, a Resurrection theology, and a Christology that relies on both the historical analysis as well as metaphysics.\(^{364}\) The connection between these three aspects of theology, which can only be identified as metaphysically grounded, culminates in the Resurrection. Christ as human in the moment of the Resurrection, “goes out from himself and through which alone he can find himself,” thereby causing a “theology of *ex-sistere,*” in which “faith and love are ultimately united.”\(^{365}\)

Important for this is Ratzinger’s acclamation, “the deepest significance of each is that *Exi,* that call to transcend and sacrifice the *I* that is basic law of the history of God’s covenant with man and, ipso facto, the truly basic law of all human existence.”\(^{366}\) The union between God, Christ, and man is articulated by way of this *ex-sistere* connection and seems only explainable through the pseudo-science of metaphysics. In this theological approach, Ratzinger establishes a dialogical system that operates by way of metaphysics. He establishes a theology in which God’s existence is foreign

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363 Ibid., 187.
364 Ratzinger dismisses Cullmann’s critique of the metaphysics-only view he and other Protestant scholars offer in their analysis of Roman Catholic theology. More specifically, Ratzinger questions Cullmann’s “mid-time and end-time” historical view of salvation history, once again reaffirming, via Jean Daniélou, the importance of a (metaphysical) view of history that extends beyond the life of Christ. Ratzinger writes, “Christian salvation does not occur as a change of relationships; but even this appearance that Christianity makes no difference, this embarrassment of faith before the world’s reckoning, is a Christian answer that directs man, beyond all his relationships, to what is essentially himself. Perhaps a theology of salvation history should regard it as its primary task to inquire into the inner form of this separation into middle and end and, thereby, to address the question that is so worrisome to existential theology,” in ibid., 188.
365 Ibid., 189.
366 Ibid.
and yet simultaneously apparent in history. Relying on the idiom, “Jesus is Christ [anointed one; lord; kyrios; κύριος], God is man [άνθρωπος; άνθρωπος],” he establishes a dichotomy that can only be described as metaphysical, as both parts insist on ontologically defined and theologically derived aspects (i.e., kyrios and Theo) in combination with the human (i.e., Jesus of Nazareth and man). In contrast, Marion’s phenomenology questions metaphysical assertions that rely on characteristics of Being/being, without denying the God-man relationship that is central to Christianity.

Asserting the role of God’s act in history, actio Dei, Ratzinger thereby places metaphysics as secondary—if only momentarily. The absoluteness of Ratzinger’s claim also permits a theology that questions non-traditional forms of Catholic theology, and more specifically, references to “political theologies.” One may rightfully speculate that because of his role as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Ratzinger held suspect any type of theology that stepped outside the confines of the traditional metaphysics and salvation history as the guiding principle for theological discourse. Moreover, as indicated in Dominus Iesus, and the response by

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367 Ibid., 190.
368 “For if it is true that the prae of God’s action is significant of faith, then the primacy of history over metaphysics, over all theologies of being and existence, becomes immediately obvious. It thus becomes obvious also that the concept of God is removed from the realm of a mere ΜΩΣΗ. I believe it was here that the definitive boundary between the biblical and the Greek concept of God became obfuscated, that this obfuscation was the crux of repeated patristic attempts to combine Greek thought with biblical faith and that from this arose for Christian theology a task that is still far from being accomplished…The prae of God’s action: this means not just the preeminence of history over metaphysics but also the rejection of a purely existential version of the gospel message…God acted: this was said before anything was said about man, about his sin, about his search for a gracious God. Thus the prae of God’s action means, ultimately, that actio is antecedent to verbum, reality to the tidings of it. In other words, the level of reality of the revelation-event is deeper than that of the proclamation-event, which seeks to interpret God’s action in human language. Precisely this is the origin of the sacramental principle, the reason why the word of God, which is also action, must be received by man in words and signs,” in ibid., 185-6.
369 “With political ‘theologies,’ theology as theology has been abandoned, the self-destruction of theology has been accomplished,” in ibid., 180. However, one may rightly question how the Catholic Church is not a political institution and is engaged in both socio-political and ethical issues as they relate to society. For more on this post-Vatican II ecclesiology, see John Milbank, Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).
fellow Cardinals, theologians, and interreligious groups, anything outside the confines of metaphysical Roman Catholic theology was likewise suspicious.

Published in 2000, *Dominus Iesus*[^370] was released for all Catholics in order to address the dialogue between Christians and non-Christians, while also reiterating and maintaining doctrine specific to the Catholic Church.[^371] The publication of the document, published by the CDF and later approved by John Paul II,[^372] was received with mixed emotions from Church leaders and theologians, as well as other religious leaders around the world. The document carries with it the expectation that lay Catholics are expected to observe the authoritative nature of the document and theologians are additionally expected to weigh the importance of the document in light of other statements of faith. *Dominus Iesus* is a document that challenges the pluralism and curiosity of other faith systems many philosophers are open to. The syncretization of religious traditions (including Christianity and other global religions) is all the more challenged by the document, which asserts the primacy of Christianity and Catholic faith specifically.

The document itself contains a number of theological issues the Magisterium is concerned with as theologians dialogue with other Christian and non-Christian faith communities. What follows is a brief overview of eight of the major issues addressed in the document, followed by


[^371]: Ibid., § 3.

[^372]: Francis A. Sullivan, "Introduction and Ecclesial Issues," in *Sic Et Non: Encountering Dominus Iesus*, ed. Stephen J. Pope and Charles Hefling (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 47. Sullivan later writes, “A declaration issued by the CDF with such strong papal confirmation is certainly authoritative, and must be taken seriously by all members of the Catholic Church. But it remains a document of the Congregation, not of the Pope himself, and thus has a lesser degree of authority than a papal encyclical would have. Thus, for instance, on questions regarding ecumenism, it has less authority than the papal encyclical *Ut unum sint*. In encyclicals, popes exercise their ordinary teaching authority, which as such does not oblige Catholics to give their definitive assent, but calls for an attitude of respectful listening and willingness to conform one’s judgment to his teaching, as far as one is able to do so,” in ibid. Gerard Mannion also addresses comments made by Thomas Rausch who believed the document was “written primarily for theologians,” but had caused a great deal of consternation among non-theologians, in Mannion, *Ecclesiology and Postmodernity: Questions for the Church in Our Time*, 87.
comments made by those who question the document’s purpose and substance. First, the document proceeds by offering a comprehensive list of Christian “truths” that seek to overcome the “relativistic theories” invoked in interreligious dialogue and “religious pluralism.” These claims reiterate the doctrinal positions the Church has held regarding the role of Sacred Scripture, the incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth, reaffirms the salvific nature of Christ, and declares the Catholic Church to be the one true Church of Christ. Subsequently, the document rejects those claims that undermine the philosophical and theological teachings of the Church, including the condemnation of Western logic and Eastern symbolism, which commonly challenges Christian theology, including the doctrine of the Incarnation.373 Referring to previous encyclicals, for example Redemptoris missio, the document reasserts the place and prominence of both the Church as a teaching institution and the primacy of Christian revelation.374 Such an affirmation, the document continues, rejects any notion that revelation is flawed, limited, or incomplete. The assertion is made by again articulating the historical and salvific role of Jesus, the “Incarnate Son of God.” How this affirmation is lived out, the document suggests, is in and through the practice of faith, though only the faith that is confirmed through the Church.375 Other religious traditions, when compared to the Christian faith, are considered lacking in their ability to connect humanity to God, as they remain in “search of the absolute truth” and “[lack] assent to [the] God who reveals himself.”376 Third, and connected to these first two assertions, the document affirms the centrality

373 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in Sic Et Non: Encountering Dominus Iesus; ibid., §4.
374 “Only the revelation of Jesus Christ, therefore, ‘introduces into our history a universal and ultimate truth which stirs the human mind to ceaseless effort,’” in ibid., §5.
375 Ibid., §6. Dominus Iesus continues, offering the difference between ‘faith’ and ‘belief’: “the distinction made between theological faith and belief in the other religions, must be firmly held. If faith is the acceptance in grace of revealed truth, which ‘makes it possible to penetrate the mystery in a way that allows us to understand it coherently,’ then belief, in the other religious, is the sum of experience and thought that constitutes the human treasury of wisdom and religious aspiration, which man in his search for truth has conceived and acted upon in his relationship to God and the Absolute,” in ibid., §7.
376 Ibid.
of Sacred Scripture for the theology within the Church: “These books ‘firmly, faithfully, and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures.”

Fourth, Christ’s centrality as the Son of God, the savior, the Word incarnate, and the universal redeemer, is articulated via Council documents, encyclicals, and scripture. Likewise, *Dominus Iesus* here upholds the place of the Magisterium as the teaching body of the Church, the source of truth as it relates to faith and Scripture. The document establishes the long-held tradition of the Church as the bride of Christ and the role of the Church as an institution directly connected to and responsible for the salvation of its members.

Fifth, Christ as the savior is highlighted, rejecting any claim that “denies the unicity and salvific universality of the mystery of Jesus Christ.” Accordingly, those theologians who challenge the salvific nature of Christ contradict the Magisterium’s teaching and the tradition of the faith, are likewise rejected. Moreover, the Church asserts its authority by declaring a set of absolutes regarding the salvific nature of Christ, above any tradition or theory that states otherwise.

Sixth, and because of the emphasis granted to the salvific nature of Jesus, the Spirit, and Revelation, the Catholic Church is the *only* source of salvation: “in connection with the unicity and universality of the salvific mediation of Jesus Christ, the unicity of the Church founded by him must be firmly believed as a truth of the Catholic faith.” *Dominus Iesus* goes one step further.

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379 Ibid., §13.
382 Ibid., §16, cf. fn. 59.
to establish who, exactly, is in union with the Church, asserting that only those Churches who acknowledge and adhere to apostolic succession and have a “valid Eucharist, are true particular Churches.”  

Those “ecclesial communities that have not preserved the valid Episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic mystery, are not Churches in the proper sense.”

However, the sacrament of baptism, if administered correctly, remains in a “certain communion, albeit imperfect, with the Church.” Despite these harsh reflections on non-Catholic Churches, the document does acknowledge the role these communities have in providing a source of knowledge about salvation to their followers. Nevertheless, they lack the “fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church.”

Seventh, the Church has an inseparable bond between Christ, the Kingdom of God, and society itself, alluded to above in the allegory of bride and groom. Those churches not in communion remain outside the ‘marriage,’ and are viewed as inferior to Rome.

And finally, eighth, the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and other religious traditions is clarified in the concluding paragraphs. Though it is open to the idea of all humans receiving salvation through Jesus Christ, it is clear that the message of salvation is fulfilled in and through the Catholic Church. Other means or ideas of salvation, including those that are presented as “complementary to the Church or substantially equivalent to her,” are viewed as “contrary to faith.” Dominus Iesus argues that it is the Church that has “the fullness of the means of salvation,” and though maintaining a degree of respect for other traditions, it rejects any

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383 Ibid., §17.
384 Ibid.
385 Ibid.
386 Ibid.
387 Ibid., §§18-19.
388 Ibid., §21.
inclination that these other communities offer a legitimate means to Christ’s salvation.\textsuperscript{389} Inter-religious dialogue, viewed as an important part of the Church’s “evangelizing mission,” requires a certain respect or “equality” that places Jesus at the forefront of the discourse.\textsuperscript{390} The emphasis placed on the centrality of Jesus and the sacrament of Baptism, addressed in the final main paragraph, is certainly disconcerting, but an important aspect of the document itself insofar as \textit{Domimus Iesus} proposes an agenda in which the Church is the \textit{only} source of divine salvation.

The document, accepted by Pope John Paul II in June of 2000, asserts the prominence of the Catholic faith above all others. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect for the CDF, submitted the document for approval believing the Church was at a crossroads. The document declares that the Church was presently “Faced with certain problematic and even erroneous propositions, [and] theological reflection is called to reconfirm the Church’s faith and to give reasons for her hope in a way that is convincing and effective.”\textsuperscript{391} The metaphysical and authoritative language found throughout the document reflects the tradition of the Church mentioned in the documents and texts earlier in this chapter. By insisting that the Roman Catholic Church, the Magisterium, and the tradition it upholds is the only means of salvation, the legitimate source of truth, and the unquestionable source of theological discourse, the Church stands in opposition to the aims of many postmodern thinkers. Whereas postmodernity aims to open the doors of philosophy and theology to non-linear and pluralistic forms of thought, \textit{Domimus Iesus} has limited such interactions with theologians aiming to dialogue with others on dense theological topics. Stephen J. Pope and Charles Hefling’s edited text, \textit{Sic et Non: Encountering Domimus Iesus}, offers a number of essays from Catholics, non-Catholics, and non-Christians who, in large part, are

\textsuperscript{389} Ibid., §22.
\textsuperscript{390} Ibid., §23.
\textsuperscript{391} Ibid.
disappointed in the text of the document. I offer two examples that illustrate this point. First, Dr. George Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury’s response in 2000, in which he rejects the claim that the Anglican community be regarded as deficient or disjointed from the apostolic tradition. In fact, in his response, he notes the positive discourse he was a part of with the Australian Edward Cardinal Cassidy at a gathering of Christian communities in Toronto earlier that year.392

Likewise, David Berger notes the concerns many in the Jewish community had regarding the document’s release. Critical of the salvific language found throughout the document, Berger rejects the notion that Jews are thereby “sui generis,” unimportant in the eyes of God and the Kingdom of God.393 Berger’s harsh response is a reflection of the Jewish community’s feelings toward the document as a whole:

[Interreligious] dialogue is described as part of the ‘evangelizing mission’ of the Church, ‘just one of the actions of the Church in her mission ad gentes’ (DI 22). The declaration goes on to emphasize in this context that though ‘equality…is a presupposition of inter-religious dialogue, [it] refers to the equal personal dignity of the parties in dialogue, not to doctrinal content’ (DI 22). For many Jews, the denial of doctrinal equality is objectionable, even deeply objectionable, in and of itself, and the ascription of evangelical intent to the dialogue appears to be a dagger thrust into its very heart.394

Berger complements these statements by referring to other instances where Ratzinger questions the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. For example, in a piece published in *L’Osservatore Romano* in December of 2000, Ratzinger was accused of addressing the Nazi idea

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394 Ibid. The essay relies on the abbreviation DI in place of *Dominus Iesus*. 
of Christian superiority over Judaism, a claim that was seen as anti-Semitic by many Jewish observers.\footnote{Ibid., 40. Berger later notes the importance of John Paul II’s apology for Christian anti-Semitism and the actions he took in Israel as a positive sign of Christian-Jewish relations, in ibid., 43.}

The suppression of the Jewish faith as a legitimate one is certainly highlighted in Berger’s remarks, but it highlights the larger issues associated with the inter-religious and inter-faith dialogue theologians and others aim to undertake. Though Berger is reluctant to label Ratzinger in this accord, especially when he considers his other essays, he does note the tension that has emerged between modern Judaism and Christianity. Put simply, Berger understands the dialogue to be cordial attempts to talk, but ultimately, lip service: “all this is simply classic, pre-modern Christian doctrine recast in a spirit of friendship.”\footnote{Ibid., 40.} Further evidence is offered via Ratzinger’s \textit{Many Religions, One Covenant} and comments made in the \textit{National Catholic Reporter} in October 2000, where the Cardinal asserts Christian superiority over Judaism.\footnote{Ibid., 41.}

Important in this discussion of Jewish-Christian theological relations must be the relationship between religious practices and worship. Any acceptance of God in the way \textit{Dominus Iesus} asserts, writes Berger, would be considered an \textit{avodah zarah}, a cardinal sin in Judaism: “Properly understood, \textit{avodah zarah} is the formal recognition or worship of God as an entity that is in fact not God. For Jews, the worship of Jesus of Nazareth as God incarnate falls within this definition.”\footnote{Ibid., 42.} Attempts to proselytize and baptize are counter-productive to the dialogue many within the Church desire.

Carey and Berger are not alone in their concerns regarding \textit{Dominus Iesus}. Many theologians within the Church have stated their concerns regarding the place of the document in light of postmodern ecclesial concerns and ecumenical dialogue. For instance, Mannion offers the
following general assessment of commentators after the release of the document: “Numerous Commentators on the document thus became concerned to ascertain whether this marked a distinct shift away from the ecumenical thinking not simply of the various interchurch discussions of recent decades, but also from the spirit of dialogue at Vatican II that gave rise to them, and that of Paul VI, indeed even—it could be argued—of John Paul II.” Additionally, many Jewish and Muslim groups saw it necessary to break inter-religious dialogue programs with the Catholic Church because of the document’s emphasis on salvation through the Church alone.

The document highlights the argument made throughout this section: the Church has historically relied on metaphysics and an authoritarian approach that has both hindered postmodern approaches to theology (and philosophy) and limited any attempts at a pluralistic examination of the Divine. The approach the Vatican has been known to take against those who challenge traditional forms of theology is evident in Dominus Iesus. Rausch’s analysis highlights the authoritarianism espoused throughout the document and the past century of Magisterial teachings:

Rausch implies that…the CDF has perhaps exceeded its authority. At the very least, he suggests, the CDF should have made clear whether or not it was actually foreclosing debates Vatican II had deliberately left open. He notes that there is a great deal of difference between what counts as ‘central truths of the Christian faith’ and what is simply theological opinion…The problem with Dominus Iesus, as Rausch concludes, is that it is unclear which is which in its pages.400

As a final comment, the lack of communal input on Dominus Iesus was a concern of Edward Cardinal Cassidy, who wondered why he and Walter Cardinal Kasper were not invited to participate in the drafting of the document, and theologians like Pheme Perkins who had concerns regarding the language of religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue, likewise questioned the publication office.401 Throughout the document, arguments against postmodernism are clearly

399 Mannion, Ecclesiology and Postmodernity: Questions for the Church in Our Time, 80. See also, ibid., 81. Later, Mannion implies a sense of shock over the fact that Ratzinger would go against his superior, Pope John Paul II, in ibid., 81.
400 Ibid., 91.
401 Ibid., 85 and 95-6.
evident, and the post-release discussions reiterated this point. Its tone and content also challenges the language articulated, as stated above, throughout the documents and sessions of the Second Vatican Council. Closed master narratives only reaffirm a certain authoritative form that is contradictory to the postmodern attempts to question the horizon and the limitations imposed on a given society, including the society that is the Roman Catholic Church.

3. Authority and the Conservative Apologists

As I began to explore in the first chapter, the Church as an institution and the theologians who dialogue with the tradition are grounded both historically and contextually. Their work is largely the result of engaging the historical material in the context of postmodernity. Likewise, the varied approaches to Catholicism by the aforementioned pontiffs is both historically connected and socially determined. What separates the two is a commitment to metaphysics and traditionalism. On the one hand postmodern thinkers, especially those who, at minimum, discuss theology—Vattimo, Marion, LaCoste, Chrétien, Nancy, etc.—remain grounded in Christian tradition; meaning, the acceptance of principles that can only be found in Christianity (e.g., the concept of the Triune God). These thinkers, to varying degrees, however, are open to the possibility of a theology that will converse with other traditions and move beyond the confines of metaphysics. The other insists on a single-handed approach that relies on centuries old authoritative systems and is deeply rooted in metaphysics, a point articulated throughout this chapter. In order to establish the second of these two divisions, I will highlight pontifical and social authority, beginning with the nineteenth and early twentieth century pontificates. The pontificates of Pius IX, Pius X, and to a lesser extent, Leo XII, are examples of this epistemological dichotomy. As noted earlier in this chapter, Pius X’s encyclicals and decrees elevated papal authority, reaffirming the Church’s stance against modernism, and developing an oath of solidarity with
Rome and the Pope. Modernity and other facets of the developing world were understood to be challenges for Pius X who, like his predecessors, believed his authority and the role of the Catholic Church in the emerging international context was one of intellectual and religious superiority. Following his predecessors, the confrontations with modernity, the rise in democratic Church-state separation, and Gallicanism versus Ultramontanism, Pius X would assert his role as leader of the Church universal via the aforementioned *Pascendi*, *Lamentabili sane exitu*, and *Sacrorum antistitum*. Each document served a functionary purpose for the Magisterium, as it attempted to control the modern theological movements led by such scholars as George Tyrell. While Tyrell’s movement was addressed in *Pascendi*, the role of the Church as a learning and teaching institution was condemned in *Lamentabili*, along with a series of other modern theological claims. Demanding that all clergy and theologians at “seminaries and other ecclesiastical institutions,” sign *Sacrarum antistitum*, affirming their loyalty to the Magisterium’s teachings is further evidence of both the fear of losing a stronghold in the emerging advanced world and fearing the dismissal or reduction of authority on political and religious issues. Much of the content within the Oath Against Modernism was in direct response to the aforementioned claims dismissed in *Lamentabili*. Certainly the lasting effects of Vatican I’s centralization of authority in the Church remained palatable through the aforementioned papacies. Pius X’s dismissal of modernism, the

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403 McBrien, 120.
404 “The only function of the teaching Church, or magisterium, is to ratify generally held opinions of the learning Church (n. 6); the Church cannot demand internal consent from its members regarding the condemnation of errors (n. 7); Christ did not intend to establish the Church as a society that would last for centuries (n. 52); the organic constitution of the Church is not unchangeable, but is subject to perpetual evolution, just as human society is (n. 53); dogmas, sacraments, and hierarchy are nothing but evolutions and interpretations of Christian thought (n. 54); Peter never even suspected that Christ entrusted the primacy to him (n. 55); and the Roman church became the head of all other churches because of political conditions, not because of divine providence (n. 56),” in ibid.
405 Ibid., 121.
requirement of an Oath to the Church for most theologians and clergy, and the reaffirmation of similar policies in Paul VI’s 1967 revised oath, the 1989 Code of Canon Law, and John Paul II’s 1998 Ad tuendam fidelem, demonstrates the Church’s historical development regarding concentrated authority and the appropriate interactions academics were to have with the Magisterium. These staunch anti-modern sentiments have since found their way into present-day scholarship, wherein the future of the Church is a hotly debated topic.

Another more prominent and appropriate example for this context is located in the apologetic tradition, as it cherishes a certain type of philosophical theology, which may ultimately limit the Church’s growth as an institution. In his historical presentation of apologetics, and later, new apologists, Rausch outlines the apologist tradition as one that is deeply centered on biblical analysis—not hermeneutics—and limited in its theological scope. Rausch also offers a lengthy list of apologists, including Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Abelard, Aquinas, and John Henry Newman. The twentieth century featured Maurice Blondel and the post-Vatican II apologists, Christopher Dawson, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, and others.406 These theologians are “defensive apologetics,” who “[reflect] the authoritarian and rationalist theology of the Roman manuals and were almost completely untouched by newer currents such as the biblical and liturgical renewals.”407 Alongside Karl Rahner, Ratzinger (Benedict XVI), Hans Küng, the post-Vatican II theologians, Thomas Howard, David Currie, Scott and Kimberly Hahn, and several others, represent the continued tradition of apologetics and “new apologetics.”408 Their approach, often considered fundamentalism or integralism, is limited in its theological development, as it relies on Scripture versus critical analysis of the biblical and historical tradition:

406 Rausch, 36-7.
407 Ibid., 38.
408 Ibid., 39-42.
Too often the new apologists’ use of Scripture is Biblicist rather than critical or hermeneutical. They ignore the Bible’s complex historical development, use it to proof-text doctrinal and moral concerns, and interpret gospel sayings attributed to Jesus historically rather than distinguishing the various levels of the Gospel tradition...At the same time many of them exhibit a fundamentalist understanding of teaching, one that fails to note the historical context of a doctrinal statement, its degree of authority, and the possibility of doctrinal development or even change. Their textual interpretation, whether biblical or magisterial, and their approach to the development of authority, structure, and doctrine shows signs of the same non-historical consciousness that one associates with Protestant fundamentalism.409

Moreover, the possibility of a divided Roman Catholic Church, a theory suggested by Scott Hahn, is becoming more and more likely. The approach many new apologists take has led observers like Peter Huff to suggest that their anti-Protestant sentiments will delay or even prevent additional ecumenical dialogue between the churches, a statement buttressed by the strong language in Dominus Iesus.410 Moreover, the lack of historical knowledge is also problematic, according to Rausch, as it permits new apologists like Karl Keating and Jimmy Swaggart to distort the Magisterial teaching on biblical interpretation (e.g., the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s 1994, The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church) and the historical complexities surrounding the development of the pontificate.411

Rausch offers this observation in light of the vast changes that have taken place since the Second Vatican Council. Though I have argued thus far that John Paul II and Benedict XVI promote a centralized form of authority within the Church, the Church of the people (i.e., the local parishes, classrooms, weekend RCIA classes, etc.) has since changed dramatically. As noted in the first chapter, people are abandoning the Church in droves. Those who remain, suggests Rausch,
often appeal to this new apologist approach, the defense of the faith, and a particular reading of the biblical narrative—one void of the hermeneutics many in the previous generation encouraged. Faith in the minds of these zealous individuals is driven by the desire to know *what* Catholicism is about, versus understanding its roots and development. Vatican II had introduced a generation in the 1960s and 1970s to a Church that was emerging from darkness, in a sense; it was a Church with open windows into which many wished to peer. Historically, however, the Church has stymied development via encyclicals, oaths, and other declarative statements affirming the role of the Magisterium and dismissing modernism, plurality, ecumenical dialogue, and even the overcoming of metaphysics. Socially, Catholicism as a whole is divided: There are those who wish to introduce new ideas. There are, on the other hand, those who accentuate the biblical narrative but downplay centuries’ worth of historical background and hermeneutical discovery.

Shifting back into the context of postmodernity, and the scholarship that supports this philosophical move, one sees the skepticism evident toward both metaphysics and Church authority. To reiterate a point introduced in the first chapter, many in the present era remain skeptical of the traditionalism found in various metanarratives and the institutions that govern them. Furthermore, metaphysics introduces various problematic ecclesial responses to postmodernity. They correspond to new theological movements within the Church responding to societal changes introduced by modernity and postmodernity. The attention Gerard Mannion grants to these changes is crucial here, particularly because they respond to the historical exclusiveness attributed to Catholicism. This type of exclusive theology—despite the cordial tone found in *Nostra aetate* and subsequent statements—stands in opposition to the postmodern predilection for inclusiveness. In many ways, postmodernists prefer a community that is open to new philosophical ideas and dialogical opportunities, thus challenging the emerging “‘neo-
exclusivism’ across denominations, which is not prevalent throughout Christianity.”

Mannion argues that this is part of a larger “‘paradigm shift,’” which has led to “the current ‘official,’ ‘top down’ version of communion ecclesiology that shapes contemporary Catholic teaching, mission, and policy.” This “paradigm shift,” Mannion goes on to explicate, is a reaction to the many and various “perceived ills of postmodernity.”

One such attribute, at least perceived by the ‘neo-exclusivists,’ is the Church’s relationship to other denominations and religious traditions. Whereas postmodernism welcomes an open dialogue with other communities, the neo-exclusivist approach divides the communities even further.

It is worth noting, however, that the papacy of Pope Francis has at times broken these exclusivist barriers, encouraging dialogue and friendship with Christian and non-Christian religious traditions turning to the Gospel theme of mercy. Though still in its infancy, Francis’ pontificate has stirred the imagination of ‘liberals’ while also causing strife among traditionally ‘conservative’ Catholics. I aim to return to the work and words of Francis in the final chapter of this project.

Mannion’s emphasis on these denominational religious changes highlights the pluralism the postmodern era encourages. Examining the pluralistic approaches to Christianity, one may easily recognize the challenge they pose to traditional Roman Catholicism, insofar as they stand in contrast to the uniformity or homogenous understanding of the faith: “Essentialist descriptions of reality and valorizing homogenous over the diverse seem to be significant features of much

412 Mannion, Ecclesiology and Postmodernity: Questions for the Church in Our Time, 44.
413 Ibid.
414 Ibid.
415 “That is to say that whereas fundamental differences between Christians (in terms of doctrine, ethics, worship, and, crucially, ecclesiology) once used to be primarily along denominational lines, such is no longer the case. Indeed, it is far more likely today that one can have much more in common with groups of Christians of another denomination than with many within one’s own Christian denomination. Hence, in so many ways, the lines of ‘division’ among Christians are thus now transdenominational rather than interdenominational, (i.e., across rather than between denominations),” in ibid., 44-5.
Western thought and culture.” Accepting metaphysics as the system of theological discourse and subsequently, the system of governance, limits the Church in its ability to dialogue both internally and externally. Nevertheless, there are those who are critical of anything other than Augustinian-Thomism as the primary philosophy of Roman Catholicism. For example, Tracey Rowland argues that *Gaudium et spes* and Nietzsche have caused the faithful to become lax in their understanding of the Church and ambivalent to the beauty that accompanies its culture.

Attempts to overcome or influence this tradition may prove more difficult than philosophers have proposed, primarily due to its embedded nature in the Church’s body of language and the fervent defense of the faith by apologists, Thomists, Neo-Scholastics, etc. Moreover, the project of overcoming of metaphysics, addressed later in this study, requires the recognition that language too is a developed phenomenon distinct to a particular society or culture. Metaphysics relies on and is limited by human language. Attempts to overcome metaphysics, as we will see, require first the acknowledgement of this fact.

### 4. Language and Philosophy

Despite the postmodern desire to overcome the metanarratives, or at minimum to address them, the Church’s influence as an institution engaged with philosophy and theology makes this

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416 Ibid., 45.
417 "The authors of the section on culture in *Gaudium et spes* neglected to offer an alternative account of ‘religion as culture’ in which beauty is not jettisoned, but ‘keyed into the theological drama’...By depriving people of these riches through the policy of accommodating liturgical practices to the norms of ‘mass culture’—a culture already identified by Guardini in the 1950s as an ‘anti-culture’—the post-conciliar Church has unwittingly undermined the ability of many of its own members to experience self-transcendence...As a consequence, plain persons fall into the bit of nihilistic despair and/or search for transcendence in the secular liturgies of the global economy, whereas the more highly educated pursue strategies of stoic withdrawal and individual self-cultivation which are destined to end in despair, and even madness, for which the secular critics of modernity—Freud and Heidegger, for example—have no viable solutions...Either the Church as the Universal Sacrament of Salvation is the primary source, guardian and perfector of culture within persons, institutions and entire societies, or culture becomes an end in itself...as in the Aristocratic Liberal and Nietzschean traditions, which in turn implodes into that anti-culture known as ‘mass culture,’” in Tracey Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition: After Vatican II* (London: Routledge, 2003), 168.
difficult. For the most part, theology and philosophy remain grounded in history, language systems, and stories, many of which are undergirded by metaphysics. The difficulty addressing metaphysics, as Martin Heidegger and Dominique Janicaud have stated, is the problem with ‘Western languages.’ As this chapter has already suggested, metaphysics has become the *de facto* language, the universal language for the Church and its theology. Pannenberg, addressing the role of metaphysics, concludes that this language system is the source for much of the theology developed over the past few centuries. Referencing Auguste Comte, Friedrich Nietzsche, the Neo-Kantian school, Wilhelm Dilthey, and Martin Heidegger, the idea of metaphysics as an historical tool is presented as a framework for theological discourse that has since run its course: “For all of these thinkers, the concept *metaphysics* characterizes a particular (and long-drawn-out) phase of the history of humanity; and all understand themselves to be thinkers of a postmetaphysical age.” Though theologians, beginning in the nineteenth century, have aimed to rid Christian theology of metaphysics and “the so-called Hellenization of Christianity,” its legacy remains in the language and dogma of even today’s theological projects. Focusing on nineteenth century philosophies of language, the use of metaphysical absolutes is questioned because of its inability to articulate what in turn is being explored. On this point, in his admittedly brief analysis of theological proofs, Pannenberg offers the following:

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419 Pannenberg, 3

420 Pannenberg (1990) goes so far as to say that metaphysics has undergone a renewal in modern philosophy and theology by leading thinkers like Nicolai Hartmann, Wolfgang Cramer, Alfred North Whitehead, Dieter Henrich, and English Hegelians, to name a few, in ibid., 4. Pannenberg offers a detailed critique of Henrich’s metaphysical project, including Henrich’s statement, “there is ‘no successful life…without metaphysics,’” permitting his theological project to move forward, despite his fellow German contemporaries who are deeply immersed in the “transcendental-philosophical tradition,” in ibid., 4-5, cf. fn. 1. Finally, Pannenberg does nuance his critique of metaphysics, arguing that it could never completely disappear, in ibid., 5-7.
These brief remarks on the problem with the proofs for the existence of God should at least indicate that a renewal of metaphysical reflection within philosophy cannot simply involve reintroducing the same positions and the same approach to the problems that preceded the turn away from metaphysical reflection in the first place. This applies also to the themes associated with the philosophical doctrine of God. The connection of metaphysical reflection and reconstruction to the finitude and historicity of our experience, which must remain its starting point, cannot be overcome but can only be clarified.421

If theological language is to overcome metaphysics, understanding both the limitations of theological proofs—commonly attributed to Aquinas—and language itself must be recognized. Metaphysics offers linguistic constructs or metaphors in order to describe the Divine: “Philosophical reflection can lead to the formulation of criteria for presenting the understanding of God within a religious tradition…When metaphysics begins to explicate the understanding of God within a particular religious tradition…it actually becomes theology.”422 Metaphysics, as a philosophical tool, leads to faulty criteria, resulting in a weak depiction of the Divine within a religious tradition. To explain further the concerns Pannenberg and others have regarding language, Hans-Johann Glock’s review of nineteenth century German philosophy and the philosophy of language is helpful.423 Glock’s historical analysis helps shape the later concerns other Continental philosophers have with language systems and the theological discourse that emerges from such systems. Vattimo’s presentation of Nietzsche regarding language and metaphysics, for example, is similar to Glock’s analysis of the nineteenth century philosopher’s skepticism on the topic.

Philosophical language—especially that which developed in nineteenth century Germany—falls into three general categories: hermeneutics, logic, and the critique of language. All three categories of such language are vital to any study of metaphysics. This is particularly

421 Ibid., 20.
422 Ibid., 42.
relevant considering the importance of such thinkers as Schleiermacher, Hegel, and Nietzsche. In order to frame the postmodern concerns of metaphysics, we must note the tension language has held in response to theological and philosophical discourse. In his essay, Glock presents a detailed analysis of the three categories of language, most notably the critique of language. He begins, stating,

The ideas of language as the *medium of communication*, the *glue of society* and a *driving force of history* are clearly more prominent in the hermeneutic tradition. The idea of language as a *source* of (philosophical) problems and confusions is the defining feature of the critique of language, while also playing a role in the logical strand. And the idea of language as a *resource* for resolving such problems for facilitating the quest of knowledge is most evident in the logical strand. Finally, the relationship between thought and language has exercised all three currents in roughly equal measure.\(^{424}\)

Though favoring the hermeneutic tradition throughout his essay, Glock’s review proposes that Lichtenberg, Nietzsche, Gruppe, and others be taken seriously in their skepticism of language, especially that which questions the legitimacy of metaphysics in instances where it should otherwise remain absent. Furthermore, measuring language, in order to understand it as a system of logic and order, is likewise important. Relying on von Humboldt, Herder, and Kant, Glock portrays language as a system of reflection:

[Language] unites a priori with empirical reflections in a way that is both stimulating and problematic…Its guiding theme is the contrast between *universality* and *particularity*, especially in three areas: first, language in general vs. specific natural languages; secondly, linguistic communities vs. individual speakers; thirdly, language as a system of syntactic and semantic rules vs. language as speech…Language is central to the anthropological equation, since we are ‘human exclusively through language.’\(^{425}\)

As a system, with often complex rules and cultural connections, language is also a byproduct of reflection and the result of experiences over a long period of time. “Through language, the subject constitutes (*bildet*) both himself and the world, yet only in the innocuous sense of *becoming*

\(^{424}\) Ibid., 371-2. Emphasis original.
\(^{425}\) Ibid., 381-2.
conscious of himself by separating (abscheiden) himself from the world."\(^{426}\) Language increases its importance as it spreads beyond its original origin and form as like-minded, intelligent partners engaged with one another dialectically; thus, “the essential intersubjective dimension of language.”\(^{427}\) Von Humboldt continues this train of thought, according to Glock, acknowledging the work of Schlegel and the interconnected nature of language and reflection, while also invoking “a super-individual agent” similar to “the Hegelian ‘spirit.’”\(^{428}\) This model, described by Glock as an organic one:

> [is] intimately linked to von Humboldt’s conviction that there is a universal human nature, yet one which is characterized precisely by the variety of its manifestations in different societies and languages…Natural languages ‘are not really means of presenting the already discovered truth, but, far more, of discovering the previously unrecognized truth.’ As a result, their diversity is not just the superficial one of different ‘sounds and signs, but a diversity of worldviews (Waltensichten) themselves.’\(^{429}\)

Recognizing language as a product of a certain set of variables and acknowledging language’s ability to connect people intimately sets it apart not as a byproduct of common ancestry, but as ongoing (hence, the study of linguistics). Moreover, language is not simply letters-to-words but also includes speech or discourse; Glock quotes von Humboldt here, “‘language creates itself…out of speech,’” grammar is only a fraction of its totality.\(^{430}\)

If we are to accept the nineteenth century understanding of language as an organic outcome of socio-cultural constructs (i.e., society, institutions, etc.), then it is easy to recognize how some may be reasonably skeptical of its use and function. Concerning this project, and in particular the concerns outlined in this chapter, the use of language pertaining to theological absolutes is concerning. Metaphysics as a language system is (and I contend that it is) problematic insofar as

\(^{426}\) Ibid., 382, cf. fns. 57 and 58.
\(^{427}\) Ibid., 382.
\(^{428}\) Ibid. Though a play on words, so to speak, Glock’s reference to Hegel reflects the philosopher’s understanding of a common “‘character of a nation,’” in ibid., 382, cf. fn. 61.
\(^{429}\) Ibid., 382-3.
\(^{430}\) Ibid., 383, cf. fn. 69.
it attempts to establish a system of absolutes out of an organically created, culturally determined set of ideas. Disavowing, consciously or not, the organic development of language—grammar and speech—in favor of absolutes does a disservice to society, if one accepts Glock’s premise. One such absolute, of course, rests in the adoption and adaptation of metaphysics as a theological and philosophical language system. In so doing, theology limits not only its theoretical possibilities, but also the subject of theology itself. This brings us to our next point regarding philosophical language, whereby Glock’s presentation of philosophical skepticism is further articulated. Relying on absolute systems creates a body of philosophy or theology in which participants can respond only in certain ways. Just as Pius X and the other aforementioned pontiffs railed against modernism and the supposed harms it caused against the systematic body of theology in the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries, theologians today are likewise met with suspicion when stepping outside the boundaries of traditional theological ideas.431

Analyzing the philosophical work of Lichtenberg and his notion of language, Glock notes the inadequacies associated with defining language as an exact science or system. When philosophy aims to articulate an idea, it is reluctantly confined to the auspices of existent bodies of language:

The language of science strives to be pure and exact...But given the dynamic nature of thought and speech, rigid definitions are more of a hindrance than a help. Ordinary language is often more intelligible and hence more propitious to philosophical clarity than artificial terminology or languages. ‘Philosophy, when it speaks, is always forced to talk the language of non-philosophy (Unphilosophie).’432

As I introduced previously in this section, language aims to connect a group of individuals who share a common background, cultural experience, etc. Philosophical discourse, despite its importance in other areas of life (e.g., academia), does little to connect with the daily experience of life and human interaction. At least in this case, philosophy is perceived to be a dense subject that aims to contribute to society in often-abstract ways. That is not to say, however, that philosophy has no place in daily life; thus, an appeal to use ‘non-philosophical’ terminology when possible. Often, metaphysics is this substitute, relied upon for more complex issues in philosophy, or in our case, theology.

Metaphysics’ limitations, however, are well documented by many Continental philosophers, including the nineteenth century Germans (e.g., Otto Friedrich Gruppe, Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, and Johann Gottfried von Herder). Referring specifically to the works of Gruppe and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Glock addresses the use of metaphysics by referring to these nineteenth century philosophers, whose work would help direct much of later Continental philosophy. Glock writes of Gruppe’s critique of metaphysics and language,

[Gruppe] targets ‘[traditional] metaphysics and speculative philosophy [German idealism] in general,’ since they seek to achieve ‘cognitions through mere concepts.’ The root cause of their aberrations is the ‘infatuation’ with the ‘mystification’ through language, which seduces us and leads us astray. Metaphysical speculations like those of Hegel are not so much false or unfounded but ‘sheer nonsense.’ More generally, the majority of philosophical questions ‘are of the kind one should never meddle with, since they contain in themselves something misunderstood, distorted, false, indeed thoroughly nonsensical and thus…never permit hope for a reasonable solution.’ All uses of language rely on tacit assumptions. The critique of language has to scrutinize the assumptions underlying philosophical questions in order to establish whether they are ‘meaningful at all.’

The need for metaphysics in a certain type of philosophy—for example, Hegel’s rationalism—is dependent on one’s ability to conceptualize the subject being presented. Analogies, metaphors, and other language tools of comparison and conceptualization are relied upon in order to develop

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433 Glock, in *The Oxford Handbook of German Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century*, 393.
a philosophical idea. Gruppe dismisses these types of systems, according to Glock, as they lead to distortions, false ideas, and in some instances, “nonsensical” philosophical notions.434

Turning exclusively to Nietzsche’s arguments on language offers a framework upon which his successors and postmodern philosophers would build. In other words, Nietzsche is formative in the philosophical development in the centuries that follow. Undoubtedly, Heidegger, Husserl, Marion, and Vattimo are significantly influenced by Nietzsche’s thinking. His study of language, which, Glock notes, is a bit more “ambivalent,” complements the study of language and metaphysics German philosophers undertook. First, critical of the application of certain language forms, including art and music, Nietzsche’s work before The Birth of Tragedy understands the use of language as “an ‘infinitely inadequate symbolism.’” By contrast, music constitutes a kind of primordial language. It is capable not just of ‘an infinite clarification,’ but of directly capturing Schopenhauer’s thing in itself—das ‘Ureine.’”435 In this case, music, though written in a mechanical form, is an expression of “human physiology,” permitting Nietzsche the space to say that “all conscious thought presupposes language,” which differs from Kant’s non-consciousness approach to language.436 This is parallel to the organic approach addressed above; its development is connected more to the culture or a society, than to a need for linguistic rules to govern its communication. Different sounds emerge from various cultures, thus creating distinct bodies of language. For example, Ravi Shankar’s music, led by the playing of the Indian sitar, varies greatly from the recent Missa Papae Francisci by Ennio Morricone. The skepticism Nietzsche holds in his early writings is one that reflects on the organic or cultural understanding of the speech-artistry

435 Glock, in The Oxford Handbook of German Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century, 393-4, cf. fn. 123.
436 Ibid., 394.
that emerges in such forms as poetry, music, etc. It is even more problematic when forms of philosophical language are employed to describe something that should be void of such uses.

Second, Nietzsche approaches language with an appreciation of its aesthetic beauty and purpose. This differs from the systematic approach to language found in scientific and philosophical projects:

Scientific and philosophical discourse aims at truth. But its conceptual apparatus is derived from prior artistic metaphors and aspirations. As a result, it is an illusion that ‘in language, we really have knowledge of the world.’ The ‘conventions of language’ are not ‘adequate expression of all realities,’ instead, they signify ‘relations of things to human beings’ and are ultimately nothing but ‘illusions and visions (Traumbilder).’

Nietzsche’s understanding of language in this portion of his writing—Glock identifies this as the mid-point of his collective corpus—finds language suspect, insofar as it fails in its attempts to present reality adequately. In this approach, language is used in the hopes to connect subjects via extensive descriptors or illusions and fails to present the idea for what it is.

Third, in his final writings, these cultural forms and descriptive forms of language become more prominent in his skepticism regarding language.

Skepticism about language fuels a general critique not just of metaphysics but also of traditional ethics. In both arenas language leads us astray because we forget the etymology of central notions. Thus our general moral principles are based on ignoring that the dichotomy between ‘good’ and ‘evil’ is geared only to its original purpose of keeping apart the consequences of specific actions; and our prejudice that the objects themselves possess secondary qualities ignores that terms like ‘hard’ and ‘green’ in their proper application signify effects rather than causes. ‘Words lie in our path.’ A whole ‘mythology’ is laid down in our language, in that ‘seduction on the part of grammar’ misleads us into metaphysical illusions and gives succor to philosophical systems.

Metaphysics as the guiding tool for modern language systems, including philosophy and theology, is thus regarded as problematic, especially if it is applied to the divine. In this approach, Nietzsche

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tries to separate language from the divine, going so far as to claim that grammar limits (divine) phenomena (God).\textsuperscript{439}

Despite Nietzsche’s skepticism towards (metaphysical) language, Glock and Fritz Mauthner object to the notion that Nietzsche abandons metaphysics in his study of language.\textsuperscript{440} The point here is to address the difficulty Nietzsche and his successors have in completely abandoning both language and metaphysics. Though philosophy requires a sort of “disenthrallment” from metaphysics and the limiting confines of language systems, humanity remains reliant on such tools in order to convey reason. Nietzsche’s detractors, including Mauthner, will argue that Nietzsche was critical of language, so much so that his “distrust of language is unlimited; but only as long as it is not his language.”\textsuperscript{441}

Nietzsche’s skepticism regarding language, along with the aforementioned speculation regarding meta-narratives and metaphysics has helped shape the postmodern era. These questions remain a vital component to any critical examination of the Church’s historical authority in both theological and secular circles. As postmodern philosophers and theologians continue to dialogue with the Church and its metaphysically driven traditionalism, understanding the skepticism and speculation remains an essential part of any future dialogue.

5. Approaching Metaphysics in Postmodernity

The application of metaphysics as the metanarrative in philosophical and theological thought concerns several postmodern thinkers. In order to effectively explore postmodernity’s fascination with metaphysics (that is to say, the general questioning of the ‘science’ as a tool used

\textsuperscript{439} “Indeed, ‘reason’ is nothing other than the ‘metaphysics of language’ and ‘‘Reason’’ in language: oh what a deceitful wench! I fear, we shall not get rid of God, because we still believe in grammar’’ in ibid., 395, cf. fn. 131.

\textsuperscript{440} Ibid., 395-6.

\textsuperscript{441} Ibid., 395, cf. fn. 136.
to explore ideas) it is useful to explore Marion and Vattimo’s treatment of the issue. Both, I contend, begin with the notion that metaphysics is weak. As a system of philosophy, it ultimately is unable to fully conceptualize ideas in philosophy, including the Divine (God), because it relies on a system of language—and thus the intellectual limitations imposed by linguistics. Metaphysics’ propensity to rely on analogy and linguistic descriptions ultimately reveals little more than a verbal exercise intended to philosophically reason something beyond human experience. Nevertheless, its application in Christian theology has resulted in its use as an authoritative system for theological thought. Thus, one of the primary concerns in postmodern thought is the use of metaphysics as the mode of operation for the Christian faith, resulting in metanarratives. Postmodern thinkers aim (at least) to question these metanarratives; furthermore, some challenge them outright.

If one accepts Dulles’ assessment of metaphysics as the guiding philosophical method for theological discourse, postmodernity’s challenge to such discourse stands in opposition to this traditional understanding of (Thomistic) theology. In contrast, postmodernity opts out of the authoritative and centralized role metaphysics requests of its users, preferring a break from such traditional approaches in theological discourse. If the Church applauds metaphysics as the central philosophical tool used in the development and communication of its systematic theology, it presently has little choice but to wrestle with the concerns postmodern philosophers have offered. Certainly, the Church has historically acknowledged the philosophical systems of Aristotle, Aquinas, Suarez, Bonaventure, and other Scholastics or Neo-Thomists, while also reasserting itself authoritatively by relying on this system. The pre-Vatican II assertion of metaphysics, as noted in the above encyclicals and through the historical review offered by Dulles, Quinn, and Christiansen, affirms these claims. Nevertheless, and continuing a theme presented throughout this chapter,
postmodern philosophy challenges this use, with scholars objecting to the use of metaphysics in theology.

In his analysis of Heidegger’s ontotheology, Joeri Schrijver argues that philosophy has mistakenly undertaken the role of discussing God. Philosophy should, as Heidegger notes, be centered on the task of delineating being. Ontotheology, “like metaphysics,” is “essentially a forgetting of being. It is concerned merely with beings.” Philosophy is not open to the “ontological difference” between being and beings, as it prefers control of the objects. This control provides a certain mastery over the object in a way that should otherwise exist outside the realm of philosophical possibilities. Subsequently, ontotheology, which aims to define a reason for the totality of beings ultimately finds a being, and decides how God will enter the (philosophical) discourse. More often than not, this identification of the where and how of God’s presence is described as causal, thus, ontotheology is often left with the identifier “prima causa,’ a First Being.” This cause results in a theological assessment in which God “must be the foundation or the explanation for the totality of beings. God cannot be anything else than that instance that saves the finite system from its own contingency and incoherency. And yes, this is what we call God or, rather, this is what we all called God.” Of course, as Schrijver notes in his essay, this opened Heidegger’s onto-theology to criticism from both sides. On one hand, there were those who rejected philosophy altogether, preferring a focus on revelation as “prior to reason.” And, on the other, Heidegger was celebrated as a philosophical success, dividing, finally, theology from

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443 Ibid.
444 Ibid., 303. Emphasis original.
445 Ibid. Emphasis original.
philosophy, a success for secularism. Approaching ontotheology in this way has provided Schrijver, Marion, Vattimo, Lacoste, and others the opportunity to examine ontotheology from a theological point of view. Schrijver and Marion, for example, subject ontotheology to a critique of idolatry, a theme common in Marion’s God Without Being and Being Given.

Heidegger’s questioning of modernity’s interpretation of Aristotle’s principle, as noted in Identity and Difference, is one that recognizes metaphysics as a “ground” for understanding Being and beings. Heidegger writes to this effect, “Therefore all metaphysics is at bottom, and from the ground up, what grounds, what gives account of the ground, what is called to account by the ground, and finally what calls the ground to account.” Onto-theology (or onto-theology) then becomes apparent and presumed necessary. Metaphysics is limited in its ability to traverse the depths of theology, psychology, ontology, and others.

Identifying the meaning of the Greek λόγος, -logy, requires one to move beyond the knowledge and limitations of metaphysics, a task the ‘science’ struggles to complete. Heidegger’s understanding acknowledges metaphysics’ place as an interpretation of knowledge or logic, without moving beyond the horizon of ground:

The original matter of thinking presents itself as the first case, the causa prima that corresponds to the reason-giving path back to the ultima ratio, the final accounting. The Being of beings is represented fundamentally, in the sense of the ground, only as causa sui. This is the metaphysical concept of God. Metaphysics must think in the direction of the deity because the matter of thinking is Being; but Being is in being as ground in diverse ways: as λόγος…as substance, as subject.

Yet, despite these seemingly appropriate distinctions between metaphysics and an onto-theology that aim to overcome the limits of metaphysics, Heidegger understands the two systems of

\[446\] Ibid.
\[447\] Ibid., 303, 05, 07-9, and 11-3 ; Marion, God without Being: Hors-Texte, and Marion, Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness.
\[448\] Heidegger, Identity and Difference, 58.
\[449\] Ibid., 59.
\[450\] Ibid., 60.
philosophy (metaphysics and onto-theo-logy) to be essentially the same.\textsuperscript{451} In fact, Heidegger argues there is a certain unity between the two, something that should be examined more closely.\textsuperscript{452}

It becomes even more problematic when discussing Being, which, according to Heidegger, extends beyond the horizon of metaphysics and the limits of an onto-theology. This becomes a theoretical conundrum when one considers the application onto-theo-logy has in relation to God (i.e., theological thought). If metaphysics aims to ‘ground’ the \textit{causa prima} or \textit{causa sui}, thereby making it the subject of human knowledge and equating it to being, as is commonly done in theology and philosophy, a definition of God becomes limited or confined to human perception. Thus, metaphysics essentially destroys the possible omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence of the Divine. This is certainly problematic in postmodern theology in which many ascribe to a post-metaphysical deity who influences from afar, perhaps best expressed as a form of spiritualism, versus the declarations a metaphysically driven knowledge system provides. Heidegger’s onto-theological work has since provided a pathway for postmodern thinkers to question the role of metaphysics as an epistemological system of governance, despite the hesitancy of scholars like Marion who acknowledge this was the only model available to Heidegger. Onto-theo-logy was equal to the modern conception of metaphysics, thereby limiting theological discourse.\textsuperscript{453}

\textsuperscript{451} For example, Heidegger writes, “The last syllable, -logy, means broadly and usually that we are dealing with the science of the soul, of living things, of the cosmos, of ancient things. But –logy hides more than just the logical in the sense of what is consistent and generally in the nature of a statement, what structures, moves, secures, and communicates all scientific knowledge. In each case, the –Logia is the totality of a nexus of grounds accounted for, within which nexus the objects of the sciences are represented in respect of their ground, that is, are conceived. Ontology, however, and theology are ‘Logies’ inasmuch as they provide the ground of beings as such and account for them within the whole. They account for Being as the ground of Beings. They account to the \(\lambda\dot{O}\sigma\), and are in an essential sense in accord with the \(\lambda\dot{O}\sigma\), that is they are the logic of the \(\lambda\dot{O}\sigma\). Thus they are more precisely called onto-logic and theo-logic. More rigorously and clearly thought out, metaphysics is: onto-logic,” ibid., 58-9.

\textsuperscript{452} ibid., 60-1.

\textsuperscript{453} Marion writes of Heidegger and Descartes, “today, the model of an onto-theo-logical constitution appears to be not only the most fruitful, but also one of the only ones available; it is not a question of imposing it on Descartes, but of using it to test in what ways Descartes is constituted according to a figure of onto-theo-logy. Reciprocally, in being applied to Descartes, the onto-theo-logical model will be subject to
theology has certainly been the topic of many dissertations following Heidegger’s authorship. Mindful of this, I wish to make clear that what has been presented here is in no way comprehensive of this, but is intended to show the importance this philosophy has had on postmodern philosophy, including the works of Vattimo and Marion. The final section of this chapter looks to this, the role of metaphysics, and the use of language in postmodern philosophy.

6. Jean-Luc Marion and Gianni Vattimo:

Introducing Concerns Regarding Metaphysics

The concerns Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, and others have had towards metaphysics, language, and postmodern philosophy carry over into the works of Jean-Luc Marion and Gianni Vattimo. Each philosopher offers his take on the problematic use of metaphysics as a philosophical system and chooses an alternative. Marion, throughout his work, turns to phenomenology—the ‘First Philosophy’—to treat various philosophical and theological topics. For example, he relies on phenomenology to critique Aristotle’s philosophy and Thomistic theology, in order to address the theological understanding of God and the limits metaphysics has in relation to the understanding of ‘Being/being.’ Vattimo, on the other hand, turns to Nietzsche’s works to suggest an overcoming of metaphysics, address the violence metaphysical systems encourage, and to present various theological ideas built upon the notion of ‘weak thought’ and the aforementioned overcoming of systematic (metaphysical) theology.

While this concluding section does not aim to present a comprehensive review of their work, it does offer a synopsis of their concerns regarding metaphysics. In short, the goal of this final section is to address the topics of metaphysics, language, phenomenology (in Marion’s work) and Church authority (in Vattimo’s work).

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6.1 Marion on Metaphysics and Phenomenology

Jean-Luc Marion’s understanding of metaphysics can be identified in his 1986 *On Descartes’ Metaphysical Prism*, where he defines metaphysics as the, “‘divine science or theology inasmuch as it considers the aforementioned “substances”—namely “…those things which are the most separate from matter…not only rationally, like the mathematical idealities, but also Being, as God and the separate intelligences are.”” More: it is called “metaphysics,” inasmuch as it considers being the attributes which naturally accompany being.” 454 In a later essay, “Metaphysics and Phenomenology,” 455 Marion argues that phenomenology can serve as a suitable substitute when asked to reason through various philosophical, or even theological issues. The theological work of Aquinas stands in contrast to the phenomenology Marion proposes. As I noted above, given Aquinas’ role as the formative thinker in Christian thought, we can accept his general definition of metaphysics, albeit adopted from Aristotle, which presents the distinction for being in general and the first being. 456 Once again, Aquinas’ adaptation of Aristotle’s philosophy has led others—Bonaventure, Suarez, and Kant—to likewise establish metaphysics as the distinct philosophical system for theological development and thought. Marion offers the following analysis regarding metaphysics, following Aquinas’ adaptations of Aristotle:

In both cases, metaphysics concerns being, whether it be common and apprehended as such or first and abstracted from matter. But when Kant considers the last scholastic tradition…what concept of metaphysics does he find? That which is offered to him…metaphysics no longer concerns being in its various states, but knowledge, which is taken in terms of the human understanding. 457

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455 Jean-Luc Marion, ”Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology,” *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 4 (1994).


In Marion’s assessment, metaphysics had changed from an intellectual system determined to differentiate Aristotle’s general being from the concept of first being, or Aquinas’ human being from the Divine Being. The historical change from an analytical system (a science for Aristotle) to a knowledge system set to define not only theology but also other facets of society, is critiqued by Marion and other postmodern philosophers, including Vattimo. This, of course, was not the intended purpose of metaphysics, but was rather a systematic change that would later shape theological discourse. Thus, acknowledging the intended use of the philosophy now proves difficult for postmodern philosophers.

In his most recent text on René Descartes’ philosophy, *On Descartes Metaphysical Prism*, Marion further elucidates the aforementioned problem; namely, metaphysics has been transformed from a pseudo-science to a *de facto* knowledge system. In light of these historical changes, and following his studies of Descartes and Martin Heidegger, Marion proposes a step forward. Proceeding beyond metaphysical thought as a system of knowledge, Marion identifies the centrality of the concept of onto-theology: “Besides the scholastic concept that articulates metaphysics in an ontology (or general metaphysics) and a special metaphysics (divided into rational theology, psychology, and cosmology), we have retained the model proposed by Heidegger, that of an onto-theo-logical constitution of metaphysics.”

Moreover, his approach to theology, though held suspect by Janicaud and others mentioned earlier, can be described as a philosophical one, insofar as it separates itself from the emotional aspects attributed to religion and religious worship. Marion’s focus, when addressing theology

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Ibid., 4. In this particular context, Marion is using onto-theo-logy (or ontotheology) to converse with Descartes’ understanding of metaphysics. See also, Dahlstrom.

In this case, the philosophical study of a religion or its theology—for example, general aspects of Roman Catholicism as a tradition—should exist void of the neurological and emotional connections pious
in this way, is addressed via the function of phenomenology as ‘first philosophy.’ Relying on this philosophical understanding, Marion questions the use of metaphysics as the guiding principle for philosophy. Phenomenology permits Marion to overcome the idolatry associated with traditional metaphysics and onto-theo-logy. As first philosophy, phenomenology challenges metaphysics by showing “the possibility of all phenomena appearing as proper objects of philosophical inquiry.”\footnote{Jones, 79}

Whereas metaphysics attempts, unsuccessfully, to give a logical reason for an object’s existence, its composition, or its source, phenomenology reacts differently, permitting the object to give itself as itself.\footnote{Marion, Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness, 5. Jones offers the following note on this point: “Marion summarizes the argument of [Being Given] thus: ‘What shows itself, first gives itself—this is my one and only theme.’ Being Given is understood explicitly by Marion to be a defense and recirculation of many of the themes developed in [Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology], justifying the privilege Marion affords ‘givenness’ and using an expanded notion of the ‘saturated phenomenon’ as the test case for pure givenness,” in Jones, 90.}

Janicaud and others critique this approach to phenomenology, something with which Marion appears frustrated on other occasions.\footnote{Graham Ward, "Between Postmodernism and Postmodernity: The Theology of Jean-Luc Marion," in Postmodernity, Sociology and Religion, ed. Kieran Flanagan (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 190-205.} The point here is to demonstrate the varied approach phenomenology—specifically Marion’s understanding of givenness and phenomena—presents in comparison to the metaphysics outlined above via Church documents and the language arguments Glock and others offer.

Likewise, theology deserves the opportunity to overcome the metaphysical (and therefore metanarrative) inheritance it has received. On several occasions Marion suggests that God can be ‘received,’ for lack of a better term, as a phenomenon or as phenomena. Regardless of his critics’
resolve to keep theology out of phenomenology completely, Marion has turned to the question of God, framing the discussion not in metaphysics, but this first philosophy:

The question of God does not begin with metaphysics. But it seems—or at least it was able to appear—that since metaphysics was coming to an end, being completed, and disappearing, the question of God was coming to a close. Throughout the century that is now ending, everything happened as if the question of God could do nothing other than make common cause, positively or negatively, with the destiny of metaphysics. Everything also happened as if, in order to keep the question of God open so as to permit a ‘rational worship’ of him (Rom. 12:1), it was absolutely necessary to stick to the strictly metaphysical meaning of all philosophy.  

The role of metaphysics in postmodern theology is of concern to Marion throughout his collective works. For instance, in “Metaphysics and Phenomenology,” metaphysics is examined through a variety of philosophical and theological developments: the positive approach of Hegel and negative approach of Nietzsche; the ability of phenomenology to overcome metaphysics common in philosophy; and/or the role of metaphysics in speculative theology (e.g., that of St. Thomas Aquinas). Despite the questions Marion raises, he does not suggest a complete end to metaphysics. Rather, he recognizes the historical importance it has had on the development of Christian theology. The collective works of Aristotle, Aquinas, and Suarez—in which they accept metaphysics as the science, which separates the divine from the ordinary—is recognized by Marion as a byproduct of the Middle Ages. Furthermore, their collective works, with respect to metaphysics, would later be expanded upon in order to develop a distinct separation between the ordinary and divine. “This duality of one and the same science that treats simultaneously of beings par excellence and of being in general will lead, with the ‘scholastic metaphysics’ [Schulmetaphysik] of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to the canonical scheme of ‘metaphysics’ as divided into metaphysica generalis (sive ontologia) and metaphysica specialis

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463 Marion, "Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology," 572.
464 Ibid., 573.
465 Ibid., 576.
The result is a simple definition of the separation between human and divine: “the system of philosophy from Suarez to Kant as a single science bearing at one and the same time on the universal of common being and on the being (or the beings) par excellence. This textual fact seems hard to contest.”

Likewise, and of interest to this topic, Marion turns to Heidegger’s work, specifically *Identity and Difference*, in order to highlight the tension metaphysics has in addressing two aspects within the same science (e.g., common being and being par excellence). Marion offers a review of metaphysics as it relates to being par excellence, common being, and onto-theo-logy worth quoting at length here:

> In and beyond the scholastic notion of ‘metaphysics,’ the onto-theo-logical constitution thus brings out the ultimate concept of ‘metaphysics’ by recognizing its unity in the intersecting conciliation of the ground (by beings as such) with the ground in the mode of causality (by the supreme being). We admit to having at our disposal no other rigorous determination of ‘metaphysics,’ that is, no other determination that is historically confirmed and conceptually operative. Because the determination remains precise it renders thinkable the possibility of ‘metaphysics’ as also its impossibility. And for this reason, too, the determination eventually renders intelligible the relief that goes beyond the metaphysics and takes it up again in a higher figure.

The historical prominence of metaphysics is important, insofar as one recognizes its role in the development of Christian theology. Nevertheless, the question of ‘the end of metaphysics,’ or at least the overcoming of metaphysics, is possible. Relying on the philosophical works of Nietzsche and his critique of Platonism, and complementing the work of Heidegger, Marion contends that metaphysics is limited in its inability to separate the two ideas of being. *Metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis* are thereby questioned in terms of their function as a method interested in investigating the two forms of being and their relationship to one another. Marion relies on

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466 Ibid., 574.
467 Ibid., 575.
468 Ibid., 576.
469 See also, Friedrich Nietzsche, “'Reason' in Philosophy, Twilight of the Idols; or, How One Philosophizes with a Hammer,” in *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Penguin, 1982), 481.
Heidegger’s understanding of common being and being par excellence, acknowledging that the two, according to metaphysics, are connected to one another.

In Nietzsche’s critique of metaphysics, however, the two concepts cannot be entwined; rather, he disputes any notion of a being par excellence having interest in the common being. Thus, metaphysics is broken down to a meaningless science if it is solely exploring the connection between being common and being par excellence: “This double disqualification if finally unified in the single identification between becoming (common being, metaphysica generalis) and Being (the being par excellence, metaphysica specialis): ‘To impose the seal of Being on becoming...—the height of speculation!’ Nothing can ground since nothing calls for or necessitates a ground. Metaphysics no longer has grounds for being, nor Being a metaphysical ground.”

Recognizing the separation that must exist between being par excellence and common being permits Nietzsche to “confirm negatively” Heidegger’s definition of metaphysics. For Marion, the historical and conceptual definition of metaphysics therefore invites speculation, especially given its place as the de facto philosophical science for many.

Metaphysics nonetheless contains limitations and is rightfully questioned as a ‘science’ tasked with exploring dense philosophical and theological thought. If one accepts the premise that metaphysics’ primary task is to explore being par excellence and being common, and thereby constitute the two, the science itself is flawed. This is essentially the approach Heidegger and Nietzsche articulate in their work. The definition-by-definition is a failure unto itself, as it does nothing to differentiate the presumed causa sui from the being par excellence and being

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471 Marion, "Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology," 577.
Likewise, an analogy or example fails to present metaphysics as a suitable tool aiming to differentiate the two forms of being. Marion substantiates this claim and the claim of Heidegger and Nietzsche, stating: “This limitation of ‘metaphysics’ is all the stronger, first, insofar as it results directly from its definition, which is maintained but turned back against itself, and, next, insofar as a mere suspicion (why ask why?) and not even a demonstration is enough for metaphysics to be invalidated in point of fact.” These limitations lead Marion to conclude, definitively, that metaphysics has ended. However, this ‘end’ for Heidegger and Marion does not mean that it no longer holds sway or carries with it a purpose: “the end itself remains fertile with a still-intact purpose for philosophy. The transitivity of ‘metaphysics’ leads not only to its ‘end’ but also to its own overcoming—more than a metaphysics at its limits, a meta-metaphysics.”

If metaphysics were to ‘continue,’ whereby it would attempt to distinguish being common and being par excellence, the ultimate arrival point would be ‘God.’ In this context, ‘God’ is recognized as being par excellence in metaphysica specialis and ensures a relationship (ground) “for every common being.” Borrowing from Nietzsche, Marion notes that this ‘end of metaphysics’ thereby “provokes the ‘death’ of this ‘God.’” Metaphysics’ role in provoking the death of God is something Marion and others will suggest as a possibility, given metaphysics’ delineation of the Divine using language that is essentially limited. Given the limits metaphysics imposes on philosophy and the Divinity of God, Marion writes,

At the very least, it is impossible today not to admit if only the possibility of suspicion. Now, it is this simple possibility that suffices to recognize, in the ‘end of metaphysics,’ the ‘death of God.’ For the divinity of God should not be capable of lacking. If therefore it is lacking, if only

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472 Ibid., 579.
473 Ibid., 578.
474 Ibid., 579.
475 Ibid.
476 Ibid.
imperceptibly, then God is already no longer at issue—but rather ‘God,’ who by his quotation marks is stigmatized as an idol.\textsuperscript{477}

This understanding, addressed further in chapter three, calls into question the legitimacy of metaphysics as it relates to language surrounding God. In short, the idol fails to personify the god, despite attempts to do so (for example, through the use of language). The idol does nothing more than represent an idolic image of the divine, leaving the god at a distance beyond the horizon of human comprehension; the god thereby remains an unknown.\textsuperscript{478}

On the other hand, phenomenology—according to Heidegger, Husserl, and Marion—permits the given-ness of the object only after it encounters the intuition. “Phenomenology calls this encounter a donation: intuition gives the phenomenon, the phenomenon gives itself through intuition. To be sure, this donation can always be examined…it can never be questioned or denied, except by the authority of another intuitive donation.”\textsuperscript{479} For Marion, this understanding of how one’s intuition is overcome by the donation of a phenomenon permits him to argue on behalf of phenomenology as the “principle of principles.”\textsuperscript{480} His understanding is further explicated when articulating the origin of intuition as present from the beginning: “The ‘principle of principles’ posits that in the beginning…there is only intuition; but insofar as it gives every phenomenon and initiates phenomenology in general, intuition is at work prior to any a priori as an originary a posteriori…in other words, what takes the place of a principle, namely intuition as donation, always precedes the consciousness of it that we receive as after the fact.”\textsuperscript{481}

\textsuperscript{477} Ibid. See also Marion, \textit{The Idol and Distance: Five Studies}, 1. and Marion, \textit{God without Being: Hors-Texte}.
\textsuperscript{478} Marion, \textit{The Idol and Distance: Five Studies}, 5-6.
\textsuperscript{479} Marion, "Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology," 581.
\textsuperscript{480} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{481} Ibid., 581-2.
Marion’s philosophical review of metaphysics then goes on to reassert the “death of God” declaration introduced earlier. Similar to other postmodern philosophers, Marion equates the “death of God” with the “end of metaphysics,” whereby the role of metaphysics as the system of thought governing philosophy is overcome. Whether or not philosophy is able to completely overcome metaphysics remains outside the scope of Marion’s article, “Metaphysics and Phenomenology,” though he does suggest phenomenology—specifically that which develops from Heidegger’s *Being and Time* and Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*—as a proper method in which the pseudo-science is overcome. The attempts to overcome metaphysics rest in the given-ness of the thing itself—its “donation” to the intuition of the individual. Quoting Husserl, Marion writes,

There is phenomenology when and only when a statement gives a phenomenon to be seen; what does not appear in one fashion or another does not enter into consideration. To understand is to ultimately see…[Husserl] posits the ‘principle of principles,’ which states ‘that every originarily donating intuition is a source of right for cognition, that everything that offers itself *sich darbietet* to us in originary “intuition” (so to speak, in its flesh actuality) must be received exactly as it gives itself out to be *als was es sich (da) gibt*.’ To be realized as a phenomenon signifies being given in an actuality without reserve, a ‘flesh [*leibhaft*] actuality.’

Whereas metaphysics works to analyze the object as it relates to being, to the individual assessing it, or via other ‘scientific’ processes, phenomenology permits the intuition of the individual to allow it to “donate” itself. Metaphysics works to define the object according to common being or being par excellence, as noted above. Centuries worth of metaphysical discourse have developed an analytical way in which something is defined. This is explicitly evident in the theological developments of the Roman Catholic Church, noted in the analysis of past ecclesial documents earlier in this chapter.

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482 Ibid., 579-80. See also Jones, 10-11. Jones notes Marion’s retrieval of the patristic authors, and others, in his attempt to overcome the metaphysical language found in Christian theology, in ibid., 11-2.
483 Marion, “Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology,” 580-1.
484 See also, Friedo Ricken, “Postmetaphysical Reason and Religion,” in *An Awareness of What Is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age*, ed. Jürgen Habermas (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010), 54-5. Ricken offers commentary on Benedict XVI’s controversial address at the University of Regensburg in
6.2 Vattimo on Metaphysics and Philosophy

Similar to the concerns Marion’s phenomenology and theology raises, Gianni Vattimo approaches metaphysics with skepticism, especially as a system that operates as the guiding body of doctrine within the Roman Catholic Church and other aspects of life. As I have outlined previously, one of the main concerns postmodern thinkers have with metaphysics is its reliance on language. Relying on Heidegger and Nietzsche, Vattimo appears reluctant to accept any system that relies on language to articulate a body of knowledge, specifically one that aims to promote faith or belief in a higher power. Rather, the postmodern approach is one that echoes Nietzsche’s ‘death of God’ assertion and likewise accepts a dismissal of metaphysics: “I argue instead that the Nietzschean announcement of the death of God and the Heideggerian announcement (let me stress the character of announcement: neither a theory nor a thesis) of the end of metaphysics can provide the general framework for characterizing late-modern experience.”

In place of metaphysics, science has become the source of knowledge and information sharing, according to Vattimo. Heidegger’s “move beyond metaphysics” is an action that “reflects the theoretical impossibility of thinking about human existence with the concepts inherited from tradition,” and thus, beyond the historical organization of society. In short, this end of metaphysics has caused an epistemological shift in the postmodern approach to religion, science, and more: “the end of metaphysics is not merely the discovery, by a philosophy or by a school of thought, that Being is not the objectivity to which science has reduced it. It is above all associated with a series of events that have transformed our existence, of which post-metaphysical philosophy

2006. The pope emeritus’ statements addressed and emphasized the role of metaphysics as a system of theological governance in the Catholic Church.

485 Vattimo, After Christianity, 12.
486 Ibid., 14.
gives an interpretation rather than an objective description.”\(^{487}\) Approaching thought in this way unites the Nietzschean notion of the ‘death of God’ and Heidegger’s understanding of the end of metaphysics, validating the two ideas.\(^{488}\)

One of Vattimo’s concerns regarding metaphysics, borrowing from Nietzsche, is a theme common to postmodern philosophy; namely, the limitations of language. As noted by Glock, Nietzsche and other nineteenth century German philosophers are skeptical of language systems because of their tendency to promote allegories, create illusion, and declare something definitive because it fits a society’s body of language. To this point, Vattimo offers the following on Nietzsche:

\[\text{[He] asserted the metaphorical character of language: everybody associates freely a mental image with an object and a sound. Nietzsche illustrates how the obligation to ‘lie by following an instituted role,’ that is, by adopting the master’s metaphors as the only proper language, arose only through the institution of society and of a cast of masters.}^{489}\]

In Vattimo’s assessment, pluralism—at least in the religious understanding of this notion—results in the dissolution of hierarchical systems of language. Certainly, this is a direct challenge to the anti-modernist and anti-pluralist papal documents outlined above; for example, the language employed in *Dominus Iesus*.\(^{490}\) Religious and cultural pluralism offer additional systems of language and pictures, which in turn permits new ideas in place of traditionally Western notions. Applying this practice to religion, as Vattimo does in *After Christianity*, these new language systems open the doors to new understandings of the Divine, God, or an otherwise relevant

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\(^{487}\) Ibid., 15.

\(^{488}\) Ibid.

\(^{489}\) Ibid., 16.

\(^{490}\) Regarding this type of language, Vattimo writes, “The demise of hierarchical principles and norms is, at least, sufficiently clear in the theoretical discourse of philosophy, literary criticism, and several genres of writing. We have at our disposal not only the explicit theory of the end of metanarratives advanced by Lyotard but also the theories of redescription such as Rorty’s, who believes it is necessary for human culture to generate infinite redescriptions so that ‘the conversation might continue,’” thus limiting the dogmatic formulations institutions develop, in ibid., 17.
identifier. He is aware, however, that these new ideas may also cause a good deal of trepidation alongside the hope non-Western cultures bring to the conversation.  

Varying from Marion, who uses phenomenology in place of metaphysics in his theological discourse, Vattimo approaches theology through the lens of history, projecting a Christianity that is free of its metaphysical confines. The status of Christianity according to Vattimo, especially following Nietzsche’s statement “God is dead,” is one that necessitates that abandonment of metaphysics as the underlying premise of the faith itself. Instead, a return or revival of the faith tradition based on the Bible is put forward.

Nietzsche writes that God is dead because those who believe in him have killed him. In other words, the faithful, who have learned not to lie because it was God’s command, have discovered in the end that God himself is a superfluous lie. However, in light of our postmodern experience, this means: since God can no longer be upheld as an ultimate foundation, as the absolute metaphysical structure of the real, it is possible, once again, to believe in God. True, it is not the God of metaphysics or of medieval scholasticism. But that is not the God of the Bible, of the Book that was dissolved and dismissed by modern rationalist and absolutist metaphysics. The post-metaphysics suggested here opens the door to a faith where God is no longer mystified through complex proofs to his existence, substance, and/or nature, but one where the faithful recognize, as scripture states, that God became human. The absolute and foreign concept of God, found throughout the metaphysics of Aquinas, Bonaventure, and others, is dismissed, favoring instead a recognition of the Incarnation: “the kenosis, the self-lowering of God” in the human Jesus of Nazareth. The kenotic act here, according to Vattimo, is itself a form of secularization; God interacting as a human in human society without the absoluteness demanded in and through metaphysics.

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491 “It is possible that the demise of proper language and of hierarchy of world pictures has provoked a phenomenon of rejection, thus creating a need to return to some forms of belonging that are at the same time as reassuring and as dreadful as all forms of fatherhood. We may add to these phenomena, on the one hand, the popularity acquired by the Roman pope [John Paul II] because of his contribution to the collapse of communist dictatorships,” in ibid., 18.
492 Ibid., 6.
493 Ibid., 67.
Moreover, this post-metaphysical Christianity focuses on the biblical and spiritual practices of the individual versus the following of doctrinal principles. Vattimo arrives at this idea in *After Christianity*, after focusing on the twelfth century mystic, Joachim of Fiore. The mystic argued in favor of three ages of Christianity, the third of which is a Post-Christianity, one no longer satisfied by doctrinal statements or the lived experience of salvation history (the presumed current age), but a secular and spiritual experience of Christianity. The post-metaphysical approach Vattimo and others attempt today still resides in the earlier era of salvation history, but moves closer and closer to the third, mysterious era. Vattimo expands this idea further:

> What happens to philosophy with the end of metaphysics also belongs to the history of salvation construed by Joachim at the moment of the ‘third age.’ I have repeatedly said that I do not intend to follow Joachim of Fiore in his too literal, insufficiently ‘spiritual’ effort to forecast future events on the basis of complex symbolic deciphering of scripture texts. What seems still valid in his teaching, from the perspective of a postmetaphysical philosophy, is the idea that the history of salvation occurs today as the spiritualization of Christianity.  

Joachim of Fiore’s approach to Christianity and Vattimo’s interpretation of his work stands in stark contrast to the authoritative ecclesial documents explored above. The articulation of spiritualism over the declarations made throughout *Pascendi Dominini Gregis, Fides et Ratio, Dominus Iesus*, and other documents is certainly alarming when compared to these traditional, metaphysical, and authoritarian approaches. Put simply, Vattimo favors the complete dissolution of metaphysical and ecclesial authority: “The active presence of the Christian heritage is recognized only if the literal, and authoritarian, interpretation of the Bible is abandoned.”  

Whether or not this overcoming of metaphysics could actually happen, is something debated by his detractors and a topic discussed in a later chapter. That said, Vattimo carries this anti-authoritarianism and traditionalism beyond scripture or spiritualism, stating that the faithful should

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494 Ibid., 44.  
495 Ibid., 47.
recognize that there is a great deal more to the Christian faith than the male-only priesthood, the top-down structure that exists within the Church, and the exclusivity of the “Official Churches” from their non-Christian or unofficial Church neighbors.\footnote{Ibid.}

Though Vattimo challenges the traditional and hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church, his other concerns regarding postmodern philosophy and theology relate to the use of metaphysics as a language system. In his review of Nietzsche and the notion of “historical malady,” Vattimo refers to the current limited use of language systems to convey a philosophical idea, similar to the presentation Glock offers.\footnote{Gianni Vattimo, \textit{The Adventure of Difference: Philosophy after Nietzsche and Heidegger}, trans. Cyprian Blamires and Thomas Harrison (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 10.} Vattimo understands Nietzsche’s arguments surrounding ‘historical malady’ to imply “an inability to create new history. The ‘historical’ nature of the malady reflects both its concern with historiography and its involvement with history as \textit{res gestae} – negatively, for it amounts to an inability to generate history of one’s own, because of an obsession with the science of things past.”\footnote{Ibid.} Vattimo’s comments reflect both Nietzsche’s nineteenth century concerns regarding the limitations of language as well as the modern and postmodern concerns regarding metaphysics. The “obsession” with the historical inheritance of the past is further exacerbated when institutions, like the Roman Catholic Church, dominate historical thought and rely on metaphysics to dictate modern principles.\footnote{Vattimo writes, “According to Nietzsche, that purity and naturalness of the relationship between life and history so characteristic of the tragic epoch of the Greeks was subsequently degraded ‘by science, by the demand that history should be a science,’” in ibid., 11.} This limited approach creates the historical malady in which no new history can be suggested, while also resulting in stagnation and a repetitive approach to various human-led events. In contrast, Nietzsche, argues
Vattimo, prefers a philosophical approach that requires more observation and immersion versus the role of an innocent bystander.\textsuperscript{500}

Vattimo’s focus on historical malady, the limitations of metaphysics, and the errors of modern language, demonstrates the dispute postmodernity has with limited systems of authority and historically centered science, meaning science which has no basis in modern scientific discovery, but rather relies on past assumptions and limited observations. Moving beyond the metaphysical or historical horizon permits one to look past the historical malady or the limited language system governing it:

[Any] definition of a horizon is possible both as an act of forgetting and at the same time as an act of interior rational articulation; every historical configuration amounts to forgetting inasmuch as it leaves outside its own sphere all ‘the rest’ of history and moreover forgets that it is itself surrounded by darkness. But the articulation of what is illuminated, in imposing itself as an exigency that is universal, and no longer merely intrinsic to a horizon, tends to dispel the darkness on which it lives, so that both creativity and capacity to produce history become enfeebled and die.\textsuperscript{501}

Vattimo’s articulation of what Nietzsche presents regarding historical malady in \textit{Untimely Meditations}, then shifts to Nietzsche’s use of religion and art as “remedies for the historical malady and more particularly for the domination of science.”\textsuperscript{502} In this case, religion and art serve as items that extend beyond the conflicts found in history, so long as they are understood as both “suprahistorical” and “unhistorical.”\textsuperscript{503} Otherwise, they are seen as lacking, with only science being able to step beyond the horizon of human history and conflict.\textsuperscript{504}

\textsuperscript{500} The sort of creativity and historical productivity that Nietzsche wants to describe is rather an equilibrium between unconscious and conscious knowing, between a pure responding to the demands of life and an ‘objective’ reflection that ‘things, rethinks, compares, distinguishes, puts together – in other words, that fulfills [sic] the functions of ’reason,’ in ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{501} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{503} Vattimo, \textit{The Adventure of Difference: Philosophy after Nietzsche and Heidegger}, 16.
\textsuperscript{504} Vattimo, \textit{Nietzsche: An Introduction}, 51.
Vattimo continues his study of Nietzsche and metaphysics in *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, in which he offers the philosopher’s idea of the world as an ultimately flawed place: “‘That which we now call the world is the outcome of a host of errors and fantasies which have gradually arisen and grown entwined with another in the course of the overall evolution of the organic being…””  

At the outset of *Human, All Too Human*, according to Vattimo, Nietzsche relies on historical philosophy to deconstruct morality—understood by Nietzsche as “‘higher’ spiritual forms”—thereby permitting the deconstruction of metaphysics. Nietzsche’s early dismissal of metaphysics, addressed in the first aphorism of *Human, All Too Human*, demonstrates the philosopher’s distrust of metaphysics as metanarratives because of their tendency to assert particular attributes or themes on people. Nietzsche writes,

> Almost all the problems of philosophy once again pose the same form of question as they did two thousand years ago: how can something originate in its opposite, for example rationality in irrationality, the sentient in the dead, logic in unlogic, disinterested contemplation in covetous desire, living for others in egoism, truth in error? Metaphysical philosophy has hitherto surmounted this difficulty by denying that the one originates in the other and assuming for the more highly valued thing a miraculous source in the very kernel and being of the ‘thing in itself.’”  

The use of metaphysics in philosophy is thereby problematic for Nietzsche and Vattimo. Vattimo’s understanding of metaphysics, not only in *Nietzsche: An Introduction*, but several of his other texts, is one that positions the philosophical method as an authoritative system of governance for both philosophy and theology. It does little to promote the positive attributes plurality (religious or otherwise) can offer society or contribute to the postmodern preference against metanarratives declared by decree from an institutional system. Nevertheless, morality, according to Vattimo and Nietzsche remains firmly grounded in a tradition such as Christianity, which

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argues, “there is no final arbiter of actions – except God”—this despite the concept of free will and individuality.\(^{509}\)

The question raised later by Vattimo and Nietzsche in his *The Gay Science*, is whether or not the systems we have become accustomed to—metaphysical theology—offer a worthwhile way in which one may ‘encounter’ the Divine.

We have now reached a point in the self-sublimation of morality which leads to the proposition: ‘God is dead.’ This proposition is first proclaimed in *The Gay Science* (GS §108, 145 and §125, 158ff.). God has been slain by religious men out of piety and devotion (cf. GS §357, 282).\(^{510}\)

The post-metaphysical approach here differs from the traditional approach outlined in the ecclesial documents above. It does not, however, establish a dismissal of God, as some might interpret Nietzsche’s statement, ‘God is dead.’ Rather, as Vattimo explains, Nietzsche’s approach to metaphysics as a theological and philosophical system is to consider it a flawed one at best. In turn, metaphysics’ historical place has been one in which the Church, as well as countless theologians and philosophers, have relied on, for example, Platonic, Aristotelean, and Thomistic theories in order to produce a ‘fable’ suitable for humanity. Nietzsche’s objection, explains Vattimo, is that it has since failed:

Nietzsche sees a connection between the process in question here and a kind of inner logic at work in moral-metaphysical discourse. The process does, however, also have an ‘outer’ basis in the way the general conditions have changed on account of the discipline introduced by morality, and they have changed so much that ultimately morality becomes redundant and its superfluousness becomes apparent. For this reason among others, the pronouncement ‘God is dead’ is not, in Nietzsche’s case, simply a metaphysical denial of his existence. For it is not a statement concerning the ‘true structure’ of reality, in which God does not exist while people believe that He does. Instead, conditions have altered and have rendered a fable superfluous, which in other ages was useful and decisively important. The new conditions make other ‘fables’ possible, indeed they make possible a more explicit and self-conscious ‘yarn spinning’ (GS §54, 90f…).\(^{511}\)

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\(^{510}\) Ibid., 75.

\(^{511}\) Ibid., 76.
Nietzsche concludes that these types of fables no longer are sufficient for his epoch, especially when metaphysics is relied upon to convey these stories. A new form of human existence, in Vattimo’s estimation, is what Nietzsche is calling for; one that maintains a strict moral code, upholding values that promote the well being of those within a society, while dismissing the metanarratives, which had previously governed, said community. \(^{512}\) It must be made clear, however, that neither Vattimo or Nietzsche, in the pronouncement and affirmation of the ‘Death of God’ is proclaiming “the non-existence of a God;”\(^ {513}\) rather, it is a transformative event in which one recognizes the short-comings of an ontological system intent on connecting God and being.

7. Conclusion

Vattimo’s review of Nietzsche’s philosophy offers the reader, the amateur philosopher, the chance to reconsider the idea of God and the response one gives to that deity. Vattimo’s lengthy summation of historical malady, historical philosophy, and linguistics presents an opportunity for systematic theologians to reengage a tradition (metaphysics) that for so long has governed and therefore limited theological commentary. Adopting either Marion or Vattimo’s approach to philosophy or theology presents postmodern theologians a platform upon which they can revisit centuries-old traditions outside the confines of metaphysics and, as suggested in the first chapter, meet those individuals who are seeking ‘something’ that is both historically grounded (Christianity) but challenges the traditional metanarratives found in institutions like the Roman Catholic Church.

The following two chapters will explore the work of Marion and Vattimo further, emphasizing their attempts to overcome metaphysics as the body of language in philosophy and theology. The chapters will also turn to their ‘praxis theology,’ that is, their emphasis on caritas

\(^{512}\) Ibid., 78.
\(^{513}\) Ibid., 85.
or *charity* as a central theme to postmodern Christianity. Nevertheless, this project remains mindful of the continued traditionalism many in the Church espouse, the influence of internal ecclesial institutions such as the CDF and the Pontifical Council for Culture, as well as the lingering authoritarianism of previous pontiffs, despite the positive changes taking place under Pope Francis. The phenomenological and philosophical work of Marion and Vattimo offer narrative systems, which in turn wrestle with traditional Thomism, challenge Church authority, and offer a foundation for Christianity grounded in charity. Approaching Christianity in this way may inculcate a conversation with theologians who, historically, have been shunned or rejected by the Church because of their ‘controversial’ work and as McCaffery suggests, offers an opportunity to return to religion in Europe and the Americas.
CHAPTER THREE
JEAN-LUC MARION’S PHENOMENOLOGY

1. Introduction

As I noted in chapter two, the modern Roman Catholic Church has sought to identify and assert the correlation between faith and reason (theology and philosophy). John Paul II’s *Fides et Ratio* is just one of the documents supporting this assertion. Several postmodern philosophers, however, have challenged this notion, suggesting that philosophy cannot be a source of authority in theological thinking. The primacy granted to reason—particularly metaphysical philosophy—is of utmost concern to many of these scholars (including Emmanuel Lévinas, Jean-Luc Marion, and Gianni Vattimo). These philosophers and theologians look to challenge the place of metaphysics raising questions related to the importance given to this philosophy, the primacy of cogito, and by extension, reason. They have also worked to develop various philosophies, which emphasize revelation and phenomenology in their theological projects—departing from the traditional Thomistic metaphysics.

Additionally, Jean-Luc Marion’s theological phenomenology, though contested by some of his contemporaries, introduces the possibility of locating a theology outside traditional metaphysics. Though his philosophy is grounded in the faith and tradition of the patristics—and acknowledges the debt owed to metaphysics as a philosophical method for early Christainity—the post-metaphysical critique Marion offers initiates new narratives for discovery of the Divine. His work presents a unique theology of God, one that demonstrates his concept of the ‘saturated phenomenon’ and provides a series of definitions for the idol and icon as they relate to theology. His phenomenology, I suggest, likewise offers a theology that aligns with the narrative of

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514 See, for example, Marion, *God without Being: Hors-Texte*, x.
515 McCaffery, 114.
'believing without belonging' and/or belief in ‘something,’ two concepts introduced in the previous chapters. This, of course, is compared to the metaphysically driven definitions popular in the theology of Aquinas and the metaphysics of Aristotle.

This chapter, therefore, aims to present Marion’s thought as a worthwhile supplement to the traditional notions of faith and reason averred by the Roman Church. The narrative option Marion provides is one that offers faith adherents an opportunity to engage theology in a phenomenological and “intuition-flooding” format. Secondly, this chapter provides an overview of Marion’s understanding of *caritas*, a central theme for Christianity and one that I champion as the central axiom of this religious tradition. Offering Marion’s conception of *caritas* provides a postmetaphysical definition, one that encourages the biblical message espoused by Christ and his disciples without relying on the Church’s concept of reason as central to that understanding.

As I have noted throughout the first two chapters, the Roman Catholic Church is facing drastic changes in terms of its cultural identity. Likewise, and as noted above, ‘postmodernity’ has begun to reshape the Church both in terms of participation and ideology. Specifically, postmodernity has begun to break down the grand narratives, the *meta-narratives*, embedded in society—including those of the Roman Catholic Church. The second chapter illustrated the concerns with the underlying philosophical system upon which the Church has relied, namely metaphysics. The metaphysical concerns of Jean-Luc Marion and Gianni Vattimo therefore come to the forefront, allowing a discussion as to how the postmetaphysical desire to escape this form of religious authority opens the possibilities of other systems to participate in theological discourse. Phenomenology, as a supplement to metaphysics, is suggested as a suitable dialogue partner for theology in this chapter. Focusing on the philosophical project of Jean-Luc Marion—and those who have influenced his phenomenology—establishes a genuine body of work that
serves theology in a postmetaphysical way. It emphasizes experience and “givenness” versus questions and proofs.

As an active scholar, Marion continues to give lectures, publish, and teach, leaving this project ‘incomplete,’ understanding that his ideas are bound to be expanded upon and developed further. Additionally, Marion’s contemporaries and detractors—Robyn Horner, Christina Gschwandtner, Tamsin Jones, Emmanuel Falque, Dominique Janicaud, and many others—continue to develop his ideas and explore the impact of his scholarship. This chapter does examine Marion’s phenomenology as a philosophical system that challenges metaphysics, especially as it relates to theology. I begin this chapter by exploring Marion’s critique of metaphysics, relying on his analysis of Descartes, who later aids his development of a phenomenology that aims to overcome metaphysics with the experience(s) of phenomena. In other words, the focus of Marion’s philosophy is one that attempts to avoid metaphysics, instead opting for the experience of what gives itself to one’s intuition. Second, I note the influence of Edmund Husserl, with special emphasis placed on givenness, transcendence, and intuition. Marion’s phenomenology, I argue, is an amalgamation of these philosophical ideas, which is often mixed with theology. Third, Emmanuel Lévinas is recognized as an influential philosopher in Marion’s works, specifically his understanding of a phenomenology centered on ethics and the Other. The attention given to Lévinas’ work demonstrates Marion’s distinction of the being-Being dichotomy introduced by Heidegger.

Marion’s work, however, does not come without opposition: Dominique Janicaud critiques Marion’s phenomenology insofar as it challenges the original phenomenology proposed by Husserl and supported by other philosophers (e.g., Heidegger, Nietzsche, Kant, etc.). Nevertheless, I suggest that Marion’s phenomenology, specifically that which discourses with theology, has its
place in postmodernity, especially for those seeking something beyond the metaphysical and authoritarian model proposed by institutions such as the Roman Catholic Church—I state this, acknowledging Marion’s devout Catholicism and his defense of the role of the bishop in *God Without Being*. Subsequently, an examination of Marion’s phenomenology is offered with special emphasis given to his work on givenness, intuition, the saturated phenomenon, being and God, ethics, most of which challenges the traditional (i.e., Thomistic) forms of philosophy (metaphysics).

The chapter is divided into two parts that reflect Jean-Luc Marion’s scholarship. The first part examines the influence of René Descartes, Edmund Husserl, and Emmanuel Lévinas. Exploring these authors allows us to identify what aspects of philosophy they influenced and, in turn, helped shape Marion’s own phenomenological project. The second part explores directly the phenomenology of Marion. The project is especially interested in Marion’s work dedicated to the saturated phenomenon, its relationship to God, and his dialogue with theology. Each of these topics, I maintain, is in part a response to metaphysics. As with the first two chapters, I am primarily arguing against the need for an authority-driven philosophy such as metaphysics, as it relates to a postmodern theology. Instead, a dialogue partner like Marion’s phenomenology can stimulate theology in the postmodern era.

**Part I: Influencing Marion’s Phenomenology**

**2. Marion and Metaphysics**

As I introduced in the previous chapter, Jean-Luc Marion’s philosophical projects have been concerned with metaphysics and the reliance on the philosophical system as the underlying tool for religious discourse. Metaphysics has been the system used for theological discourse dating back to Leo XIII and “the *ordo rerum futurus*.” Subsequent pontiffs and theologians have applauded metaphysics as the language system necessary for the Church to articulate its
theological message. Moreover, metaphysics has also resulted in the authoritative message Catholic theology has developed dating back to Leo XII, Pius IX, and others. Marion’s concern regarding the use of metaphysics, specifically as it relates to the discussion of God, is that it falls short of adequately encountering the Divine. Marion instead moves to a phenomenology that offers a different and even deeper experience. In other words, Marion aims to overcome traditional metaphysics—that which is championed by the Church—in favor of a phenomenological treatise, lacking the authoritative certainty metaphysics demands.\footnote{Jones, 81.}

While one may initially suggest that Marion completely rejects metaphysics as a valid system for theological discourse, the opposite is true. In Being Given, for example, Marion acknowledges metaphysics as an entry point for theological discovery, but will conclude that it lacks the potential of fully exploring theology and the Divine. In his analysis of Marion’s phenomenology, Victor Taylor offers the following, which addresses Marion’s use of phenomenology against the traditional metaphysics offered by others:

Jean-Luc Marion’s writings begin with the question of metaphysics, particularly as it relates to Cartesian philosophy. His forthcoming book entitled Descartes’ Grey Ontology, his doctoral dissertation, investigates the Aristotelian foundation of Descartes’ science. This use of “greyness” as a philosophical and theological concept allows Marion to re-situate phenomenology beyond Husserl and Heidegger. Marion’s post-Heideggerian phenomenology allows a new consideration of theology—a theology freed from the confines of reason, Being, and morality. In this postmetaphysical theology, “God” is not made visible against a terminal backdrop of Being; instead, Marion sees a “God” in relation to a “greyness” or, more recently, an “excess” beyond ontotheology itself. The so-called absolute condition one equates with Being, God without Being, the principal work in which this concept of excess is unfolded, as David Tracy notes in the preface, is a “brilliant” alternative to “corational” theology in which “a revelation-centered, noncorrelational, postmetaphysical theology” presents “the question of Good freed from our usual philosophical reflections on the God of reason (Kant), the God of being (Aquinas) or the God of morality (Nietzsche).” Marion leaves us with a God of revelation or a God of excess, a God that comes to us, not a God we come to or can know “corationally” through reason.\footnote{Victor E. Taylor, "A Conversation with Jean-Luc Marion," Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory 7, no. 2 (Spring 2006).}
God’s existence (e.g., *Summa Theologiae*, I, 2, 3), which presents God before us in terms relatable to the human intellect and pre-determined principles, Marion’s approach via phenomenology differs significantly. Marion’s phenomenology posits, rather than a God to whom one reasons, one who arrives and floods one’s intuition. The difference is this: the theology of Aquinas and Scholasticism proposed a God of whom we could conceive via analogy, correlation, and/or physics; however, that same theology ultimately limits the possibilities of a God likewise described as *omniscient* and *omnipresent*. Phenomenology, by contrast, does not place such limitations on the Divine, suggesting instead that an encounter with God (the phenomenon) is one in which the experience arrives before the person; before his or her intuition and thereby “floods” it. In this case, there is no linguistic exercise necessary to “experience” the phenomenon; rather, the phenomenon gives itself without condition. Marion’s approach is one that—at minimum—questions the use of correlations in order to describe God, favoring an approach that welcomes the saturation of the thing itself (i.e., God).

Prior to arriving at this argument, Marion first looked to dispel the necessity of metaphysics by examining the metaphysical concerns of René Descartes. What emerged from his analysis was an acceptance of the Cartesian infinite and the uncertainty of metaphysics, despite the insistence others had for it. Thus, what follows is in no way a comprehensive examination of Descartes’ work, his detailed philosophical examination of metaphysics, or a thorough examination of Descartes’ theology. Other projects, including Marion’s own work on Descartes, resulted in thorough explanations of these topics. It is necessary, however, at least to establish the context from which Marion develops his philosophy and his attempts to ‘overcome’ metaphysics. To explore this subtopic, I have chosen to focus primarily on Marion’s 1999 publication, *On Descartes’ Metaphysical Prism: The Constitution and Limits of Onto-theo-logy*. The text keeps
this chapter focused on Marion, while also introducing the influence Descartes has had upon him.

2.1 Marion and Descartes

Jean-Luc Marion’s concern with the adaptation of metaphysics as the language system of modern theology centers on its limitations and use when describing the concept of being and specifically, Aristotle’s general being. Additionally, he draws attention to the concept of first being, and Aquinas’ concept of Divine Being. René Descartes’ understanding of metaphysics is one that appears so infrequently throughout his work that it is initially difficult to assess.\textsuperscript{518} According to Marion, Descartes mentions metaphysics in passing and as a qualifier for the first time in his “celebrated Letter to Mersenne of 15 April 1630.”\textsuperscript{519} The qualifier is a simple phrase, “‘to prove metaphysical truths,’” and follows similar references found in the Discourse on the Method and the Meditationes.\textsuperscript{520} The few instances in which Descartes refers to metaphysics are likewise understood as limited or limiting to philosophy. For example, Descartes writes, “‘…valde tenuis et, ut ita dicam, Metaphysica dubitandi ratio [any reason for doubt which…is a very light and, so to speak, metaphysical one],’” indicating an insubstantial means to discuss philosophical ideas that extends beyond the mundane, including the Infinite.\textsuperscript{521} Marion, in turn, notes the importance of Descartes’ 1647 Principia, in which he defines metaphysics as a systematic way of thinking, one that has served theology and the qualities of God:

The first part of [true] philosophy is metaphysics, which contains the principles of knowledge,

\textsuperscript{520} Marion, On Descartes’ Metaphysical Prism: The Constitution and the Limits of onto-Theo-Logy in Cartesian Thought, 9.
\textsuperscript{521} Ibid.
including the explanation of the principal attributes of God, the non-material nature of our souls and all the clear and distinct notions which are in us...Thus the whole of philosophy is like a tree. The roots are metaphysics, the trunk is physics, and the branches are emerging from the trunk are all the other sciences, which may be reduced to three principle ones, namely medicine, mechanics, and morals.\footnote{522}

Descartes presents, in this instance, a common analogy (decidedly not his own), which establishes philosophy—specifically metaphysics—as the source for theology and all other trends of thought. However, the trivial analogy, Marion argues, is foolish: it suggests a connection between the sciences and metaphysics.\footnote{523} He questions any immediate acceptance of metaphysics as the ultimate basis for scientific or philosophical thought. (Likewise in later texts of Descartes.) Such an application of metaphysics, Marion notes, would be acknowledging metaphysics as the source for full and total authority. Henceforth he rebuffs this premise, suggesting that this form of philosophy (1) limits the extent to which philosophy, as human wisdom, can explore all aspects of life and (2) is falsely interchanged with the forms of philosophy, including \textit{prima Philosophia}.\footnote{524}

On this second point, first philosophy and metaphysics are used incorrectly as interchangeable devices, despite the \textit{a priori} knowledge of the two. Marion makes it clear that these two—metaphysics and \textit{prima philosophia}—are distinct ideas in Descartes.

Marion also offers three reasons why metaphysics should still be considered a valid part of Descartes’ work, despite the aforementioned contestation regarding \textit{prima philosophia} (first philosophy) and metaphysics. First, the absence of metaphysics from the collection of Descartes’ texts and essays does not mean it has no role in shaping his understanding of philosophy during the seventeenth century; rather the ‘silence’ of the term in his work indicates that Descartes is making a conscious decision to avoid talking about metaphysics, specifically because, as a philosophy, it is unaware of its very essence.\footnote{525} Though Aristotle, Aquinas, and others had

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\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{522} Ibid., 10.
\item \footnote{523} Ibid.
\item \footnote{524} Ibid.
\item \footnote{525} Ibid., 11.
\end{itemize}

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outlined an understanding of metaphysics for their own purposes (philosophical and theological), Marion suggests the seventeenth century had observed a drastic shift in this understanding, despite frequent references to the work of the aforementioned thinkers. Second, Descartes was still inclined to offer a definition of metaphysics, here relying on the traditional teachings taught at the universities of Paris (specifically, those operated by the Jesuits). In this case, and in light of his scholastic training, Descartes acknowledges the work of Eustache de Saint-Paul, Abra de Raonis, and Scipion Dupleix, to outline a definition of the pseudo-science that acknowledges the fourfold tradition taught to university students at the time: “Logicam, Metaphysicam, Physicam…Ethicis” [logic, metaphysics, physics, and ethics]. Metaphysics’ role could only be identified within this quartet and not separate from it. Finally, Marion acknowledges the ambiguity offered by this initial investigation into Descartes’ understanding of metaphysics. This, he suggests, is purposeful—providing Descartes the opportunity to thereby be compared to the traditional understanding and application of metaphysics used by Aquinas, Pererius, Fonesca, Suárez, and contemporaries of his during the seventeenth century. This, in turn, would lead Descartes “to a radically new concept of metaphysics,” one that we will turn to now.

Descartes’ concern with metaphysics, insofar as he mentions the topic infrequently in his work, aims to distance the subject from that of mathematics and the real sciences (e.g., physics and biology). The desired separation between math and metaphysics, Marion explains, was Descartes’ desire to show that the two do not work well together. In an almost comical way, Descartes argues that no mathematician, specifically those who study geometry, can grasp the idea of metaphysics; likewise, a person well versed in metaphysics is unlikely to accept geometry in the same way. “It generally happens with almost everyone else that if they are accomplished in

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526 Ibid., 12-3.
527 Ibid., 13-4.
Metaphysics they hate Geometry, while if they have mastered Geometry, they do not grasp what I have written on First Philosophy.”\textsuperscript{528} The distinction is not centered on one’s ability or inability to grasp one or the other, but the contradictions the two offer. In his letter to Mersenne (13 November 1639), Descartes writes, “For ‘the imagination, which is the part of the mind that most helps mathematics, is more of a hindrance than a help in metaphysical speculation.’”\textsuperscript{529} Descartes and Marion questioned metaphysics as a subject that ‘transgresses’ mathematics because of its origin: it was created in order to give order to the world around us. “That is to say, at once as dependent on something previously established…and as instituted by an authority that remains unintelligible to it, since it founds mathematics.”\textsuperscript{530} The questions of origin and movement—questions answered in the metaphysical philosophy of Aristotle, Aquinas, and others—still lingered for Descartes. Subsequently, Descartes looked to a philosophy of God in order to argue for the unknown given, the nonphysical principle, which causes physics to be in motion in the first place; Descartes would identify these initial explorations, as \textit{inertia}. Nevertheless, his initial response centers on God as the source:

I prove this by metaphysics; for God, who is the author of all things, is entirely perfect and unchangeable; and so it seems to me absurd that any simple thing which exists, and so has God for its author, should have in itself the principle of its destruction.\textsuperscript{531} God is referenced by Descartes in this case as the “author of the essence of created things no less than of their existence…author of everything.”\textsuperscript{532}

\textsuperscript{528} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{529} Cited in, ibid., 15 and 16, cf. no. 10. Marion’s saturated phenomenon may be an acknowledgement of this fact. Whereas metaphysics seeks a form of blind loyalty to it, insofar as the individual is not expected to question its content or the authority disseminating it, phenomenology encourages one’s imagination. In this case, the imagination should be open to the possibility of the given flooding one’s intuition. There is a direct correlation here to Husserl’s understanding of intuition/experience. See, for example, Edmund Husserl, \textit{Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology}, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson (London: Routledge Classics, 2012), 35-38.
\textsuperscript{531} Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{532} Ibid.
In his detailed analysis of Descartes’ arguments on inertia, physics, and metaphysics, Marion concludes that such basic understandings of movement—insofar as they are considered “rectilinear” and never ending—are flawed. Descartes’ explorations of metaphysics, as the one source of all movement—God—mirrored the ideas Aristotle put forth in *Metaphysics, Book E*. Put simply: The rules of physics indicate that any movement is not strictly linear; moreover, physics does not suggest that moving things operate in a straight line from two starting points, and will eventually stop, as is the case with a pendulum. According to Descartes, metaphysics “is characterized also by the transgression of physics,” an idea developed from Aristotle’s philosophy. In 1630, Descartes argued that metaphysics as taught by the scholastics and his contemporaries extended beyond the physical sciences especially physics and mathematics. Like Aristotle, Descartes acknowledged the relationship metaphysics had to other academic subjects, including those referenced above. More importantly, Aristotle understood metaphysics as a conduit used to explain the unexplainable. Descartes’ reference to Aristotle, in his acknowledgment of the possibility of something “existing” that is “eternal and immobile and separated,” could only be described through the use of metaphysics, a “science” that aims to transgress the natural sciences and mathematics. Marion offers the following commentary on Descartes’ use of metaphysics:

The nomenclature of the three sciences thus remains unchanged from Aristotle to Descartes: it is always a question of physics, mathematics (the different branches being united beneath the banner of a science of quantity in general, by which Aristotle anticipates the Cartesian language), and

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533 Ibid., 17-8. This notion was likewise referenced in chapter two of this project. See Aristotle, 86: Book Gamma, 8; 87: Book Delta, 1; and 259: Book Lambda, 7.
535 Aristotle’s *Metaphysics, Book E* will likewise consider this scientific-academic relationship and the role of metaphysics extending beyond the established principles of these sciences. For more on Marion’s reading of Aristotle’s metaphysics and its transgression beyond physics and mathematics, refer to Aristotle’s “hierarchy of the theoretical sciences as it is explained by Aristotle in *Book E*,” cited in ibid., 18-9.
536 Ibid., 19.
finally a theology (Descartes here retrieving, alongside métaphysique and despite the revealed sense of the term, the Aristotelian usage).\textsuperscript{537} By acknowledging Descartes’ work regarding traditional-Aristotelian metaphysics—one that was developed to explain the unexplainable—Marion will move to overcome this. He will move to a philosophy that departs from the authoritative nature and origin of metaphysics—insofar as it was developed for a particular purpose. Nevertheless, Marion’s ideas on metaphysics appear to be continually influenced by his early work on Descartes.

Marion subsequently notes the reasons why, in 1630, Descartes, here relying on Aristotle’s work, supported the application of metaphysics. Working through a series of supporting arguments, metaphysics is presented as that which, as mentioned earlier, transgresses mathematics and the natural sciences. Of particular concern, at least for this project, is the theological question, seemingly absent from these letters to Mersenne. Presumably, Marion concludes, a previous letter was forwarded to Descartes with a theological question aimed at exploring the use of metaphysics in theology. Interestingly, and despite the aforementioned references to Aristotle’s Metaphysics, Descartes suggests that this subject remains largely outside his purview as a philosopher and mathematician, though simultaneously suggests that metaphysics fills the void mathematics and the natural sciences cannot answer; namely, the subject of God.\textsuperscript{538} Descartes’ opinions regarding metaphysics as a divinely-inspired science stood in stark contrast to others. Kepler, Mersenne, and Galileo, for example, reject the notion that mathematics and the natural sciences found their origin in the Christian God. Despite his apprehension to acknowledge the explicitly Christian God’s role in the creation of science and math, Descartes upheld the Aristotelian view that connected metaphysics with these two subjects. Again, Marion references the Letter to Mersenne (April 15, 1630), in which Descartes adopted Aristotle’s philosophy suggesting the superiority of

\textsuperscript{537} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{538} Ibid., 20-1.
metaphysics over physics and math. Perhaps in further response to Mersenne, Descartes invited another step in his notion of transgression, suggesting that only those who accept the inconceivable—God—may recognize “‘metaphysical truths.’”539 Once again, the ambiguity over the essence or being of the Christian God is avoided, recalling his issues of purview suggested above.

As a result, Marion is focused on the question of subjectivity and (divine) authorship. For Aristotle, the answer is clear: it is derived from the inaccessible, prime mover, only analyzed via metaphysics, a philosophy later accepted prima facie. Subsequently, “Descartes also appropriates the etymology, as disputable as it is widespread, of metaphysics as transgression of the physics after which it would come.” Again, metaphysics is accepted nemine contradicente. Fonseca, Suárez, Eustache de Saint-Paul, Abra de Raconis, and Scipion Dupleix all place metaphysics after that of the sciences and as a result of God, reaffirming the scholastic acceptance of this philosophy as the de facto source for theology and philosophy.540 The outcome is an establishment of an Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics, which extends the natural sciences. At this point, however, Marion observes a shift in Descartes’ writings regarding metaphysics, beginning in 1647. Now, Descartes is less ambiguous regarding his embrace of the scholastic notion of metaphysics, which remains in conversation with the three other subjects referenced above (logic, morals/ethics, and physics). Descartes, accordingly, referenced de Raconis and de Saint-Paul, establishing metaphysics as the “root” for all other philosophical and scientific principles, including the absent

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539 Ibid., 22.
540 Ibid., 22-3. As an example, Marion refers to Scipion Dupleix’s *La Métaphysique ou science surnaturalle*, and his explanation as to the origins of metaphysics: “The first and the most common is the name Metaphysics, which is given to this science for two reasons. First, because it is about supernatural things such as God or the angels…The other is that the Philosopher has titled the books that he wrote about this science τῶν μετὰ τὰ φυσικά, that is to say: *On things which follow natural things*, or what follows physics and the science of natural things,” in Scipion Dupleix, "1, 2, Des Divers Noms De La Métaphysique," in *La Métaphysique Ou Science Surnaturalle* (Paris: 1610), 19., cited in Marion, *On Descartes’ Metaphysical Prism: The Constitution and the Limits of onto-Theo-Logy in Cartesian Thought*, 24.
mathematics, for which Marion suggests is simply subsumed into the other topics. The emphasis Marion grants to Descartes’ ideological shift between 1630-7 and 1641 is of particular concern—the change appears to influence what will be Marion’s phenomenology.

As I have examined thus far, Marion argues that Descartes established at minimum an appreciation for the scholastic tradition and offers a definition of metaphysics. This metaphysical certainty was challenged in 1641, when Descartes transitioned to a focus on doubt. Descartes had shifted his focus away from the authoritative and hyperbolic tendencies many of the metaphysical principles surmised. Simultaneously, however, he noted that the exact hyperbole used in metaphysics makes it in fact metaphysical:

Consequently, it is not disqualified by its tenuous hyperbole, but in fact it is qualified by such tenuous hyperbole as metaphysical. In short, the metaphysical transgression definitively affects the itinerary and the conclusions of the Meditationes, even and especially if ‘metaphysical certainty’ ends up completing hyperbolic doubt. This in fact would support Descartes’ and Marion’s claim that metaphysics itself is flawed, insofar as it relies on hyperbole to bolster the proposed ideas. Descartes noted, according to Marion, “metaphysics [is] a science that hardly anyone understands” and “there are few who are capable of understanding metaphysics.” Of course, he was referring to the convoluted nature of metaphysics, but did not go so far as to deny its use by the scholastics and others.

Metaphysics, and the limitations therein, remained inadequate for those trained in more scientific methods (e.g., mathematics, physics). This led Descartes to prefer prima Philosophia, which went beyond the limitations of scholastic metaphysics. However, as Marion notes in On Descartes’ Metaphysical Prism, the complications associated with this distinction namely, prima

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541 Marion, On Descartes’ Metaphysical Prism: The Constitution and the Limits of onto-Theo-Logy in Cartesian Thought, 24. For more on the authors listed above and Pererius, see ibid., 25-7. Specifically in this instance, Marion notes the differences and similarities Descartes holds with the Jesuit authors on the subject of metaphysics. Descartes challenge to their notion of metaphysics begins to emerge on page 27.

542 Ibid., 29.

543 Ibid., 29-30.
Philosophia’s superlative place above metaphysics, must also be considered after Descartes. In this regard, and here focusing on theology, metaphysics provides a system of language accessible to the philosopher choosing to talk about God. Prima Philosophia, in contrast extends beyond the limitations of metaphysics, without compromising mathematics, physics, etc. Marion offers the following by Descartes:

‘The route which I take to make known the nature of the human soul and to demonstrate the existence of God is the only one which could enable us to reach our destination;’ or, ‘for metaphysics,’ ‘I think that I have fully demonstrated the existence of God and the immortality of the soul.’ In short, ‘the principles of metaphysics…give us the knowledge of God and of our soul.’ In the same vein, metaphysics can never be partially confused with theology—since it covers two regions proper to it, God and the (immortal or at least immaterial) soul: ‘Semper existimavi duas questions, de Deo et de anima, praeipua esse ex iis quae Philosophiae potius quam Theologiae ope demonstrandae [I have always thought that two topics—namely God and the soul—are prime examples of subjects where demonstrative proofs ought to be given with the aid of philosophy rather than theology].’

The two questions raised by Descartes are central to metaphysical theology: what is the soul and how God should be referred to. The idea that metaphysics can offer an explanation for both, as Marion addresses in his own writing, is tenuous at best. Marion, of course, will defer to phenomenology in order to explore these topics without establishing de facto truths on the substance of either. First philosophy (prima philosophiae) for Descartes would attempt to account for metaphysics, insofar as it covered more than the scholastic subjects referred to above. In this case Descartes understood first philosophy as that which “passes beyond metaphysics by being extended to all primacy; hence it is universal as well as first.”

Additionally, Descartes understood first philosophy as a philosophical system, which did more than address the questions and proofs established by the likes of the Jesuit fathers mentioned above: “…first philosophy is more essential to the question of metaphysics than is the metaphysical discipline itself. The former covers the domain of the latter (God and soul), while also passing beyond it toward ‘all the first

544 Ibid., 34, cf. no. 37.
545 Ibid., 35.
things in general.’’

Descartes’ focus on the ego as it relates to knowledge and God, is even more striking. Marion explains that Descartes established the ego as the primary source that serves as the precursor to and source of knowledge: “The Principia thus confirms in advance the privilege that the Preface of 1647 will accord to the same ego: ‘…I took the being [être] or existence of this thought as my first principle, and from it I deduced very clearly the following: there is a God…’”

This would of course lead to Descartes’ more well-known quip regarding knowledge and existence:

‘…haec cognition ego cogito, ergo sum, est omnium prima et certissima, quae cuilibet ordine philosophanti occurrant [This piece of knowledge—I am thinking, therefore I exist—is first and most certain of all to occur to anyone who philosophizes in an orderly way].’

While the phrase, ego cogito, ergo sum, has been addressed frequently in philosophy—including in Kant and Hegel—Marion accentuates the Cartesian notion of knowledge that precedes all other science, as well as the knowledge of God. Thus, the issue of primacy is explored with Marion establishing philosophy as first insofar as it is “not stolen from God by the ego, nor from God and the soul by some third being.” In his On the Ego and on God: Further Cartesian Questions, Marion surveys the role of ego cogito, ergo sum as the defining metaphysical principle from which to explore the philosophical idea of being, concluding that “the ego does not attain itself except by the interlocution whereby an other than itself establishes it prior to every self-positing.”

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546 Ibid., 36.
549 Ibid., 36-7. For an example of how Descartes’ ego cogito, ergo sum has been used by Kant and Hegel, see Kazuhiko Yamamoto, "An Alternative Analysis of the Discourse by Descartes, Kant and Hegel in Terms of the Ethical Stucture of the Kanun,” Collegium Anthropologicum 39, no. 2 (2015).
relationship between an other and the ego will be re-emphasized in Marion’s work on charity, an extension of Lévinas and the ethical treatment of the other, a topic to which I will return below.

For Descartes, first philosophy implied a relativized and orderly construct of that which is thought: “primacy qualifies all thoughts so long as they follow the very order of thought in operation: ‘…direct my thought in an orderly manner’”. 552 In other words, philosophy’s prominence, its primacy, arrives when one recognizes that as a thinking being, one is able to do philosophy, unlike the complications associated with metaphysics. In metaphysics, I am given a series of principles I am expected to accept wholly, without exploration of their scientific or historical truths, thereby confining my experience to the thing itself. One’s ability to explore—to “do” philosophy—was never a question for Descartes; thinking was accessible to all women and men. 553 Where metaphysics fails, in comparison, is its establishment as an authoritative system, insofar as it claims knowledge over various facets of being and life, and not just God and soul. Descartes’ ambiguity, 554 however, appears in the inability to separate metaphysics from first philosophy, almost accepting the two terms as synonymous with one another. At minimum; first

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553 “If philosophy claims to have restored its primacy [above metaphysics], it will succeed in doing this only by accomplishing it according to the order of thoughts, thus by establishing itself as the first thought (or the first series of thoughts) allowing the other thoughts to be engendered—without any consideration of the relative dignity of the beings involved in each case. In other words, philosophy no longer borrows its primacy from certain regions of beings, those supposed to be intrinsically first (God, the soul, the separate intelligences—in short, the domain of rational theology), nor from being considered as such (ontology), since being no longer enters into play and is disqualifed as soon as the ordo cognoscenti arrives on the scene. Philosophy will reestablish its primacy over the other sciences by producing it itself by means of the order; that is to say, it will do so by installing itself as the unique instance of all the first thoughts that generate other thoughts (sciences), whatever they might be, and whatever might be the corresponding beings,” in ibid., 38.

554 Marion admits this ambiguity exists writing, “Consequently, between what is called Descartes’ method and what is called his metaphysics, we have found relations that are sufficiently complex to forbid confusing them as well as separating them absolutely. To be sure, only evident knowledge attains the dignified rank of first philosophy; but by assuming this rank, evident knowledge enters into a debate with metaphysica as it had been previously defined,” in ibid., 40. See also, 67.
philosophy aids metaphysics by providing a basis from which to operate (i.e., to explore physics, ethics, and mathematics).  

The concern Descartes and Marion have, in terms of metaphysics’s use in philosophy, is the dominance and authority it has taken within philosophy, and by extension, theology. Marion acknowledges Descartes’ apprehension regarding his contemporaries’ approach to metaphysics, insofar as it departs from the definition(s) offered by Aristotle—most notably, that which is used to argue in favor of a doctrine of the divine (φιλοσοφία πρώτη) and everything else. Marion underscores the role that this combination, between divine and other, is limiting insofar as it rescinds the overwhelming experience as a phenomenon. The metaphysics that will emerge from Suárez and others can thereby be described as lame compared to the radicality Descartes proposed. The former neglects the opportunities available to the ego, limiting his or her exposure by introducing limitations (questions and proofs). The latter provides an opening for, essentially, free thought, unbound and free from the limits of an authority (metaphysics). The two still have several aspects of philosophy in common: notably, the pursuit of wisdom and the reliance on principles to achieve this goal in the field of philosophy. Second, these two acknowledge the “diverse titles of philosophy,” particularly those of “metaphysica and philosophia prima.”  

Descartes’ focus on philosophia prima aimed to separate metaphysics from the absolute authority granted to it under Suárez, for example. Marion suggests that Suárez’s approach is one

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555 Ibid., 39.
556 Ibid., 41.
557 Ibid. “It is to be affirmed, however, with the commonly held opinion, that metaphysics is purely and simply one single science with a specific unity. For this seems clearly to have been the opinion of Aristotle,…who attributes to it, as if to a single and selfsame science, names and attributes which are appropriate to it in part insofar as it deals with God and the intelligences (for this reason it is named theology, divine science, and first philosophy) and in part insofar as it deals with being as being, with its first attributes and principles (for which reason it is called universal science and metaphysics). It is called wisdom [sapientia] in that it encompasses all that and contemplates the first principles and the first causes of things, in Francisco Suárez, Disputationes Metaphysicae, I, vol. 25, s. 3, n. 9.
in which the philosopher attempts to grant universality to metaphysics, applying this form of philosophy to *all* aspects of knowledge, including principles or proofs used to argue in favor of the divine (i.e., the Christian God). Descartes’ approach, to quote Marion, was ‘innovative,’ and did not accept the scholastic and neo-scholastic metaphysics that converges divine and secular science—for lack of a better phrase—favoring “a more ‘general,’ less ‘particular,’” domain than” other philosophers put forth.\(^{559}\) To support these claims in Descartes, Marion offers three different philosophers who rely on metaphysics for theological discourse: Abra de Raconis, whose work offers four separate yet connected definitions of philosophy, all of which ultimately discuss God; Scipion Dupleix, who likewise supports four interconnected philosophical ideas (including metaphysics) that work in tandem with theology; and Eustache de Saint-Paul, who rejects narrow adaptations of metaphysics, specifically as it relates to theological discourse. In contrast to these authoritarian and universal approaches, Descartes found support, according to Marion, in the work of the Spanish Jesuit, Pererius (Bruno Pereira). Pererius preferred a threefold division of metaphysical philosophy: *prima philosophia*, the area of the “transcendentals” (“being, one, true, good, act, and power”), and “the ten categories.”\(^{560}\) Marion suggests a definition of *prima philosophia*, one which deals with the transcendentals, identified as the ‘pars universalissima’ by Descartes, and the other forms of philosophy; namely, “Metaphysics, Theology, Wisdom and divine science.” We are reminded, however, of the ambiguity between metaphysics and *prima Philosophia*, a distinction which cannot be made easily and one Descartes seemed to (reluctantly) ignore. The two appear, as noted here, intertwined, unable to escape a relationship. I would suggest that this, in turn, shapes Marion’s own attempts to overcome metaphysics. As a result, Marion explains, “first philosophy exchanges characteristics with metaphysics: the region of the divine

\(^{559}\) Ibid.

\(^{560}\) Ibid., 44-5.
(God and the separate intelligences) passes from first philosophy to metaphysics, now *de intelligentiis*, is reduced to theology.”\(^{561}\) Similarly, Descartes liked his notion of *universalis* to Pererius’ *prima philosophia*, acknowledging the aforementioned categories of philosophy. Acknowledging Pererius’ influence on Descartes allows us to identify the place of God in *prima philosophia* and the assertion that, as a philosophy, it extends beyond a general philosophy (*generalis philosophia*). Their agreement stops at the naming or titling of *prima philosophia*, with both philosophers disagreeing about its contents. Eventually, as Marion notes, this type of philosophy—*generalis philosophia*—will be identified as *ontology*, ratifying the earlier philosophy of Aristotle and confirming Descartes’ stance that *prima philosophia* stands above all else: “All the other sciences (including of course theological philosophy) therefore yield before being as such, universal and consequently first—and of course before it alone.”\(^ {562}\) Moreover, and in contrast to Suarez and others, Descartes couldn’t establish a philosophy that maintained an absolute certainty, but only offered, ultimately, “a gray ontology.”\(^ {563}\)

To reiterate a point made earlier in this section, Descartes reaffirmed the role of metaphysics insofar as it served as a system aimed at defining and establishing differences among different objects, including the divine (God). Marion describes the use of metaphysics to identify God, particularly evident in Suarez’s work, accordingly:

To constitute such an adequate object, which would include God within it, it is not necessary that some thing or some reason for being be by nature prior to God; it is enough that it be so by means of the abstraction or consideration of the understanding. This has nothing contradictory about it, as we will show later when we deal with the concept of being.\(^ {564}\) Being, as a concept, is introduced as a topic of discussion in metaphysics and theology. God, as a

\(^{561}\) Ibid., 45.

\(^{562}\) Marion notes that this change takes place with Goclenius and Clauberg, following Aristotle’s philosophy and “the science of ὄν Ἰ ὄν,” in ibid., 47. Additionally, Marion observes the emphasis Suarez and Pererius give to *prima philosophia*, a philosophy (“Metaphysica, Theologia”) that focuses solely on “God and the intelligences,” a trend common among the Jesuit Scholastics. Ibid., 48-9.

\(^{563}\) Ibid., 48.

\(^{564}\) Ibid., 49-50.
subject of metaphysics, is conceived of through the characterizations of metaphysics—the limits of a created pseudo-science. Suarez, for example, conceives of God as being, a perfect being without cause or principle, which in turn connects the divine to everything else philosophy explores. Suarez comes to this conclusion, understanding philosophy to be nothing less than *scientia universalis*.\(^{565}\) In Pererius’ terms, this is *ontologia*, as it aims to encompass more than the physical world. In this sense, God was coupled in this understanding, subjecting the divine to the same limitations beings maintain.

The duality constitutive of metaphysics always ends up asserting the primacy of a universal science *over philosophia prima* (as rational theology). But this universality never, except in Descartes, falls under the jurisdiction of knowing through the order, evidence, and arrangement. It marks the primacy…of the science of common being, abstract and universal within the limits of reality. Accordingly, it foreshadows the coming dominance of *ontologia*…\(^{566}\)

Finally, and to echo what was stated above, Marion mentions De Raconis, Dupleix, and de Saint-Paul as individuals whom Descartes coupled into the coterie of those who wished to directly connect being to the Divine, though each with his own distinct understanding of theology and metaphysics. In short, Marion acknowledges what Descartes debated in his letters and lectures: metaphysics had become the primary philosophical resource of the exploration and discovery of all things, including theology and the essence of God.

Descartes, however, challenged the metaphysical understanding these philosophers chose to employ via metaphysics. The assertion that metaphysics was the philosophy for all ontological and theological questions was called to task in Descartes. Instead, he departed from this notion in order to establish *prima philosophia* as non-ontological and therefore one that explores experiences as is: the givenness of the things themselves, as they can be naturally or scientifically.

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\(^{565}\) Ibid., 50. Similarly, Marion notes, Fonseca understands the subject of metaphysics to imply more than God and more than the known substances of the physical world, often given the status of being: “the subject of metaphysics is therefore neither God alone nor separate substance nor only substance in common, but the being common to the substances and the accidents,” cited in ibid., 51, cf. no. 54.

\(^{566}\) Ibid., 53.
(without metaphysics) described or measured.

The originality of the Cartesian prima philosophia is not indicated so much as having contested a purely theological definition of metaphysics...Rather, it is indicated by Descartes’ invoking, for the sake of such an overcoming, an instance radically different from that which the others mobilize. His contemporaries overcome prima philosophia (rational theology) in and through the primacy of considering the ens in quantum ens universally...Descartes, in contrast, breaks with this current, which was dominant before and after him: for him, the universal instance that surpasses that metaphysics reduced to rational theology is no longer the science of being as such...but arranging in the order of knowledge, that is to say, knowledge according to the order in which evidence is brought to light.\footnote{Ibid.}

Insofar as metaphysics becomes a protologic, aimed at creating a theology that conceives of being as a universal and infinite theory—to the point of being assigned to God—Descartes objected, suggesting that metaphysics had no place in attempting to encapsulate the Divine in such a form. He rejected the notion that metaphysics could be considered a science dedicated to developing a rational theology focused on being and God. Metaphysics could not be considered theological or ontological for Descartes, a point Husserl, Marion, and others will affirm in their own work.\footnote{Ibid., 54.}

To this point in the chapter, I have focused heavily on the Jesuit scholastics as teachers of an academic metaphysics, which aimed to cover all aspects of society and theology. I would be remiss, as would Marion, in failing to address the influence of Thomas Aquinas on Descartes’ understanding of metaphysics. Similar to his confrontation with the Jesuit scholastics, Descartes held Thomas Aquinas’ metaphysics suspect, especially in its application as a theological tool to determine the substance or origin of God. Descartes further rejected the notion that metaphysics could be considered the first philosophy—that is, a philosophy that “‘considers the first cause of things.’”\footnote{Saint Thomas, In Metaphysicorum libros, XII, Prooemium, cited in ibid., 56, cf. no. 60. See also Marion’s diagram, which identifies the different opinions surrounding metaphysica, scientia divina, and prima philosophia, ibid., 57.} Moreover, Descartes would question Aquinas’ assertion that metaphysics, by virtue of being labeled first philosophy, is that science from which all other science can be determined,
including, of course, ontology. In response to these various claims of primacy and/or first philosophy, Descartes settled the argument by simply stating—after acknowledging that God cannot be held to such common systems as the natural sciences imply—that identifying something as ‘first’ is simply relational and cannot be determined as absolute. In place of this form of first philosophy, Descartes instead suggested his prima philosophia as a substitute. This prima philosophia is what Descartes accepted as a suitable dialogue partner for discovery. It is not a metaphysical, theological, or ontological system that, as I have noted in this section, has placed the notion of being alongside that of God. Descartes, instead, moved to an understanding of the infinite in order to discuss God, a point addressed in his Third Meditation and a topic found in the work of Emmanuel Lévinas.

Descartes imparted a sense of ambiguity in his discussion of metaphysics, especially in light of his own declaration of what prima philosophia should or should not be. Jean-Luc Marion’s move away from metaphysics entirely follows this ambiguity insofar as he aims to overcome the role of metaphysics in modern and postmodern philosophy. In this regard, Tamsin Jones suggests that Marion is justified in his development of a suitable system for philosophical and theological discourse:

Marion’s need to provide this justification is in large part a product of the historical and geographical context within which he was writing: the secular university in France…that demanded an incredibly strict separation between state and religion…Marion must provide his philosophical under-taking with a methodology that can claim to be both universal and rigorous…Marion must identify a method that does not determine a specific epistemological outcome a priori.\(^{570}\)

Moreover, we begin to see the origins of Marion’s own philosophical concerns relating to the acceptance of metaphysics, ontology, and prima philosophia. Descartes is important in Marion’s early writings, particularly the influence he has had on challenging the scholastic theologians and philosophers. Marion moves, however, to adopt the phenomenological project of Husserl and the

\(^{570}\) Jones, 79.
phenomenological-ethics of Lévinas to help shape his subsequent writings. In place of the ambiguous first philosophy Descartes introduced, Marion focuses his phenomenology on the notion of givenness, versus metaphysical absolutes. Certainly, Descartes’ philosophy has had a lasting impact on a number of postmodern philosophers.571 The philosophical projects of Edmund Husserl and Emmanuel Lévinas, along with the previously mentioned Martin Heidegger and Friedrich Nietzsche, have influenced several post-modern phenomenologists and Continental philosophers. These, likewise, have developed projects that challenge the authority of metaphysics. For example, the projects of Michel Henry and Jean-Louis Chrétien offer philosophical alternatives to metaphysics, many of which also dialogue with other aspects of society and culture, including theology. In order to give proper attention to Marion’s phenomenology, the influence of Husserl and Lévinas deserves brief attention. Like Descartes’, their work has shaped Marion’s phenomenology and its applications in philosophical discourse, including theology.

2.2 Edmund Husserl’s Phenomenology and Marion

Edmund Husserl’s influence on Marion’s phenomenology can be identified throughout his various texts and ideas, perhaps most notably in Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology.572 The influence of Husserl can be found in Marion’s adaptation of the phenomenological ideas of givenness, transcendence, and intuition in particular. Before exploring these three concepts as they relate to Marion’s phenomenology, it is important to offer a brief overview of how Husserl developed this particular form of phenomenology. Husserl’s philosophical ideas began in 1901 at the University of Göttingen and would later

continue at the University of Freiburg. His goal, explains Dermot Moran, was to develop a philosophy that looked to overcome the traditional Western systems of thought, including those that explored logic and mathematics, science, and consciousness. In particular—and in variation from the aforementioned correlative philosophy often attributed to metaphysics—Husserl’s project focused on what one’s consciousness encounters. Arriving at this conclusion, however, was interrupted—Husserl initially sought to apply his philosophy of phenomena to “logic and epistemology,” transitioning eventually to a phenomenology that encompassed “all conscious experiences [Erlebnisse], their correlates, and their essential structures, as a science of all essential possibilities.”

Husserl’s Logical Investigations and Ideas I outline how phenomenology emphasizes the role of consciousness and experience, especially by exploring ‘infinite tasks’ and not just logic or mathematics.

Philosophy, first and foremost, according to Husserl, aimed to serve as a type of science, one that explores the various aspects of life, society, and/or culture. At the beginning of Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy, Husserl writes,

> From its earliest beginnings philosophy has claimed to be rigorous science. What is more, it has claimed to be the science that satisfies the loftiest theoretical needs and renders possible from an ethico-religious point of view a life regulated by pure rational norms. This claim has been pressed with sometimes more, sometimes less energy, but it has never been completely abandoned, not even during those times when interest in and capacity for pure theory were in danger of atrophying, or when religious forces restricted freedom of theoretical investigation. During no period of its development has philosophy been capable of living up to this claim of being rigorous science; not even in its most recent period...It is, in fact, the dominant characteristic of modern philosophy that, rather than surrender itself naïvely to the philosophical impulse, it will by means of critical reflection and by ever more profound methodological investigation constitute itself as rigorous science.

Though Husserl notes the desire for humanity to continue to be enriched through knowledge,

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573 Dermot Moran, Introduction to Phenomenology (London: Routledge, 2000), 124. See also, Edmund Husserl, The Idea of Phenomenology, trans. William P. Alston and George Nakhnikian (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), 19. In The Idea of Phenomenology, Husserl will insist that philosophy, since the seventeenth century especially, has been and should be considered a science. As this section demonstrates, Husserl also notes the tension philosophy encounters when in conversation with psychology and the natural sciences.

philosophy’s goal of serving as a science to therefore provide such knowledge remained frivolous. According to Husserl and Kant, philosophy cannot provide a means to an end (knowledge), but can only provide a system within which to operate. “Kant was fond of saying that one could not learn philosophy, but only to philosophize.” Philosophy itself, Husserl goes on to say, cannot be considered a science at all, as it fails to objectively assess what is presented before the ‘scientist’—the thinker in this case. The goal of philosophy, then, was not to govern the sciences, but allow one’s thoughts and knowledge an opportunity to discover and explore the world.

The reliance on traditional modes of philosophy appeared troublesome to Husserl. In its place emerges the need for a philosophical system that permits the intuition or consciousness to experience something as it is, rather than through systematic, pre-determined, or established proofs. When compared to theological or philosophical proofs—commonly attributed to scholastic and neo-scholastic theologians, for example—the intuition remains free of the rules given to the natural sciences, metaphysics, etc. In contrast, intuition lacks a master or that which seeks to govern experience the way metaphysics would. Marion, commenting on Husserl’s understanding of intuition writes, “Intuition itself cannot be understood as a last presupposition, since it is neither presupposed, nor posited, nor given, but originarily giving. Intuition sees what theories presuppose of their objects; as intuition gives, with neither reason nor condition, it precedes the theories of the given, in the capacity of a ‘theory of all theories.’”

Husserl understands this ‘breakthrough’ to imply a system that no longer accepts a determined body of knowledge (e.g., metaphysics, natural sciences, historicism, etc.) as the source for experience; rather, the intuition itself becomes the source from which knowledge is determined. In turn, Marion praises Husserl’s attempt to

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575 Ibid., 73.
577 Ibid., 10-11. Marion will go on to describe Husserl’s “domains of intuition,” a topic inconsequential to this project. See, for example, ibid., 11-5.
dismantle the status quo of the natural sciences and metaphysics, applauding the move toward an
intuition-based system of knowledge championed in *Logical Investigations*:

> The powerful originality of the Husserlian institution of phenomenology can be imagined only if
> one measures the audacity of the theses…nothing constitutes an exception to intuition, and
> therefore nothing escapes its reduction into the full light of presence; neither the sensuous, nor
> essence, nor the categorical form itself—nothing will remain invisible from now on, since a mode
> of intuition tracks and hunts down each of these objects as so many modes of presence.\(^{578}\)
> Thus, the intuition encounters the thing itself without anterior knowledge; its givenness is therefore
> clear of any ambiguity associated with other forms (e.g., naturalistic philosophy) of knowledge
> available to the recipient.

Husserl rejects the naturalistic philosophy that some may turn to, suggesting that it too has
become the subject of laws determined by humanity. It appears limited in its ability to go beyond
the scope of empiricism, something he addresses in various texts:

> \[\text{[Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy:]}\] Naturalism is a phenomenon consequent upon
> the discovery of nature, which is to say, nature considered as a unity of spatio-temporal being subject
> to exact laws of nature. With the gradual realization of this idea in constantly new natural sciences
> that guarantee strict knowledge regarding many matters, naturalism proceeds to expand more and
> more.\(^{579}\)

> \[\text{[Ideas I:]}\] If philosophy possesses “fundamental” principles in the genuine sense of the term,
> principles which can therefore be grounded in their essential character only through what intuition
> immediately gives, a contest which concerns such intuition does not depend for its decision on any
> philosophical science, on the possession of the idea of philosophy, and the professedly grounded
> content of its theory. The circumstance which compels us to give battle is this, that “Ideas”,
> “Essence”, and “knowledge of Essential Being” are denied by empiricism. It is not the place here
> to unfold the historical grounds which should show us just why the victorious advance of the natural
> sciences, however greatly indebted for their high scientific level, as “mathematical”, to eidetic
> grounded, has favoured philosophical empiricism, and has made it the dominating, and indeed in the
> circles of empirical science the almost exclusively dominating, conviction.\(^{580}\)

Since Isaac Newton, the natural sciences have expanded beyond simple mathematics to include
such things as zoology, geology, electrodynamics, and many others. Newton, Descartes, Bacon,
and others believed that if mathematics could measure the subject discussed (e.g., biology,

\(^{578}\) Ibid., 15.
\(^{579}\) Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy: Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Philosophy and the
Crisis of European Man*, 79.
\(^{580}\) Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, 34.
astronomy, etc.), it could be equally labeled a part of the natural sciences. To assist in this
distinction between the natural sciences and what Husserl is proposing, let me offer an example
by way of the elephant. An elephant’s biological characteristics can easily fit within the natural
sciences: an adult bull elephant typically weighs an average amount, stands an average height, and
measures an average length. The philosophizing about the beast ends when naturalistic philosophy
is introduced. Accepting the mammal as a phenomenon implies a bracketing of the naturalistic or
scientific categories applied to it. In other words, avoiding the human-made constructs of the
binomial nomenclature used in the sciences (i.e., genus species), permits the elephant to give itself
as a phenomenon. Juxtaposed to this, as we will see, phenomenology permits the deconstruction
of the beast, thereby permitting the intuition its own form of discovery.

Husserl’s point is that too much has fallen subject to this naturalistic approach, thereby
dismissing the philosophizing of the objects at question. The objects become subjects of natural
law and nothing else; the elephant is thereby limited by the genus species title, where Husserl
suggests a thesis in which the categories are bracketed. Moran explains that metaphysics, the
dominant philosophy, has become the way in which humanity considers all things, thus making us
naïve to other forms of discovery.\footnote{Husserl regards naturalism both as the dominant theoretical outlook of his age and also as deeply embedded in our ordinary assumptions about the world surrounding us. In other words, our pre-theoretical engagement with the world has an inbuilt bias towards naïve naturalism. This is fine in our ordinary practices in the world, but when naturalism is elevated into an all-encompassing theoretical outlook, it actually becomes far removed from the natural attitude and in fact grossly distorts it. Husserl’s critique of naturalism is that it is a distorted conception of the fruits of scientific method which in itself is not inextricably wedded to a naturalist construal,” in Moran, 142.} Husserl’s philosophy, in contrast, aims to go beyond these
pre-determined notions and any sense of materialism commonly associated with ‘naturalistic
philosophy.’ Naturalistic philosophy becomes problematic when it seeks to apply its principles to
human consciousness,\footnote{Husserl, Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy: Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man, 80.} something Husserl rejects, suggesting that consciousness remains outside
of the naturalistic theories. Psychology, tasked with examining consciousness, possesses the ability to become victim of naturalistic philosophies if it limits itself to only the measurable physical and psychical attributes of the subject. Such interactions deny “the reality of consciousness” and subject the individual to a limited “picture,” rather than a person offering more than what natural law presents. Thus, consciousness is not classified the same way naturalism or naturalistic philosophy chooses to explore other topics. Instead, human consciousness is understood as the guiding source for knowledge:

In contrast to the outlook of naturalism, Husserl believed all knowledge, all science, all rationality depended on conscious acts, acts which cannot be properly understood from within the natural outlook at all. Consciousness should not be viewed naturallyistically as part of the world at all, since consciousness is precisely the reason why there was a world there for us in first place. For Husserl, it is not that consciousness creates the world in any ontological sense…but rather that the world is opened up, made meaningful, or disclosed through consciousness. This transition from the naturalistic attitude prominent in philosophy and culture to a philosophy that focuses on consciousness results in Husserl’s understanding of phenomenology, one that, to borrow from Kant, is transcendental. It is transcendental insofar as it centers itself on the “conditions for the possibility of knowledge,” versus the measurable and declared naturalism prevalent in such systems as metaphysics. Husserl aims to present a philosophy that scientifically assesses the role of one’s consciousness, but does not succumb to the pressures and socio-cultural embodiment of naturalism. To do this, Husserl addresses the relationship between consciousness and being. Unlike the ideas of being addressed in Aristotle and Aquinas, Husserl employs intentionality, suggesting that consciousness can be conceived of by being. Consciousness is “perceived, remembered, expected, represented pictorially, imagined, identified, distinguished,

583 Moran, 143.  
584 Ibid., 143-4. See also, Husserl, The Idea of Phenomenology, 19. It is worth noting here that Husserl does not imply a transcendental theology, but one in which the conditions for conceptualization may take place. This is largely a product of his later writings and something Lévinas and Marion will adopt in various forms.  
585 Moran, 144.
believed, opined, evaluated, etc.,” but never fully grasped naturally or scientifically like the analogous elephant. Following this dismissal of naturalism, Husserl turns to another form of understanding, one that accepts knowledge through its exposure to one’s consciousness: “Every type of object that is to be the object of a rational proposition, of a prescientific and then of a scientific cognition, must manifest itself in knowledge, thus in consciousness itself, and it must permit being brought to givenness, in accord with the sense of all knowledge.” Husserl’s simplification in this regard posits that all types of consciousness are a form of knowledge. The individual can gain something from each encounter or experience consciousness has. Self-knowledge, the act of recognizing that which is given before consciousness, remains a constant for Husserl. Objects that present themselves before a person are internalized as knowledge and become recognizable, where previously they were not—individuals relied too much on the natural sciences to determine the essence of the thing before us. “What it means, that objectivity is, and manifests itself cognitively as so being, must precisely become evident purely from consciousness itself, and thereby it must become completely understandable.” Metaphysics and naturalism rely on conditions, measurements, pre-determined principles in order to declare what the very things are that exist before me. There is a declaration of being, properties, categories in which the thing exists. The philosophy of consciousness Husserl presents is one that is not subject to these principles, but relies on consciousness to determine meaning, objectivity, etc.

In Marion’s review of Husserl’s understanding of intuition, he argues that intuition is more

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586 Husserl, Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy: Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man, 89.
588 Moran, 144.
589 Husserl, Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy: Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man, 90.
than a simple set of objectively determined facts, or characteristics. To explain this point, Marion writes, “Intuition does not only make objects of the world present, it makes the world itself present; intuition does not simply fill in the world, it superimposes itself on the world in order to coincide with the whole worldliness of its presentification… The world is worlded through intuition, which one must therefore recognize as literally universal. Intuition deposits the world into presence, without withdrawal, without remained, without restraint.”\(^{590}\) Despite the spurious word choice Marion invokes here, his point is to demonstrate the importance of the intuition interpreting the phenomena presented before it. Moreover, one individual’s consciousness may determine its place based on its interaction, an interaction that will vary from another’s reception of said givenness. Marion will demonstrate his notion of givenness in the form of artwork, most notably in *In Excess.*\(^{591}\) In both Marion and Husserl, the experience of the phenomena differs for each person, though the principle itself remains constant. Intuition determines the world for the individual interpreting it, and that much is absolute.

The givenness of the thing itself demands that the natural attitude be bracketed, or, to use Husserl’s term, the application of the process of epoché. Elsewhere, this term (or act) is referred to as ‘reduction:’ the process of pruning the natural attitude experience in order to arrive at the thing itself (the reduced phenomena before me). This act of “‘abstention’ (Enthaltung), ‘dislocation’ from, or ‘unplugging’ or ‘exclusion’ (Ausschaltung)” and/or “’withholding,’ ‘disregarding,’ ‘abandoning,’ ‘parenthesising’ (Einklammerung), ‘putting out of action’ (außer Aktion zu setzen),” are a few of the ways Husserl explains epoché.\(^ {592}\) Both Moran and Paul Ricoeur


\(^{591}\) Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy: Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man*, 90-1. For Marion’s example of Mark Rothko’s painting, specifically *The Subway Scene*, see Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomenon*, 72.

offer explanations of reduction, which suggest a casting aside of the naturalism so prevalent in the world around the phenomena. First, Moran: “The essential feature is always to effect an alteration or ‘change of attitude’ (Einstellangänderung), to move away from naturalistic assumptions about the world, assumptions both deeply embedded in our everyday behavior towards objects and also at work in our most sophisticated natural science.”\textsuperscript{593} Ricœur offers two worthwhile explanations of reduction in the introduction to his 1950 translation of Ideas I:

The Ideas sketches an ascension which should lead to what Husserl calls reduction, or even better ‘suspension,’ of the natural thesis of the world (thesis being equivalent to positing) and which is nothing but the reverse side or the negative of a formative, perhaps even creative, work of consciousness, called transcendental constitution. What is the thesis of the world? What is its reduction? What is constitution? What is \textit{that which} is constituted? What is this transcendental subject which is disengaged thereby from natural reality and is engaged in the work of constitution? Such questions cannot be answered ‘without support’ but must be won by the asceticism of the phenomenological method. What is greatly disconcerting to the reader of the Ideas is the fact that it is difficult to say when one really employs the famous phenomenological reduction.\textsuperscript{594}

Similarly, but relying on a definition of what reduction is \textit{not}, Ricœur writes:

One might say, for example, that the thesis of the world is the illusion that perception is more \textit{certain} than reflection, or that the thesis of the world is the naïve belief in the existence \textit{in itself} of the world. Reduction would then be something like methodical doubt or the resort to consciousness as an a priori condition of the possibility of objectivity. These are some of the possible paths of approach. In particular reduction is \textit{not} doubt, since it leaves belief intact without invoking itself in it. Therefore, the thesis is not belief, properly speaking, but something which contaminates it. Reduction is not the discovery of a regulative action of the mind either, since consciousness continues to be a subject of \textit{intuition} and not of \textit{construction}.\textsuperscript{595}

Reduction may ultimately be labeled a form of asceticism, intent on separating one’s self from the natural attitude to arrive at an experience of something (\textit{noema}, the intended object) before outside influences cloud what that very thing might be. Moreover, consciousness (\textit{noesis}), according to Husserl, existing outside the realm of naturalism, opens itself to phenomena through reduction. This, according to Ricœur, results in a natural attitude that can be overcome: “Nature is no longer

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{593} Moran, 147.
\item \textsuperscript{594} Ricœur, in \textit{A Key to Husserl's Ideas I}, 38.
\item \textsuperscript{595} Ibid., 40. It is worth noting Ricœur’s reluctance and apprehension to accept Husserl’s idea of \textit{reduction} in this section of his introduction, noting that one may find it confusing and misaligned with Cartesian versus Kantian thought and, just as equally, question its status as a \textit{non}-destructive philosophical act as it relates to consciousness. See, for example, ibid., 40, 41-2, 43, and 47-8.
\end{itemize}
only doubtful but contingent and relative. Consciousness is no longer only indubitable but necessary and absolute.\(^{596}\) In Ricœur’s analysis, reduction leads one’s intuition to a new state of experience, one that is free of the natural attitude the world has become so dependent on; it provides an aesthetic view that may in turn cause one of two reactions: consciousness may either experience phenomena as a gift to which it is called to respond in some form; or, to quote Ricœur, “I apparently lose the world while truly gaining it,” that is to say losing the known natural world and gaining the world experienced in consciousness.\(^{597}\)

In addition to the naturalistic philosophy, Husserl is also skeptical of the historical philosophy or Weltanschauung philosophy.\(^{598}\) The concern with historicism is derived from Husserl’s “scepticism" [sic] and the desire to apply historical development in various ways in hopes of understanding the essence or meaning of something.\(^{599}\) The result, Husserl notes, can be a Weltanschauung, a worldview that fits a particular set of people, a particular culture, or in this case, a particular philosophical method, including metaphysics. As Weltanschauung, metaphysics brings with it a set of ideas that comprise its method and have since become culturally bound.\(^{600}\) Thus, according to Dilthey and Husserl, and because the philosophical method of metaphysics has been derived from centuries of historical, religious, and philosophical interpretation, it becomes

\(^{596}\) Ibid., 40.

\(^{597}\) Ibid., 42-4.

\(^{598}\) Husserl offers the following by way of definition for Weltanschauung: “In according with this [the many experiences humans may have], the man of many-sided experience, or as we also say, the ‘cultivated man,’ has not only experience of the world but also religious, aesthetic, ethical, political, practico-technical, and other kinds of experience, or ‘culture.’ Nevertheless, we use this admitted cliché ‘culture,’ in so far as we have its contrary ‘unculture,’ only for the relatively superior forms of the described habitus. With regard to particularly high levels of value, there is the old-fashioned word ‘wisdom’...and most of all, the now-beloved expressions ‘world view’ and ‘life view,’ or simply Weltanschauung,” in Husserl, Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy: Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man, 131.

\(^{599}\) “In this manner everything historical becomes for us ‘understandable,’ ‘explicable,’ in the ‘being’ peculiar to it, which is precisely ‘spiritual being,’ a unity of interiorly self-questioning moments of a sense and at the same time a unity of intelligible structuration and development according to inner motivation,” in ibid., 123.

\(^{600}\) Husserl notes W. Dilthey’s Weltanschauung, Phiosophie und Religion in Darstellungen (1911) as a text that further outlines this conception of philosophy as culturally/historically bound. See, ibid., 123, cf. no. i.
more difficult for anyone to separate it from philosophical discourse. This method of metaphysics, in time, has become a part of the Western worldview, a *Weltanschauung*. Husserl acknowledges this analysis, though he also notes the constantly changing hypotheses in science, as new discoveries are made daily. Simultaneously, he does not dismiss the notion that there are those ideas that have become engrained in our lives as scientific, historical certainties (e.g., $2 \times 2 = 4$). This brings us to Husserl’s main objection with historicism and *Weltanschauung*: philosophy seems to insist on a philosophical system in terms of its reliance on “particular sciences as treasuries of objective truth.”

Regarding consciousness, one can see Husserl’s skepticism, insofar as historicism would like to apply the known sciences in order to offer reason for consciousness and what it experiences. Unlike the natural sciences, which rely on measurement, mathematics, and the like, historicism turns to the person’s experiences, allowing an evaluation that fits the culture and orientation within which he or she exists. Neither the natural sciences or historicism provides an adequate philosophical method from which Husserl believes one’s consciousness can be explored; however, historicism does offer something more in terms of relation to lived experiences: “The natural sciences have not in a single instance unraveled for us actual reality, the reality in which we live, move, and are.” Likewise, he dismisses the notion that *Weltanschauung* can be considered a science, as it has the potential to cloud one’s judgment, relying on past experiences versus either the naturalistic philosophy (which he also rejects) or one’s consciousness (which he champions). These systems (historicism and naturalistic philosophy) provide a form of prejudice, whether one follows the teachings of Aristotle, Aquinas, or countless others, and therefore have the potential to

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601 Ibid., 130.
602 Ibid., 140.
cloud one’s intuition. In the context of naturalistic philosophy or historicism, experience is
categorized, measured, and filed in such a way as to limit the possibilities such an event offers.\textsuperscript{603}
Husserl therefore posits that his philosophical system (phenomenology) needs to be ‘rigorous’ and
have the ability to overcome the metaphysical systems previously in place.\textsuperscript{604} The new rigorous
philosophy would encourage one to “see with his own eyes,” rather than be subject to the
prejudices implicit in the other methods. “Thus the greatest step our age has to make is to recognize
that with the philosophical intuition in the correct sense, phenomenological grasp of essences, a
limitless field of work opens out, a science that without all indirectly symbolical and mathematical
methods, without the apparatus of premises and conclusions, still attains a plentitude of the most
rigorous and, for all further philosophy, decisive cognitions.”\textsuperscript{605}

Departing from these systems or methods is where Husserl identifies the importance of
the phenomena. Whereas psychology, as a science, desires the application of naturalism to the
experience of the phenomenon/phenomena, Husserl approaches each encounter differently,
focusing instead on consciousness.

In its naïveté it was not aware that things have a “nature” which can be determined by means of
certain exact concepts in an empirically logical procedure. But psychology, with its institutes and
apparatus of precision, with its keenly thought-out methods, justly feels that it is beyond the stage
of the naïve empirical study of the soul belonging to former times. In addition, it has not failed to
make careful, constantly renewed reflections on method…The phenomenal had to elude
psychology because of its naturalistic point of view as well as its zeal to imitate the natural sciences
and to see experimental procedures as the main point.\textsuperscript{606}
As I mentioned above, the appeal of naturalism is apparent in psychology: it provides a basis from
which one’s experience(s) can be scrutinized. Husserl’s critique extends itself to a parallel

\textsuperscript{603} Husserl, \textit{Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology}, 41.
\textsuperscript{604} Husserl, \textit{Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy: Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Philosophy and the
Crisis of European Man}, 142.
\textsuperscript{605} Ibid., 147.
\textsuperscript{606} Ibid., 101-2.
questioning of metaphysics, in which he accuses the pseudo-science of being a falsely conceived of science that has applied the natural sciences (e.g., geometry and the physical sciences) to the intangible. His general critique centers on the reliance of naturalism, which subjects consciousness to ‘second class.’ The critique is especially relevant when those who defend the science of psychology question the objectivity one’s consciousness maintains. Certainly, in the case of our elephant, one can observe and objectively identify those natural characteristics that appear before the viewer. The elephant’s presence, however, may also offer more to the intuition, inviting more questions surrounding the experience than the science of naturalism generates.

The same realities (things, procedures, etc.) are present to the eyes of all and can be determined by all of us according to their “nature.” Their “nature,” however, denotes: presenting themselves in experience according to diversely varying “subjective appearances.” Nevertheless, they stand there as temporal unities of enduring or changing properties, and they stand there as incorporated in the totality of one corporeal world that binds them all together, with its one space and its one time. They are what they are only in this unity; only in the causal relation to or connection with each other do they retain their individual identity (substance), and this they retain as that which carries “real properties”…Realities, however, are given as unities of immediate experiences, as unities of diverse sensible appearances.

Consciousness should dominate one’s encounter with the thing (the elephant), before it is overtaken by the naturalistic philosophy, natural science, or otherwise. Meanwhile, overcoming or bracketing the natural attitude permits the phenomena to encounter one’s intuition on another level—the psychical.

The ‘psychical phenomena,’ as it were, is understood by Husserl to be something different: “The psychical is divided (to speak metaphorically and not metaphysically) into monads that have

607 See, for example, Husserl, The Idea of Phenomenology, 18. See also, Husserl, Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology, 34-5.
608 Questions such as how the data of experience came to be objectively determined and what sense “objectivity” and “determination of objectivity” have in each case, what function experimental method can in each case take over—these all depend on the proper sense of the data, i.e., on the sense given to them according to its essence by the empirical consciousness in question…To follow the model of the natural sciences almost inevitably means to reify consciousness,” in Husserl, Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy: Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man, 103.
609 Ibid., 104-5. In Ideas, Husserl emphasizes the importance of the intuition over the metaphysical, often attributed to the empirical sciences. See Husserl, Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology, 35.
no windows and are in communication only through empathy.”610 Different from metaphysics, which relies on the process of categorization, the phenomena here arrive before consciousness in a form that is unique to each person and void of the natural attitude. Husserl labels those attempts to categorize phenomena—using psychology, the natural sciences, or otherwise—as absurd:

A phenomenon, then, is no ‘substantial’ unity; it has no ‘real properties,’ it knows no real parts, no real changes, and no causality; all these words are here understood in the sense proper to natural science. To attribute a nature to phenomena, to investigate their real component parts, their causal connections—that is pure absurdity, no better than if one wanted to ask about the causal properties, connections, etc. of numbers. It is the absurdity of naturalizing something whose essence excludes the kind of being that nature has.611 Whereas the natural sciences can easily be changed, redefined, or dismissed, the phenomenon maintains “no ‘real properties,’” allowing them to stand as is, though connected to one’s consciousness differently than to another’s. Again, one’s experience of the phenomenon will vary in contrast to another’s experience; thus, we begin to witness how Marion discourses with theology in a phenomenological way. He suggests the Divine cannot be subjugated to metaphysics, naturalism, or categories; rather it must be experienced individually.

So that one’s cognition is free of the natural sciences and tendencies commonly attributed to metaphysics, Husserl offers phenomenology as a replacement—one that permits consciousness to experience, versus being told what things are. “If then we disregard any metaphysical purpose of the critique of cognition and confine ourselves purely to the task of clarifying the essence of cognition and of being an object of cognition, then this will be phenomenology of cognition and of being an object of cognition and will be the first and principal part of phenomenology as a whole.”612 In other words, phenomenology provides an avenue from which Husserl intends to explore what engages consciousness, what floods intuition. Despite the assumption this form of

610 Husserl, Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy: Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man, 106.
611 Ibid., 106-7.
analysis brings—namely that it lacks any sort of validity—Husserl insists that phenomenology must be regarded as a philosophical and scientific method, and that it can replace the seventeenth century philosophies to which we have become so accustomed (metaphysics, Thomism, Neo-Thomism, etc.).\(^{613}\) In contrast to these other philosophical methods, Husserl proposes that phenomenology find a new space within which to operate—one not subjected to scientific or metaphysical principles.\(^ {614}\) After considering these other philosophical approaches, Husserl proposes phenomenology as the philosophy. He asserts in Ideas that this emphasis on phenomenology can be labeled “the principle of all principles”:

> But enough of such topsy-turvy theories! No theory we can conceive can mislead us in regard to the principle of all principles: that every primordial dator Intuition is a source of authority (Rechtsquelle) for knowledge, that whatever presents itself in “intuition” in primordial form (as it were in its bodily reality), is simply to be accepted as it gives itself out to be, though only within the limits in which it then presents itself.\(^{615}\)

In summary, Husserl brackets (epoché) the natural attitude that seeks to govern the way we interpret what appears before us, what we experience, and what floods our intuition. Relying on the elephant as our example: its measurements are put on hold or cast aside, its genus and species are forgotten (at least momentarily), its natural characteristics are reduced while confronting us, and we are left with an experience that our consciousness is called to interpret. The elephant appears as a phenomenon insofar as it does not rely on past experiences of massive beasts or what the natural sciences has informed us. The giant enters into my consciousness as a unique

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613 Ibid., 19.

614 “In contradistinction to all natural cognition, philosophy lies, I repeat, within a new dimension; and what corresponds to this new dimension, even if, as the phrase suggests, it is essentially connected with the old dimensions, is a new and radically new method which / is set over against the “natural” method. He who denies this has failed to understand entirely the whole of the level at which the characteristic problem of the critique of cognition lies, and with this he has failed to understand what philosophy really wants to do and should do, and what gives it its own character and authority vis-à-vis the whole of natural cognition and science of the natural sort,” in ibid., 21. Emphasis original.

615 Ibid., 43. Emphasis original.
experience that cannot be categorized as though I am composing a scientific textbook; rather, it floods my intuition in such a way as to amaze, shock, bewilder, etc.

In several of his books, Marion identifies this shift in thinking as a ‘breakthrough.’ The experience no longer accepts naturalistic philosophy as the necessary thought system in order to understand what appears before one’s intuition. Noting Husserl’s Logical Investigations, Marion points to the tendency to accept naturalism as necessary, thereby failing to recognize the thing itself. In turn, the intuition is tasked with interpreting the phenomena (the thing itself) without the natural sciences intervening. Thus, Marion can write of Husserl’s idea: “One must speak of a ‘breakthrough’ because one must lead every thought back to its intuitive actualization (its acts).”

The principle of principles aims to then reorient the individual beyond the natural attitude, such that the intuition experiences phenomena without impediment.

2.3 Emmanuel Lévinas’ Influence on Marion

Lévinas’ work is in part a reaction to Husserl’s philosophy, especially when the ideas of intentionality, subjectivity, and intuition are presented. Aside from the philosophy of Husserl and Heidegger, Emmanuel Lévinas is one of the more influential philosophers to affect Jean-Luc Marion, Jacques Derrida, Michel Henry, Jean-Louis Chrétien, and, to an extent, Paul Ricoeur, among other contemporary Continental philosophers. Their adaptation of Lévinas’ philosophy, Christina Gschwandtner explains, centers on his understanding of the other, and by extension, God. Despite Lévinas’ insistence that his philosophical ideas, Jewish faith, and Talmudic lectures remain separate, each of these areas overlaps on occasion. This has led some to apply a

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617 Gschwandtner, 40.
religious reading or interpretation of his phenomenology.\textsuperscript{618}

Nevertheless, the majority of Lévinas’ work emphasizes a phenomenology centered on the other and on intentionality. For example, in Totality and Infinity, Lévinas responds to Husserl and the concept of intentionality, stating: “The thesis that every intentionality is either a representation or founded on a representation dominates the Logische Untersuchungen and returns as an obsession in all of Husserl’s subsequent work. What is the relation between the theoretical intentionality of the objectifying act, as Husserl calls it, and enjoyment?\textsuperscript{619} Lévinas’ response, according to Horner, is that enjoyment is “more fundamental than my ability to present it.”\textsuperscript{620} Therefore, what Lévinas calls into question is Husserl’s understanding of experience, as it relates to intuition. As a result, Lévinas’ represents an adaptation of Husserlian phenomenology, despite the critics who question the occasional religious deviations.

Lévinas accepts Husserl’s understanding of phenomenology insofar as it “opens a new and unique way of access to the things themselves.”\textsuperscript{621} He also acknowledges, as noted above, Husserl’s understanding and application of intentionality and intuition.\textsuperscript{622} Where they differ, according to Gschwandtner, is in their understanding of consciousness:

\begin{quote}
Like Husserl, he is interested in how consciousness approaches what (or whom) it is conscious of. Yet while Husserl’s greatest aim is to provide evidence for the perceptions of consciousness and to present and understand them in the greatest clarity, to provide signification for them and assign meaning to them, one could say that Lévinas’s intent is almost diametrically opposed to this search for clarity and evidence. It is not that Lévinas exults in obscurity and ambiguity for its own sake. Rather, he senses something essentially unethical about this approach of consciousness to everything and everyone that stands outside of it or is apprehended by it. Instead of eliminating the difference and enigma of the other, Lévinas seeks to uphold them. Yet he does not try to eliminate
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{618} “Lévinas always insisted that his religious commitments and his philosophical thought were separate and had little to do with each other, especially in the face of various claims that his philosophy was but a veiled religious project and despite the fact that his philosophy is indeed sprinkled liberally with religious terminology and imagery,” ibid.


\textsuperscript{620} Robyn Horner, Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida, and the Limits of Phenomenology (New York: Fordam University Press, 2001), 50. See also, Marion, Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness, 266-7.

\textsuperscript{621} Gschwandtner, 41.

\textsuperscript{622} Ibid.
phenomenology.\textsuperscript{623} Lévinas thus replaces Husserl’s understanding of consciousness with an encounter, described simply as \textit{il y a}, or “there is.” This notion, outlined in Lévinas’ \textit{Time and the Other}, explores the notion of consciousness in relation to the experience of insomnia: the person, void of sleep, encounters something (a strange noise, an unknown presence in the dark), which remains unidentifiable and nameless. “This is a first interruption of consciousness by something utterly strange and different.”\textsuperscript{624} This first concept of encounter is not so much an address of concern for another human, but an unknown presence. Here, Lévinas and the concept, \textit{il y a}, stands in contrast to Heidegger’s understanding of existence as “the primordial experience,” one that focuses only on one subject: “facing only him- or herself.” The change addresses Lévinas’ ethical phenomenology, so to speak, one that explores the “‘face-to-face’ relation,” a philosophical idea that will be central in his \textit{Totality and Infinity}.\textsuperscript{625} The contrast between Heidegger and Lévinas is found in the experience: Heidegger claims that an experience can only grant meaning to the one experience. Lévinas, as we will see, notes the impact an experience has on the other, even the unknown other.

What is clear in these brief comparisons between Lévinas, Husserl, and Heidegger is the witness of an emerging phenomenology in Lévinas that maintains some attributes of his predecessors, but is uniquely his own—a product of his own religious and secular experiences. Next, the philosophical topic of totality becomes a primary concern of Lévinas’ in his 1961 publication, \textit{Totality and Infinity}. According to Gschwandtner, the book expresses his concerns

\textsuperscript{623} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{624} Ibid., 41 and 43. Lévinas’ \textit{il y a} is an adaptation of Heidegger’s “es gibt,” similarly translated as “there is.” In contrast, however, Lévinas does not accept Heidegger’s notion of generosity and giving associated with the phrase. See ibid., 300, no. 4. Marion will adopt this concept when describing \textit{the flesh}, an aspect of his saturated phenomena, outlined below. See Marion, \textit{In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomenon}, 91ff.
\textsuperscript{625} Gschwandtner, 41-2.
regarding totality in traditional Western (metaphysical) philosophy. Lévinas’ view of metaphysics is one in which the philosopher “sees metaphysics as an attempt to view the world as a totality, from ‘outside,’ as it were,” leaving “the significance of human life…lost in such a perspective.” This form of philosophy likewise inherits the many characteristics found in Descartes’ philosophy, many of which were outlined above. One of the main concerns addressed in this and the previous chapter is the role of metaphysics and the absoluteness, the authority, or the totality granted to it as a prime philosophy. Like Lyotard, Vattimo, and Marion, Lévinas is concerned with the authority granted to a meta-narrative—in this case Western philosophy. Moreover, he is suspicious of the priority granted to phenomenology. He is reluctant to grant it such equal space as incorrectly given to metaphysics: “Even phenomenology, although it emphasizes the essential relationship between consciousness and the objects of consciousness, between the activity of perceiving and what is being perceived, still attempts to grasp and comprehend as fully as possible what appears to consciousness as phenomenon.” This is not to deny one of the objectives of philosophy: to gain understanding or knowledge of something. It

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626 Ibid., 42. It is worth noting, at least in passing, J. Aaron Simmons questions related to Lévinas’ approach to metaphysics. Simmons suggests his approach is not a full critique of Aristotelian or Thomistic metaphysics: “Rethinking ‘metaphysics’ as an insatiable desire for the infinite, Lévinas demonstrates that the danger is not found in the term itself, but in the conceptual framework into which it is deployed. He rethinks metaphysics ‘ethically,’ and offers what Edith Wyschogrod and Adriaan Peperzak will both call an ‘ethical metaphysics.’ Similarly, ‘ontology’ is, for Lévinas, problematic because it is essentially connection with power, freedom, totalization, violence, ipseity, self-identification, and comprehension. Within this notion of ontology there can be no room for alterity without reinscribing it in the egoism that defines the very horizon of thought…I want to suggest that in order to see the political relevance of Lévinasian ethics we need to offer a rethinking of ‘ontology’ that is analogous to Lévinas’s rethinking of ‘metaphysics’.…Just as Lévinas does not mean to suggest that what ‘metaphysics’ has meant in the tradition is what he means by it now, so we would be mistaken to think that the sort of ‘ontology’ I attribute to Lévinas and Kierkegaard is what was meant by the term in the seventeenth century or since. Exactly the opposite is the case…the ontology I am attributing to Lévinas is not ontology on the order of Platonism, Cartesianism, Kantianism, or Hegelianism,” in J. Aaron Simmons, God and the Other: Ethics and Politics after the Theological Turn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 101. See also, Edith Wyschogrod, Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).

627 Hilary Putnam, "Levinas and Judaism," in The Cambridge Companion to Levinas, ed. Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 35. Lévinas begins to work through these ideas at the outset of Totality and Infinity; see, for example, Levinas, 33-52, at 37-8.

628 Gschwandtner, 42.
does aim to assert, however, the importance of experience and the use of phenomenology to facilitate an understanding of the things themselves. “I—as the conscious subject—am in charge and assimilate the known to myself.”

The fault in Lévinas’ understanding, particularly as it relates to one human assimilating the other into him or herself, is the power given to the one doing the absorbing. Gschwandtner offers the following explanation:

Lévinas finds that this desire to comprehend another person or subject matter fully and to reduce something to complete evidence or appearance implies that what is other or different becomes assimilated to my own understanding and therefore reduced to me—it becomes a version of myself. What was dark becomes light; what was hidden becomes uncovered and exposed to full view. In becoming exposed, grasped, laid out and comprehended, the phenomenon loses its alterity (otherness) or difference from consciousness and instead becomes a part of it. This process of assimilation and full comprehension is particularly detrimental when the other, the phenomenon that faces me, is not an object or a machine, but a human being.

What commonly binds one person to the other is language, specifically metaphysical language, which provides a common starting point for an encounter and later discourse. “The relation between the same and the other, metaphysics, is primordially enacted as conversation, where the same, gathered up in its ipseity as an ‘I,’ as a particular existent unique and autochthonous, leaves itself.” How, then, one individual receives the stranger is what concerns Lévinas. He offers two suggestions: (1) either destroy the other, because the other is always considered a threat, or (2) accept and assimilate the other, internalizing and making the other a part of the self. By conversing with the other, as Lévinas implies, a form of appreciation and response occurs. Ontology, as

629 Ibid.
630 Ibid. See, for example, Levinas, 35-6.
631 Levinas, 39. “Religion” gives Lévinas a shared and common language between one and the other, without insisting on a totality, see ibid., 40. This is not to say, however, that Lévinas is embracing one systematic theology or institution over another. Instead, he is articulating that common language attributes can be identified between one person and the other. In the same chapter, Lévinas insists that religion is centered on “inter-human [relationships]” and anything that exists outside of this concept is a “primitive form of religion.” Once again, the importance of ethical action between two individuals is emphasized, ibid., 79.
632 “A relation whose terms to not form a totality can hence be produced within the general economy of being only as proceeding from the I to the other, as a face to face, as delineating a distance in depth—that of conversation, of goodness, of Desire—irreducible to the distance the synthetic activity of the understanding establishes between the
Gschwandtner notes, “[reduces] the other to the same,” thereby making the other as an assimilated being, one that fits the mold I create for her/him. ⁶³³ In contrast, Lévinas is proposing a philosophy of the other in which he or she is acknowledged as unique, unable to be assimilated into my categories of interpretation. Thus, Lévinas does not imply authority over the other and does not aim to assimilate everything into an understandable form; instead, he promotes a phenomenology that accepts the other as is. This is especially the case with other people. Whereas we are apt to use language as an authority over an object in order to describe said object (e.g., a pair of glasses or spectacles), the ethical treatment of the other human should not be carried out the same way. “Lévinas insists that while I might be able to grasp and fully comprehend an object, I should not do so with another person because in doing so I would reduce the other precisely to an object I can grasp and manipulate.” ⁶³⁴ As I noted in the previous chapter, (metaphysical) language is problematic because it grants authority or ownership over something. Assigning language to a pair of glasses permits one to fully understand what that object is: rectangular shaped reading glasses, with a light brown frame that fit snugly on my face. The reader gains possession of what those spectacles look like and how they are to be determined. In terms of another human, the other is an object that cannot be possessed; each person remains his or her own person. ⁶³⁵ In Totality and Infinity, this recognition of alterity connects directly to Lévinas’ opinion of Western philosophy;

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⁶³³ Gschwandtner, 42.
⁶³⁴ Ibid., 43.
⁶³⁵ “It is unethical to reduce the other to a mere version of myself, comprehending the other in my terms, grasping (literally and metaphorically) the other in my control. To attempt to do so is to treat the other as an object to be exposed to light and to be examined at my will and pleasure. It is unethical to extrapolate from my experience of myself and simply assume that the other is and feels exactly like me. Lévinas therefore seeks to unsettle the history of philosophy (or of “ontology”) and to open it up to the alterity and difference of the other. Philosophical history, according to Lévinas, tends to “totality” in being closed to the infinity of the other and attempting to enclose this infinite difference in a totality of sameness,” in ibid. See also, Emmanuel Levinas, God, Death, and Time, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 181. Cited in Simmons, 101.
namely, it is an ontology, which aims to reduce the other/Other to terms acceptable to all parties. This reduction is tied directly to one’s ability to categorize, label, and name the other, making the other ‘the same.’ Lévinas writes, “Western philosophy has most often been an ontology: a reduction of the other to the same by interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being.” By calling into question this ontology—the metaphysical approach to one’s existence (being)—Lévinas suggests an ethics. When one no longer reduces the other to standards and characteristics that are the same, an ethics emerges: “A calling into question of the same….is brought about by the other. We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics. The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics.”

The response to the other becomes central to Lévinas’ philosophical ethics and in this respect, Lévinas focuses on the notion of ‘the face.’ To clarify, his idea here is not a redefinition of the English-language understanding of one’s face—the body part made up of one’s eyes, nose, facial hair, etc. Instead, he is referring to ‘the face’ in a phenomenological way, one in which the observer does not see the aforementioned facial features, but hears what ‘the face’ gives.

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636 Lévinas, Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority, 43. Lévinas specifically refers to Socrates in this instance, “This primacy of the same was Socrates’s teaching: to receive nothing of the Other but what is in me, as though from all eternity I was in possession of what comes to me from the outside—to receive nothing, or to be free,” ibid. See also, Horner, Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida, and the Limits of Phenomenology, 45-6.

637 Lévinas, Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority, 43. It is worth noting here Derrida’s reluctance to accept Lévinas’ philosophy as it relates to the treatment of the other. Derrida’s essay, “Violence and Metaphysics” calls into question the possibility of violence Lévinas’ philosophy purports. See, Jacques Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” in Writing and Difference (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), at 151. Likewise, Gschwandtner focuses on Derrida’s critique of Lévinas, specifically the theological talk that comes through in Totality and Infinity. Gschwandtner also addresses Lévinas’ response to Derrida, which largely emerges in the later text, Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence: “To some extent, in response to Derrida’s objections (although in no way a concession), Lévinas’s language for the ethical obligation to the other becomes even more intense and extreme in his second major work….He radicalizes his earlier analyses: While in his earlier work Totality and Infinity…the self gives to the other out of abundance of its own resources, in Otherwise Than Being, the self is itself in a position of need,” in Gschwandtner, 47.
Approaching Lévinas’ notion of the face, Waldenfels understands this phenomenon to be much more than the human elements commonly attributed to the understanding of this noun.

What is called ‘face’ in English is less common than it seems to be. There is no basic face in the sense of Danto’s basic actions. Even on the linguistic level the connotations differ from one language to the other. Let us take the languages Lévinas spoke. The French word *visage*, like the German *Gesicht*, refers to seeing and being seen. The Hebrew expression *panim*, not unlike the German *Angesicht* or *Antlitz*, emphasizes the face facing us or our mutual facing. The Russian term *lico* means face, cheek, but also person, similar to the Greek *prosópon* which literally refers to the act of ‘looking at’ and which stands not only for the face, but also for masks and roles, rendered in Latin by *persona*.\(^638\) Waldenfels’ presentation demonstrates the limited, narrow meaning of ‘face’ versus the intended phenomenon offered by Lévinas. Rather than the “culturally over-determined, marked by certain aesthetic, moral and sacred features,\(^639\) Lévinas’ face speaks out beyond these attributes. In this case, ‘the face’ calls out imploping a response. It goes beyond, as Lévinas writes in *Totality and Infinity*, identifying someone because of their status in life or their work.\(^640\) Approaching an individual in this way limits one’s ability to experience the other as phenomenon, something more than just the *visage* presented before our senses. Lévinas thus suggests a phenomenology that engages the other as a phenomenon: “The face I welcome makes me pass from phenomenon to being in another sense: in discourse I expose myself to the questioning of the Other, and this urgency of the response—acuteness of the present—engenders me for responsibility.”\(^641\) The response then shifts from mastery over the other to a listening to the other, recognizing what the other presents unequivocally before me. Additionally, there remains an infinite distance between one and the other: “The distance and interiority remain intact in the resumption of the relationship...The phenomenon is the being that appears, but remains absent. It is not an

\(^{638}\) Waldenfels, in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, 64. Emphasis original.

\(^{639}\) Ibid., 65.


\(^{641}\) Ibid., 178.
appearance, but a reality that lacks reality, still infinitely removed from its being.”642 The one thing that stands out regarding Lévinas’ emphasis on the other is that the encounter itself lacks logic, extending beyond any traditional form of encounter one has with another individual.643 He continues this train of thought in Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence, in which the other becomes the focal point of his philosophy. In this text, “care for the other…becomes a much more excessive demand, which may entail extreme suffering or even death for me.”644

Lévinas’ point is to argue in favor of an ethics not necessarily tied to metaphysics, which serves the human condition. Putnam explains, “Lévinas’s daring move is to insist that the impossibility of a metaphysical grounding for ethics shows that there is something wrong with metaphysics, and not with ethics.”645 In the place of metaphysical principles, Lévinas accepts sense data insofar as it presents the Other with a givenness that is void of metaphysical interpretation:

A genuine ethical relation to another presupposes that you realize that the other person is an independent reality and not in any way your construction. Here is one of Lévinas’s many critical descriptions of Western metaphysics cum epistemology: ‘Whatever the abyss that separates the psyche of the ancients from the consciousness of the moderns…the necessity of going back to the beginning, or to consciousness, appears as the proper task of philosophy: return to its island to be shut up there in the simultaneity of the eternal instant, approaching the mens instanea of God.’646 Likewise, Lévinas’ work on love explains that the act of love cannot be established via metaphysics, but is “sensed;” it is given to an individual and ultimately remains theoretical and thus intangible.647 These ideas will aid in Marion’s understanding of a philosophy centered on “the other” and on “love,” aspects of his phenomenology that extend beyond any authority found in systems like metaphysics. The point here is to demonstrate the importance of experience and how one is overcome by that which engages the senses and ends up interacting with one’s consciousness

642 Ibid., 181.
643 Ibid., 180-1.
644 Gschwandtner, 47.
646 Ibid., 41. Originally, Lévinas, Otherwise than Being, 78.
and intuition. Theoretically, this understanding of a philosophy of phenomenon can extend to theology. Marion will adopt the ideas presented thus far in the chapter to produce a phenomenology that effectively communicates with theology—this, despite his contemporary detractors who reject such a turn.

Lévinas’ philosophy influences Marion’s phenomenology as it relates to a discussion of the divine (God). Whereas traditional metaphysics attempts to do this through proofs, natural law applications, and other means, Lévinas’ phenomenology approaches the manifestation of something and how it appears before someone differently. The acceptance of the thing before me, without the application of metaphysics, is the way in which he understands phenomenology. When he does talk about God (infrequently, according to his detractors), he does so by way of the (Cartesian) infinite. The idea of ‘infinity,’ as a means to describe God, is a reflection on Descartes’ “Third Meditation,” 648 which suggests that human beings are incapable of understanding or conceptualizing the infinite. Put simply, the infinite eludes our understanding. Any notion of the infinite must come from somewhere else, Descartes’ reference to God. In Cartesian terms, God can only be considered in terms of the infinite.

The unknown that accompanies the infinite is of particular concern here. Hilary Putnam notes the importance Lévinas places on experience versus metaphysical proofs and the ethical response that accompanies this encounter:

> It isn’t that Lévinas accepts Descartes’s argument, so interpreted. The significance is rather that Lévinas transforms the argument by substituting the other for God. So transformed, the ‘proof’ becomes: I know the other (l’autrui) isn’t part of my ‘construction of the world’ because my encounter with the other is an encounter with a fissure, with a being who breaks my categories. 649

Proofs that are common to Thomistic metaphysics are absent when considering the infinite. The

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former demands a philosophical approach that encourages a limited point a view—a person is asked to consider metaphysical data, which argues an aspect of life as proof of God’s existence. The latter asks one to consider God as infinite, an impossibility for the human intellect. Aside from the mathematical symbol, infinity cannot be conceived of in a sort-of “totality.” Its mere mention confounds the intellect, leaving it in a state of contradiction. It cannot be visualized, drawn, or proven. Similarly, the infinite can be found in the other or the Other. Lévinas understands this concept as the proper way to identify the other, the one the ego encounters and offers two choices: (1) dominance or (2) acceptance. Dominance occurs when one approaches the other determined to define (using language, for example), thereby limiting the other’s potential, totality, etc. The other should be granted the title ‘infinite,’ leaving the other impossible to capture, thus leading to the second—acceptance. In recognizing the other as an infinite source of capabilities, abilities, etc., I am left with a simple exhortation: ‘do not kill.’ In accepting the other, I reduce the other to the infinite potential she or he possesses, avoiding dominance, and recognizing the desire to live, so that those possibilities may become reality. Thus, we have a snapshot of Lévinas’ ethics, one that does not seek to command or hold authority over another’s potential.

At this point, we must clarify that Descartes and Lévinas differ in the way this notion of the infinite is understood: Descartes accepted that such knowledge, or the conception of God in this way, could only have been ‘implanted’ in his mind. Lévinas suggests an alternative, one that is ultimately grounded in his concept of the other, a relationship that demands a particular ethical reaction. Lévinas’ ethics and idea of the divine (God) can be identified in and through that relationship. As noted above, language is central to this concept; the other is impossible to define

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650 Putnam, in The Cambridge Companion to Levinas, 42. As noted above, and in contrast to Putnam’s essay, Marion extends Descartes thought well beyond this simplistic limitation the essayist and Lévinas focus on here. Putnam will later assess this infinite application as a result of Descartes’ “trouble” with the (Christian) concept of God, in ibid.
by way of language, as doing so would limit that person, restrict or hold mastery over the person. The infinite is introduced here—the other cannot be defined fairly, nor can language be used to define God. The Divine does not simply “appear” with an insipid type of dissipation; rather, it gives as the appeal, ultimately demanding a reaction in return (without thanks or subsequent gift for said response). The appearance depends on the appeal, requesting of us a response without condition. The lost Israelites of Exodus appeal to the infinite possibilities unknown to them, finding God’s appearance only after the cries for help. Lévinas explains, “The responsibility for the other can not have begun in my commitment, in my decision. The unlimited responsibility in which I find myself comes from the hither side of my freedom, from a ‘prior to every memory,’ an ‘ulterior to every accomplishment,’ from the non-present par excellence, the non-original, the anarchical, prior to or beyond essence. The responsibility for the other is the locus in which is situated the null-site of subjectivity, where the privilege of the question ‘Where?’ no longer holds.”651 Whereas metaphysics would insist on finding an origin or a source for the call to respond to another—often times an authoritative body commands this response—Lévinas argues that it originates from beyond time immemorial. It originates, he suggests, from the goodness beyond Being found in Plato.652 In short, Lévinas does not accept the notion that an idea could be simply accepted as implanted or built into human reason; rather, as a philosopher, certain evidence or principles must be deduced in order to arrive at such a conclusion. In this particular case, and since the infinite is impossible to reason either linguistically, mathematically, or through scientific principles, Lévinas resorts to the notion of witnessing God through the Other, a concept that reverberates through one of his major texts, Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence.

651 Emmanuel Levinas, Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1997), 10.
652 Ibid., 19.
Lévinas adds that the responsibility to the other “provokes this responsibility against my will, that is, by substituting me for the other as a hostage,” putting the responder in place of the recipient.\textsuperscript{653} In short, Lévinas’ philosophy is bound to an ethic, which insists upon a response between two parties. Thus, the concept of “otherwise than being,” establishes subjectivity, the responsibility for the other, and an acceptance of the Infinite. This is done by breaking with the metaphysically-driven concept of essence while establishing the relationship between one and the other, a relationship highlighted by Lévinas’ understanding of illeity.\textsuperscript{654} Experiencing the Other grants access to the Infinite. This is not to suggest, however, that the Infinite exists or appears alongside or beyond the Other, but rather suggests the Infinite passes \textit{through} the Other. “Lévinas tells us: ‘We have designated this way for the Infinite, or for God, to refer, from the heart of its desirability, to the non-desirable proximity of Others, by the term “illeity.”’ By illeity Lévinas invokes ‘the \textit{he} in the depth of the \textit{you},’ the desirable in the undesirable.”\textsuperscript{655} Metaphysical proofs have no place in this approach; whereas proofs intend to establish the already existent and ever present God, the passing through of the Infinite only posits that God has already passed through, leaving behind a trace that is unpresentable in present time and history. The question of whether or not the Infinite/God therefore exists is not a concern for Lévinas, but a matter of faith. In this sense, faith is the desiring for something—God—and the only way to do this, suggests Lévinas, is to respond ethically to one’s neighbor—the Other. This ethical responsibility is something Marion will return to, especially in \textit{Prolegomena to Charity}.\textsuperscript{656}

Briefly, let me return to the issue of language and God. Horner recognizes Lévinas’

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{653} Ibid., 11.
\item \textsuperscript{654} Ibid., 8.
\item \textsuperscript{656} Marion, \textit{Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness}, esp. 70-101.
\end{itemize}
resistance to accept the notion of philosophical language used to develop or provide proofs for the existence of God: “for Lévinas meaningful speech about God tests the limits of philosophy. God signifies beyond philosophy.”657 Accepting Descartes’ “Idea of the Infinite” permits Lévinas to extend beyond the ideas philosophy and consciousness permit, thus acknowledging something beyond the scope of human experience (the infinite).

When Lévinas speaks of the idea of the Infinite, we may be less than convinced by his apparently Cartesian argument that it is introduced into thought. This surely sounds like a lapse into the proof for the existence of God, and while Lévinas disputes that he is interested in proofs, if the Infinite is God, then we have come no further in Lévinas than in Descartes. However, some important distinctions may enable us to continue with Lévinas.658 Acknowledging Lévinas’ separation from the metaphysical language of Aristotle and Aquinas—insofar as they center the notion of the Divine in the language of being—we can then acknowledge his ethical and transcendental language in the hope of acknowledging a God surpassing the limitations imposed by language.

One of Marion’s adaptations of Lévinas’ work emerges out of an understanding of Husserl and Heidegger’s phenomenology. Notably, the role of “the appeal” is central to Marion’s own philosophical project, specifically those aspects centered on an ethics towards ‘the other.’659 Marion likewise brings the importance of intentionality and counter-intentionality forth as important in discovering the necessity of ‘the appeal,’ borrowing from the phenomenology of Husserl’s early works.660 This approach brings us to ‘the face,’ a topic mentioned above:

Henceforth, among and outside the swarming mass of phenomena on which is exercised my intentionality, constituting them as objects, there can also be distinguished counter-phenomena: the face, or faces. Counter-phenomena, because their appearing consists less in giving themselves to be seen directly, or countenanced—what Lévinas elsewhere captures with the word “façade”—than in imposing on my own gaze the weight of a glory irreducible to intentional objectivity. And thus,

657 Horner, Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida, and the Limits of Phenomenology, 69 and 73-4.
658 Ibid., 70. See for example, Levinas, Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriorty, 54.
660 Ibid., 224.
such phenomena—faces—do not merely offer this or that particular spectacle among others, but break into the middle of the field of visibility accessible and originating from my gaze, throwing it back on itself.\textsuperscript{661}

Lévinas argues that the \textit{face} is what presents itself to the observer and requires a response. The ethical response, a central point in \textit{Otherwise than Being}, focuses on the ethical treatment of the other—one that accepts the other without precondition and an intentionality that does not aim for mastery over the other.\textsuperscript{662}

Whereas Heidegger’s notion of the phenomenon is one that presents itself to the observer insofar as it gives itself,\textsuperscript{663} Lévinas’ notion of phenomenon especially when observing the concept of the face reveals itself and beckons a response. Comparing the two, Marion writes:

Without a doubt, or at least perhaps, if one undertakes to clarify, going beyond Heidegger—which is to say against him—precisely how a phenomenon can show \textit{itself}, how it can make itself a phenomenon (or phenomenalize itself) not only as such or as itself, but also and above all from itself. What \textit{self} can a phenomenon make use of (and serve) in such a manner that it is able to show \textit{itself}? This \textit{self} cannot yet bear on any subjectivity, nor on the least ipseity or “mineness” (\textit{Jemeinigkeit}), since for Heidegger all of these concern ordinary phenomena and not \textit{Dasein}. This \textit{self} could so still less for Lévinas, since for him the phenomenon par excellence which it is a matter here of justifying is precisely not that of one’s own subjectivity (this ipseity of the type characterized by “mineness”), but that of an Other of which one can be assured of only a single phenomenal trait, namely, that it transgresses, suspends in short defeats, (my) “mineness.” The \textit{self} according to which the phenomenon shows \textit{itself} (in general or that of the Other) thus remains, as such, enigmatic or indeterminate.\textsuperscript{664}

The lengthy quote is worth unpacking in order to further distinguish between the two notions of phenomenon and their relation to the receiver of said phenomenon. The danger in doing so, of course, is embarking into metaphysical language that in turn breaks down the very meaning

\textsuperscript{661} Ibid. See also, Levinas, \textit{Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exioriety}, 192.

\textsuperscript{662} “Responsibility for the other, going against intentionality and the will, which intentionality does not succeed in dissimulating, signifies not the disclosure of a given and its reception, but the exposure of me to the other, prior to every decision,” in Levinas, \textit{Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence}, 141. See also, Marion, “The Voice without Name: Homage to Levinas,” in \textit{The Face of the Other and the Trace of God: Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas}, 225.


\textsuperscript{664} Marion, “The Voice without Name: Homage to Levinas,” in \textit{The Face of the Other and the Trace of God: Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas}, 225.
Heidegger, Lévinas, and Marion intend. I do believe, however, that this step is necessary in order to later articulate Marion’s phenomenology. Accordingly, phenomenon shows itself to the individual, explains Heidegger, as it exists, without the individual’s judgment being placed on it. Marion will, in turn, identify the face as a form of his saturated phenomenon, accepting it as an icon. As part two of this chapter will explain, the icon offers more than what appears before the gaze. The icon gives more than the facial characteristics, thus presenting a story and intangible aspects discovered only through one’s contact with it.\textsuperscript{665} As an icon, the face has more to offer than the initial encounter has to offer, ultimately imploring the one who encounters the other to respect life and to not kill.\textsuperscript{666}

Lévinas understands that the phenomenon presents its characteristics in response to the individuals’ own existence and beckons a response, different from Heidegger’s understanding. The latter understands the phenomenon to simply give itself, without any acknowledgement of the ‘source.’ The former suggests that the phenomena arrives from the Other and thus seeks a reaction form the receiver. Marion offers this with regard to Lévinas’ approach:

How, then, by way of radical hypothesis, that the self of the self-showing can be legitimated with phenomenological rigor only insofar as it is found returned to the self of a self-giving. In other words, no phenomenon can show itself in itself and from itself unless it first gives itself in itself and from itself: it is this givenness—donation—which assures the original self, and which permits “showingness” (monstration). Self-giving permits self-showing.\textsuperscript{667}

The givenness of the phenomena is a primary concern for Lévinas and Marion. Whereas

\textsuperscript{665} “The face shares the privilege of flesh: in the same way that the latter only feels in feeling itself feeling, the former only gives itself to be seen in seeing itself. But like flesh, the face becomes problematic when it is a question of recognizing it as the other person. For flesh, Husserl has already formalized the aporia: I can infer unknown flesh (Leib) from the other person, starting from his or her known physical body (Körper), following the analogy that their relationship forms with the relationship comparing my known flesh and my known body. But even recognized in this way, the flesh of the other person remains unknown as such, since by definition it would be merged with mine if it became immediately intuitable and would therefore disappear in it as other;” in Marion, In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomenon, 113-4.

\textsuperscript{666} Ibid., 116.

\textsuperscript{667} Marion, “The Voice without Name: Homage to Levinas,” in The Face of the Other and the Trace of God: Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, 225.
metaphysics works to establish the being, essence, or presentation of something (e.g., metaphysical proofs of God), Lévinas and Marion suggest this other avenue from which one can encounter the phenomena.

Returning to Lévinas’ notion of the appeal, as explored in Otherwise than Being and Of God Who Comes to Mind, we see Marion’s approach to encountering the phenomenon, especially Lévinas’ face motif, observing that not all phenomena give themselves in the same way. As previously noted, the appeal brings us to the face and lacks any sort of ambiguity—in contrast to the ambiguities mentioned above in our section on Husserl. In De Dieu quie vient à l’idée, for example, Lévinas reiterates the presentation of the phenomenon and the requirement of an adequate response. In comparison to metaphysics, ‘the appeal,’ is a mere reaction to what appears before me (e.g., the elephant). Whereas metaphysics accepts that which appears before me, void of any deeper understanding, Lévinas’ phenomenological approach is one in which the phenomenon presents itself and evokes a deeper response—one bound by ethics:

“It is precisely in this call to my responsibility by the face which assigns me, which commands me, which calls to me; it is in this placing into question that the Other is my neighbor.” Or “In the appeal which addresses me in the face of the Other, I grasp in an immediate fashion the graces of love: spirituality, the lived experience of authentic humanity.”

The phenomenon reveals itself, according to Lévinas, in such a way as to not display itself metaphysically. Accordingly, the face remains outside of visibility. The face arrives when one experiences it as an impactful event: “To receive the face implies not so much to see it as to undergo the impact or feel the shock of its arrival.” Again, and in stark contrast to metaphysics,

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669 Horner, Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida, and the Limits of Phenomenology, 46.
that which appears before one’s gaze—presumably, the phenomenon—remains outside the individual’s ability to apply characteristics, proofs, or language appropriate to it. The face lacks a form recognizable by one’s gaze or understanding. Instead, the face encounters the ego and causes an emotional reaction: “The I, placed in the accusative by the assault of counter-intentionality, does not discover the face as a new phenomenon which is as accessible and thus identifiable as all the others, but simply discovers itself as affected, touched, and shaken by it.” It is at this point, however, that Marion raises a number of concerns relating to the idea of and the encounter with “the face.” He highlights a number of ambiguities, most notably how this understanding relates to the Other or God. As Marion develops his own phenomenology, Lévinas’ understanding of the encounter with the Other or with God will become a particular concern for, as an example, in God Without Being and Being Given.

In summary, much of Lévinas’ philosophy regarding intentionality, the appeal, the other, and a phenomenological ethics helps shape Marion’s own phenomenology. The notion of the appeal thus becomes a focal point for Marion’s theological works, insofar as it offers a way to explore the notion of God. For example, expanding Lévinas’ idea of the face, Marion suggests the possibility that this may relate to the Divine:

For the face which appeals can be assigned equally to the Other or to God, thus avowing the indecision of its origin as well as the necessity of questioning both identity and individuation. To evoke “the wonder of the I claimed by God on the face of the neighbor” (DVT 265) amounts to suggesting that the claim which refers to the face—to that of the Other—effectively goes back to God, in the fashion of some strange ethical occasionalism in which the effective cause (God) recovers and would always precede a simply occasional cause (the other person), so that one can escape this murderous challenge only by admitting either that the appeal does not coincide with the

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672 Ibid.
673 Ibid., 226-7. Marion's comments on 'the Other' or 'God' can be found at 27.
674 Marion, God without Being: Hors-Texte. Specifically, I am concerned with Marion’s understanding of ontological difference and being, a notion found, at least on the periphery, in his comments on Lévinas’ face and the Other. See ibid., 83-102.
675 Marion, Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness, 267.
face, or else that responsibility remains originally dual. Of course, as with each generation of philosophers, Marion is left with unanswered questions relating to Lévinas’ philosophy. In Marion’s reading of Lévinas, the question of who does the calling is first among these: “Who (or what) calls—God and his word, or the Other and his or her face? As clarifying and magnificent as it is, does not the emergence of the theme of the à-Dieu nonetheless hypostatize this ambiguity to the point of rendering it exemplary and insurmountable?” While Marion will return to these questions in Prolegomena to Charity and The Erotic Phenomenon, the question raised here echoes that of several other philosophers mentioned throughout this section: Waldenfels, Simmons, Putnam, etc. They seek to clarify interaction between the individual and the Other, suggesting that it ultimately remains ambiguous. The source of the call remains at a distance from the one being asked to respond. According to Marion, it begs two questions: “What does it mean that the appeal can and must refer me to an Other (autre) as well as to its agent, the other person who, however, it does not make act toward me?” and “Does the appeal come from the other person, or does it refer me to the Other only from an other than the other person—no doubt God?”

There are those who would outright reject a theological reading of Lévinas, preferring the ambiguity that resides in this area. Jean-Luc Marion does not shy away from the theological possibilities here—despite his critics—stating bluntly that the appeal can be thought of as coming

678 Marion, Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness, esp. 71-101.
from God. He writes in *The Erotic Phenomenon* that this appeal may originate from the divine: “The lovers accomplish their oath in the *adieu*—in the passage unto God [à Dieu], whom they summon as their final witness, their first witness, the one who never leaves and never lies. For the first time, the say ‘adieu’ to one another: next year in Jerusalem—next time in God. Thinking unto God [*penser à Dieu*] can be done, erotically, in this ‘adieu.’” Marion’s partnership expressed here highlights the Lévinasian ethics: the two partners are responsible for one another, bound by their love and commitment. What stands out, however, is the use of God in this context, breaking with the aforementioned ambiguity and the non-theistic approach most phenomenologists aim to take. On this point, Horner explains, “Marion invokes God as the first lover who enables all other lovers.” She does, however, appropriately note Marion’s dance with metaphysics here, one in which he flirts with the metaphysical notions of *causa sui*, while also connecting his phenomenology of ‘the gift,’ suggesting the two work in tangent with one another. The argument can be made, however, that Marion does not intend to engage metaphysics à la Descartes; rather, he offers a theology immersed in phenomenology, one that does not grant consideration of the *causa sui* proofs associated with Aristotle and Thomistic theology.

The *à-Dieu*, accordingly, is the intimate connection between two lovers and the

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681 Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 212.
684 “It seems to me that we can read Marion’s reference to God as first lover in two ways. According to the first way, God as lover provides a theological solution to the phenomenological problem of how one can be enabled to love, when this can only be the result of always and already finding oneself loved. This solution would be consistent with Marion’s earlier writings, and especially with *God Without Being*. It would be a final reassertion of the theological destitution of all thought, including phenomenology. Yet how would we then account for Marion’s insistence—in *Being Given* for example—that he now resists the move he made in *Dieu sans l’être*, the “direct recourse to theology?” According to a second way of reading God as first lover, Marion’s reference could be interpreted within the trajectory of his later works, that is, in light of his recognition that our references to God are basically pragmatic or undecidable…In other words, in the same way that the *à-Dieu* appeals to God with an address that will always be a mis-address, the appeal to God as first lover could also find itself diverted to the other person who, I find in every instance of loving, has in fact always loved me first,” in Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-Logical Introduction*, 144.
responsibility they have for one another. In *The Erotic Phenomenon, The Idol and Distance*, and *Prolegomena to Charity*, Marion explains his desire to work through this relationship using phenomenology versus metaphysics. The ambiguity introduced by Lévinas, however, seems to subsist, manifesting itself in terms of the seemingly inescapable metaphysical language. At least in *Being Given*, love is explored as that which can overcome metaphysics, but Marion also concludes that metaphysics must simply be acknowledged for what it is.

It should, therefore, be admitted that phenomenology does not actually overcome metaphysics so much as it opens the official possibility of leaving it to itself. The border between metaphysics and phenomenology runs within metaphysics…I stick with the phenomenological discipline only in search of the way that it opens and, sometimes, closes.  

This understanding is expanded upon in *The Erotic Phenomenon*, published after *Being Given*, in which Marion proposes that metaphysics is ultimately deficient, lacking in its ability to explore the phenomenon of love, specifically the importance of *loving* and *being loved*. The roots of this argument, of course, can be traced back to Lévinas and the responsibility to the other. Marion then expands this phenomenological approach in the context of Christianity, a move that distinguishes him from other phenomenologists and has drawn the ire of traditionalists like Dominique Janicaud, to whom we now turn briefly.

3. Dominique Janicaud and the Critique of a Theological Phenomenology

Dominique Janicaud rejects the theological turn found in Lévinas and Marion, preferring

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686 Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-Logical Introduction*, 145. See also Prevot. Prevot explores several of Marion’s texts, but especially *The Idol and Distance* and Marion’s latest, *In the Self’s Place* to establish the connection between love, metaphysics, and phenomenology. Specifically, and in regards to *In the Self’s Place*, Prevot identifies a shift in the philosopher’s thought initially introduced in *The Erotic Phenomenon*: “Although *The Erotic Phenomenon* had already offered another provocative engagement with Descartes, and precisely on the basis of the rather Augustinian theme of love, it did so within the horizon of an anonymous givenness (Marion’s version of the Heideggerian *es gibt*). *In the Self’s Place* changes the strategy: Marion now claims that it is not any love whatsoever that calms the anxiety of the go about the validity of its existence, but rather the infinite love of God that is poured out on creation that mercifully embraces and heals the sinfully distorted image of God that Augustine finds in himself. In this way, Marion suggests that Augustine’s praise answers Descartes’ profoundest doubt (“Am I loved?”) more decisively than Marion’s nontheological erotic reduction ever could,” in ibid., 270. Also, Marion, *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, 99 and Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomenon*, 24.
the traditional Husseralian and Heideggerian modes of phenomenology. In Husserl’s phenomenology, the possibility for givenness as it relates to God is forbidden, permitting only an intentionality of faith to express the possibility of God.\footnote{See, for example, Janicaud, \textit{Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate}, 43-6. Janicaud accuses Lévinas of committing a violent act against phenomenology through his questioning of ontology. By referencing Derrida’s “Violence and Metaphysics” (cited above), Lévinas is questioned on his ideas of the other (\textit{autrui/autre}) and the possibility of such a philosophy being more theological and therefore metaphysical than phenomenological. “We affirm that the most intimate movement of [Lévinas’] thought consists in transporting it from phenomenology to metaphysics, in line with the radicality of the ‘expropriation’ of the subject by the Other [\textit{Autre}],” ibid., 47. See also, Simmons, 139-41 and 54-8 and McCaffery, 139.} Husserl’s distinction is simple—the possibility of God can only be determined in one of two ways: the God of faith or the God of reason, “with faith being something unique, self-sufficient and without contest \textit{(phenomenologically possible on its own terms)}.”\footnote{McCaffery, 140.} Janicaud objects to those who explore notions of ‘the absolute’ or ‘transcendence’ as part of a phenomenological project, arguing they violate Husserl’s phenomenology and the notion of phenomenology being the “principle of all principles.”\footnote{Cited in Simmons, 154.} The two exceptions to Janicaud’s critique are Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who, he suggests, do not violate Husserl’s phenomenological method, despite their own phenomenological liberties.\footnote{Janicaud, \textit{Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate}, 35.} Whereas the transcendental for Husserl (and by extension Janicaud) is understood as the conditions from which conceptualization may take place, those who have taken the ‘theological turn’ (Marion, Henry, Chrétien, and others), often refer to the transcendental, as it relates to theology. For Janicaud, phenomenology should remain a-theistic or at minimum agnostic, especially if argued from the Husserlian model.

\section*{3.1 Janicaud and the Critique of Lévinas}

Janicaud’s critique of Lévinas begins in the second chapter of \textit{Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn,”} in which he rejects the claim outlined in \textit{Totality and Infinity} that
phenomenology, as a philosophical method, “does not constitute the ultimate event of being [être] itself.” In Janicaud’s reading, this is a direct violation of the phenomenological project put forth by Husserl and Heidegger. Janicaud’s objections are four-fold: first, he rejects Lévinas’ philosophy surrounding the use of “phenomenology, intentionality, and representation,” which challenges Husserl’s ideas on the aforementioned, but falls in line with that of “Condillac and Hamelin.” Second, he rejects Lévinas’ understanding of phenomenology as a philosophical method, especially one that seeks to “assimilate phenomenology to ontology.” While Sartre’s philosophy could certainly be labeled “phenomenological ontology,” Janicaud argues that Husserl cannot fit into this categorization:

For Husserl, the suspension of the natural attitude implies leaving behind all ontological realism, and the project of the constitution of a phenomenological science obeys the telos of an infinite rationality and therefore an ideal. Ontology is itself bracketed, whether on the level of the entity [l’étant] or on the level of the “there is” [“il y a ’"] of being [l’être] (to which Husserl did not at all mean to restrict himself).

Third, Janicaud rejects Lévinas’ idea that philosophy is nothing more than “objectivism of knowledge,” as highlighted in Totality and Infinity. He also notes the affinity philosophy gives to Plato’s Good, Plotinus’ idea of the One, and the Infinite in Descartes, to which Lévinas refers in various ways. Finally, Janicaud calls into question Lévinas’ coherence of thought. In this case, he questions Lévinas’ understanding of intentionality and its reduction, a direct challenge to Husserl’s notion of intentionality, which cannot be reduced. In this case, Janicaud rejects Lévinas’ understanding of an infinite, which can reduce itself to a form that is understandable “to me” or “in me.” Janicaud responds, rejecting this form of intentionality: “A sham intentionality, purely

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692 Janicaud, Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate, 37.
693 Ibid., 37-8.
694 Ibid., 38.
695 Ibid.
representative, has been fabricated to prepare the way for the advent of the idea of the infinite. This is an artificial operation, one that Descartes and Husserl were able to do without.\textsuperscript{697} The Lévinasian approach to phenomenology would thus dismiss the rigor found in Husserl’s phenomenology, according to Janicaud, while also resurrecting the place of metaphysics in a way both Husserl and Heidegger would object to.

Similarly, Janicaud also objects to two of Lévinas’ central ideas: first, the application of being [être] and the “event of being” and second, Lévinas’ challenge of ontology—a critique of the phenomenological method he uses to introduce his own phenomenology.\textsuperscript{698} This is especially concerning in his address of a phenomenology of Eros, an idea that extends beyond the face and the Other. Janicaud argues that this phenomenological move by Lévinas is “a double transgression,” leaving the reader perplexed in their attempt to grasp the relationship between the many ideas put forward. The impossible blend of phenomenology and ontology is what leaves Janicaud mystified that Lévinas could label his project phenomenological in the first place. He writes, “This ‘phenomenology’ comes down to the edifying and airy evocation of a disembodied caress and a display-window eroticism. ‘The caress consists in seizing upon nothing.’ Let us not succumb to irony to easily; it is clear that this ‘nothing’ is not static, but searches for a form that eludes it.”\textsuperscript{699} In other words, Lévinas’ descriptive word choice in describing ‘Eros’ leaves Janicaud questioning the possibility of a particular transcendence proposed here, one that discusses the experiences of desire and pleasure.\textsuperscript{700} Lévinas’ phenomenology, according to Janicaud, is nothing more than a “two-timing” attempt to blend Husserl’s thoughts with something else—in some cases,

\textsuperscript{697} Janicaud, Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate, 38.
\textsuperscript{698} Ibid., 39-40.
\textsuperscript{699} Ibid., 40. See Levinas, Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority, 257.
\textsuperscript{700} Janicaud, Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate, 41-2.
ontology, at other times metaphysics, and still others a particular ethics that does not play well with phenomenology. 701 “Lévinas’s two-timing can be critiqued as purely and simply contradictory, terminating in a battle of words. Formally, such is the case. But it appears to us philosophically more enriching to unmask, in the working of these contradictions, a more artful strategy, through one not totally mastered.”702 Lastly, Janicaud, echoing Jacques Derrida, suggests that this turn in Lévinas’ phenomenology is nothing more than a hostage taking of the traditional phenomenology expressed by Husserl, Heidegger, and others.703

3.2 Janicaud’s Critique of Marion’s Phenomenology

Similar to his treatment of Emmanuel Lévinas’ phenomenological project, and the theological turn it takes, Dominique Janicaud rejects Jean-Luc Marion’s phenomenological project insofar as it too challenges the traditional method espoused by Husserl and Heidegger. Focusing primarily on Marion’s Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology, Janicaud raises several questions pertaining to metaphysics, reduction, the idea of givenness, and theology.

His first concern with Marion’s phenomenological project is the suspicious relationship he maintains with metaphysics. Janicaud specifically references Marion’s books The Idol and Distance and God Without Being, which differ from the post-metaphysical phenomenology

701 Ibid., 42 and 47.
702 Ibid., 42.
703 For example, Janicaud rejects Lévinas’ claim in Otherwise Than Being, that he is staying true to Husserl’s phenomenology. First, Lévinas: “Our analyses lay claim to the spirit of the Husserlian philosophy, whose letter has been the call to order for our epoch to a permanent phenomenology, rendered to its rank as the method of all philosophy,” Levinas, Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence, 183. Janicaud questions this claim, writing, “This claim obviously must be taken seriously, but that does not mean we must pass over in silence, or underestimate, the methodological difficulties it raises…As to the spirit of the Husserlian ‘philosophy,’ no one is its guardian; the discussion risks, then, losing itself in the imponderable. What is contestable…is…Lévinas’s appeal to the bizarre and not very rigorous notion of a ‘permanent phenomenology’ together with, on the other hand, his addendum that the evocations of Otherwise Than Being remain faithful to ‘intentional analysis,’” in Janicaud, Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate, 48-9.
Heidegger proposed, developing instead a theology that emphasizes ‘love.’ In this case, Marion
develops a Christo-centric theology that is both nonontological and nonrepresentative, thereby
radicalizing the Heideggerian model into a philosophy that challenges metaphysics and promotes
a theology that is possible. Janicaud is not quick to dismiss metaphysics, aware of Marion’s
adaptations of Hegel and Nietzsche in his work, suggesting that Marion himself does not adhere
to this philosophy aimed at overcoming traditional metaphysics. “Chiefly contestable is the
‘evidence’ concerning the end of metaphysics and the historicist form given to this Heideggerian
thesis (that we have entered into the ‘postmetaphysical’ era). Admittedly Marion nuances this
thesis with a ‘perhaps’ and concedes its ‘unilateral violence,’ its dogmatic massiveness. It remains
the case, nonetheless, that this schema is adopted as quasi-evident.” Therefore, Janicaud
adamantly objects to Marion’s interpretation of Heidegger, metaphysics, and his attempts to
“overcome” metaphysics. He then questions Marion’s intimation that postmodern philosophy has
moved beyond of the metaphysical era. Janicaud objects to the use of Nietzsche as the forefather
of the end of metaphysics, an idea to which both Marion and Gianni Vattimo allude.

Next, Janicaud objects to Marion’s interpretation of Heidegger’s Ver-endung, which would
seem to suggest a pro-longed abandonment of metaphysics and the emergence of something else
(i.e., phenomenology). According to Janicaud, metaphysics is not dismissed so easily, noting
Heidegger’s Holzwege (1967) as a point in which the late philosopher examined onto-theology or
metaphysics, without breaking from it entirely. Though he affirms Hegel’s questioning of
metaphysics, it nonetheless cannot be regarded as ended, insofar as Marion attempts to proclaim

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704 Janicaud, Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate, 52.
705 Ibid.
in *Phénoménologie et métaphysique*: “the first entry of phenomenology came to its end, with Hegel, in [phenomenology’s] being put aside.”\(^{707}\) Marion projects the idea that phenomenology moves beyond metaphysics—it serves as the antimetaphysics postmodern philosophers have sought: “Phenomenology does not introduce metaphysics, it exits from it [*elle en sort*].”\(^{708}\) Janicaud hence rejects Marion’s suggestion that metaphysics can and has been outright rejected by those engaged in phenomenology; rather, he clearly states that this part of his argument should be revised in its entirety. Moreover, Janicaud rejects any attempt by Marion to characterize phenomenology in a unified form under the label, “postmetaphysical.”\(^{709}\)

Marion’s proposed unification, to which Janicaud objects, is carried out through the process of reduction, a term referred to by Husserl, but introduced by Descartes and Kant. In *Reduction and Givenness*, Marion outlines three reductions: transcendental, existential, and the pure or the unquantifiable.\(^{710}\) Janicaud criticizes Marion for his use of these reductions first in his labeling them as unifiers, and second, misinterpreting Husserl’s application of reduction or *epochê* outlined in *Ideas I* and introduced earlier in this chapter.\(^{711}\) In fact, following his critique of Marion’s use of Kant and the attempt to explicate the transcendental, Janicaud critiques Marion’s idea of reduction and its connection(s) to Husserl: “More royalist than king, Marion systematizes the Heideggerian critique of Husserlian reduction (which Hiedegger formulated, in particular, in the *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*) to such a point that it becomes impossible to discern either the interest or the originality of Husserl.”\(^{712}\) Janicaud justifies this reading of Marion by pointing

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\(^{709}\) Janicaud, *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate*, 55-6.

\(^{710}\) Ibid., 56-7.

\(^{711}\) Ibid., 57-8.

\(^{712}\) Ibid., 58-9.
to the Heideggerian ontology as a “revival of Husserlian phenomenology,” despite Heidegger’s later texts (i.e., *Being and Time*) as a philosophy opposed to Husserl.

As a result of adopting Heidegger’s ontology and understanding of being and *Dasein*, questioning Husserl’s phenomenology, and reviving a phenomenology of his own, Marion is, in summary, criticized by Janicaud as developing something “unrecognizable.” ⁷¹³ Any attempt by Marion to incorporate Heidegger’s philosophy as a phenomenology, insofar as it completely adopts Husserl’s thinking on topics related to reduction and being, is the subject of ridicule by Janicaud. He ultimately comes down against the phenomenological attempt by Marion, suggesting that his philosophy is nothing more than wordplay and not phenomenology in the Husserlian sense of the word. Thus, he turns to the critique of his theological reading and the misuse of phenomenology in, for example, *God Without Being*, and the elasticity Marion finds in the application of *intuition, givenness*, and other terms he uses to develop a ‘phenomenology.’ “In Marion’s work, there is no respect for the phenomenological order; it is manipulated as an ever-elastic apparatus, even when it is claimed to be ‘strict.’” ⁷¹⁴ The theological turn in this case is in direct opposition to Husserl’s assertion that God remain far outside the philosophical project that is phenomenology. Janicaud, who suggests that these types of explorations are not phenomenological, rejects Marion’s incorporation of God and theology, in favor of a Husserlian form that repudiates such thinking.

The chapter thus far has presented a brief overview of René Descartes’ metaphysical concerns, Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology, and Emmanuel Lévinas’ ethical phenomenology. Throughout this chapter, I have argued that these philosophers have helped shape Jean-Luc

⁷¹³ Ibid., 60.
⁷¹⁴ Ibid., 65. Janicaud is likewise critical of Marion’s contemporary, Jean-Louis Chrétien, who also attempts to develop a phenomenology that is theological, in ibid., 66-8.
Marion’s phenomenology, one that incorporates their thoughts as well as introduces theology as a dialogue partner. As noted above, this comes with objections, highlighted in the brief presentation of Dominique Janicaud. There are those who assert theology has no place in a phenomenology that is derived from Husserl, Heidegger, and others. Moreover, overcoming metaphysics is, simply, a daunting task when one considers its influence in theological discourse. As I have alluded to throughout this project, metaphysics is deeply ingrained in Roman Catholicism and its theology; in fact, it is ingrained in such a way as to be promoted by several popes and commissions, which have understood the philosophy to be essential for theological thinking.

The second part of this chapter offers Marion’s phenomenology as a suitable partner for theological discourse. The connection between theological discourse and philosophy is not new, but the way it has become manifest is. Lieven Boeve, as I noted in chapter one, addresses the religious/spiritual shifts happening in Europe.715 Similar changes can be witnessed in other parts of the West; namely, a desire for something that does not necessarily follow the traditional descriptions of God. Whereas Boeve understands this transition to be a new visibility of religion—one that is not determined by religious institutions, but individual acceptance of something beyond—others reject the premise that religion, especially forms of Christianity, has upheld its prominence in Western Society. Likewise—despite Janicaud’s rejection of the theological turn Marion and Lévinas make in their own work—there are those who believe a phenomenological-theological discourse can be made. Part two of this chapter begins with this notion, before moving on specifically to the phenomenology of Jean-Luc Marion.

CHAPTER THREE

JEAN-LUC MARION’S PHENOMENOLOGY

Part II

Jean-Luc Marion: Theology and Phenomenology

At its inception, I suggested that this project continue to explore the changing forms of Christianity in postmodernism, especially, the changes which co-exist alongside the secular and post-secular trends in Western culture and theology. The implications associated with new theological narratives being incorporated alongside the influence of secularism, post-secularism, and a so-called post-Christianity requires a reexamination of the existing systems of narrative. I am specifically concerned with those narratives grounded in metaphysics. The tensions found in the historical developments of theology, our reliance on language, and the metaphysically-focused narratives are questioned via Jean-Luc Marion’s philosophy. Approaching this ‘overcoming of metaphysics’ necessitates supplementing ontology, onto-theology, and metaphysics with an alternative philosophical system; namely, phenomenology. I argue that this form of philosophy provides an opportunity in which theological ideas may develop, despite social trends which indicate a shrinking interest in religion. In other words, phenomenology opens the possibility of reigniting theological discourse not only in the coliseum of academic thought, but also in more informal or parish settings. This latter suggestion, is of course, formidable, considering the lack of philosophical foundation and the theological education of many. In the end, this may be too lofty a goal. And yet, when presented with the notion of phenomena, I suggest it may be fulfilling, offering a concept which seeks to overwhelm one’s intuition versus the noticeable resistance to authority—and here, I include metaphysics—outlined in chapter one.

The changing dynamics of the Christian faith (chapter one), as well as the postmodern and post-metaphysical approaches to philosophy (chapters two and three) open a door through which
a non-metaphysical approach may find footing, insofar as it challenges the metaphysical status quo familiar to Christian and Catholic faith. This is not a presumption, however, that the Church will be transformed from a stagnant institution to one revived and welcoming new persons into the fold. This claim would be naïve. Rather, I am proposing phenomenology as an adequate discourse partner—one that would re-invigorate theologians and the flock by suggesting a ‘new’ language to re-discover faith or God. At the outset, let me make this clear: the Roman Catholic Church and its subsequent doctrine has a vested, political interest in metaphysics as its underlying philosophy. It is political in the sense that it is a tool from which it can socially exchange ideas of the divine and its prominence as a pillar of the authoritarian structure (addressed further in the next chapter).

The Church has all but affirmed St. Thomas’ metaphysics as the philosophy of the Church, referenced above and highlighted in Leo XIII’s *Aeterni Patris* (1879) and has reaffirmed its role through the pontificate of Francis. Similarly, we observe that it is impossible for Marion either to completely dismiss metaphysics from his work. Therefore, this is not an argument which suggests Marion completely rejects Aquinas’ metaphysics; rather, his goal is to find a suitable way in which Aquinas’ ideas may be overcome via phenomenology.\(^{716}\)

Offering a system which seeks to overcome the limitations of metaphysics is the goal here. Jean-Luc Marion invites us to consider a theological narrative which reintroduces the historical tradition of Christianity (found in the patristics), while also offering a narrative that avoids the idolatry evident in metaphysics. This chapter explores Marion’s philosophy—the “*bête noire* of the ‘new phenomenology’”—to borrow a phrase coined by Tamsin Jones,\(^{717}\) and the possibility of

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\(^{716}\) Marion addresses this in his essay, “Aquinas and Onto-the-o-logy,” found in the revised edition of *God Without Being* (2012).

\(^{717}\) The phrase, *bête noire*, refers to the general disregard for this type of phenomenology (i.e., that which adopts theology as a discourse partner). Tamsin Jones offers this initial comment to help qualify Jean-Luc Marion’s phenomenology. See Jones, 1.
a theology partnered with phenomenology. Marion’s historical position as a scholar emerges at the end of the *nouvelle théologie* movement in Paris and as a student of Derrida focused on the works of Descartes, Husserl, and Lévinas. By challenging the influence of metaphysics on religious narratives, I suggest that Marion furnishes an opportunity to discourse with Christianity that is otherwise absent from the ontological, metaphysical presentation attributed to Aquinas, Suarez, and others. The influence of Husserl and Heidegger, especially, help Marion develop a phenomenology grounded in givenness and reduction, versus the Thomistic absolutes and proofs. Thus, the second half of this chapter looks to examine how Jean-Luc Marion’s phenomenology, one that uniquely engages theology, may offer a dialogue partner for a dynamic Christian faith, particularly defined within Roman Catholicism. This unique engagement would consider the varied changes in postmodernity, especially the previously described disaffection with authoritative structures. Put another way, I am proposing a new set of ‘language-games,’ in which theology participates. I am proposing a way in which theological discourse can continue in postmodernity without relying on the metaphysics of the past. In this way, a set of different ‘language-games’ are carried out—void of the metaphysical trappings Marion and Vattimo work to overcome.

Of course, this proposal carries two risks at its outset. First, the institutional Church and its long, historical association with metaphysics will undoubtedly resist. This resistance will emerge not only from the pulpit, the ivory tower, and Rome, but from the pews. Presenting something, for instance, which seeks to challenge the catechetical teachings—the classic Baltimore Catechism comes to mind—will face suspicion and disdain. Those enamored by Aquinas, Suarez, and others, will see this discourse as unpalatable, particularly given the rejection of God as being/Being.
Secondly, though to a lesser degree, Marion’s philosophical contemporaries have already rejected the melding of Husserl and Heidegger into systems of theology.

Nevertheless, proposing Marion’s particular phenomenology as an alternative invites a reexamination of the centuries-long appropriation of metaphysics as the dialogical partner. His theology, presented in such texts as Being Given, The Idol and Distance, and God Without Being, re-introduces the work of the Greek fathers and the importance of idol and icon. Marion’s project invites such a conversation by way of the deconstruction of traditional Aristotelean and Thomistic models of theology. Additionally, and beyond the influence of Descartes, Kant, Husserl, Heidegger, and Levinas, Marion has also been influenced by Dionysius the Aeropagite (Denys) and Gregory of Nyssa. Collectively, their ideas, and the notion of ‘God,’ are found throughout Marion’s philosophical theology.

I begin this chapter by focusing our attention on phenomena and the various categories assigned to it. Here, Marion’s understanding of how we interact with various aspects of reality are examined, highlighting those categories which may overwhelm one’s intuition. I grant special attention to Marion’s understanding of the icon, which is used to present an understanding of the divine (i.e., God, as understood in the Judeo-Christian sense). Second, this chapter discusses how Marion develops a theology grounded in metaphysics; one that builds on the understanding of saturated phenomena and one’s intuition. Third, an understanding of Revelation is offered via phenomenology. Here, I present Marion’s goal of overcoming the metaphysical limitations assigned to Revelation by Aquinas, Suarez, and others. Further emphasis is given to Marion’s philosophy of God without being. The chapter concludes with an observation of how Marion’s philosophical thought may be applied to the postmodern understanding of faith and the necessity of charity in the life of a Christian. What is presented here is in no way a complete synopsis of
Marion’s work, but a presentation of how postmodern theology might overcome its reliance on metaphysics.

Thus, the focus in this chapter re-emphasizes the postmodern detachment from metaphysics as an authoritative system established to illustrate the ontological and theological ideas philosophy has offered for centuries. As noted, metaphysics offers descriptions of things (e.g., the elephant) based upon the natural sciences or the historical understanding of such things. Phenomenology, centered on an acceptance of phenomena, intends to present itself in an entirely different method: beyond the limitations of metaphysics, insofar as the pseudo-science serves as a limiting frame (i.e., a picture frame), phenomenology suggests that the phenomenon offers more than what the frame contains. Marion explains, “[The phenomenon] can no longer be spoken of in terms of ordinary representation and appearing. In the strict phenomenological sense, the phenomenon is no longer (or not only) visible; it breaks through the frame, is abandoned to the world of which it now makes up a part. It comes forward insofar as it gives itself.”718 The elephant is no longer only visible through the lens of the natural sciences, mathematics, or metaphysics, but offers more to one’s gaze than what these systems offer. The elephant/phenomenon gives itself—appearing before the observer and not described, measured, defined in a book, etc. Its impact on the consciousness of the individual is likewise apropos to its phenomenality: it becomes a gift, demanding some form of response (negative or positive), providing no escape because of its ‘exploding’ before consciousness. By virtue of its givenness, the phenomenon demands a response; its appearance as a given requires an interaction, as though it were a gift seeking a (valid) response. Certainly, one can reject the phenomenon once it gives itself, but it cannot be denied insofar as it appears without a frame or other limitation.

718 Marion, Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness, 69.
In further contrast to metaphysics, phenomena are relative to one’s life experiences, relative to intuition, and how phenomena engage one’s surroundings. One’s intuition stands in relation to either poor or “common-law” (resulting in a common or poor sense of intuition) or the saturated phenomenon (one that fully floods one’s intuition). “Poor” phenomena are defined as those which are “poor in intuition,” meaning, “[they] claim only a formal intuition in mathematics or a categorical intuition in logic, in other words, a ‘vision of essences’ and idealities.”719 This type of phenomenon needs nothing more than “its concept alone;” there is no further explanation needed for the observer to understand.720 In this sense, mathematics can be regarded as a ‘poor phenomenon,’ as indicated in a simple mathematical formula (1+1=2) or in quantum physics, which may be overwhelming to the mathematically disinclined but can nonetheless be taught and therefore regarded as being a “poor phenomenon.”

Common phenomena vary slightly from the aforementioned “poor phenomena.” Whereas poor phenomena are articulated through concepts, such as mathematics, common phenomena become further defined but remain partially absent from intuition.721 Common phenomena are dependent on how these forms give themselves to the recipient. These types of phenomena are most evident in physics and the natural sciences, and are subject to the same ridicule to which Husserl subjects them.722 For example, the physics equation, \( v = \Delta s/\Delta t \), articulates that the distance of a falling object increases the rate of speed at which it falls. This natural science equation is thus nothing more than common phenomena.723 Common phenomena, often illustrated in two or three-

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719 Ibid., 222.
720 Ibid.
721 Ibid.
722 The “natural sciences” in Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness are references to the sciences of astronomy, biology, chemistry, physics, etc.
723 It is worth commenting, however, that this does not assume a complete departure from technology. In this way, mathematics is categorized as a poor phenomenon and technology as a common phenomenon. Both maintain a place as a benefit to society. “[This] figure of phenomenality…finds confirmation in the case of technological objects. Here
dimensional ways, relate to humanity in an existence economical to them. As a result, mathematics and physics are used to understand the proper way in which metal can be used, for example, in the construction of an architectural masterpiece (e.g., Burj Khalifa). The natural sciences, despite their magnificent contributions to society, remain common-law phenomena for Marion, as they fail to flood one’s intuition once the mathematics or science is grasped. They fail to flood one’s intuition as they can be preconceived prior to actualization or production on paper, screen, or otherwise.

Common or poor phenomena in turn solicits a phenomenological view of what one’s intuition encounters. Ultimately, common phenomena fail to offer what is possible beyond the ordinary encounters to which one’s intuition is exposed. In other words, intuition exposed to common phenomena does nothing more than accept it as is; it never floods the intuition. Theologically, Marion invites his readers to consider whether or not common phenomena are adequately able to offer a pathway for the Divine. Metaphysics, insofar as it neglects to offer anything outside its own observed conceptions of science, natural law, etc., draws parallels to the ideas of poor or common phenomenon. Going beyond common phenomena, specifically as it relates to theology, is Marion’s articulation of saturated phenomenon, which overwhelmingly floods the intuition, inviting the possibility of an invisible divine presence to encounter the I, leaving it drenched in an experience uncommon and rich.

The consideration given to phenomena is a direct shift away from the attention given to metaphysics as a conversant philosophy with theology. This is a renewed approach to theology, one that avoids the limitations of metaphysics and one which proposes phenomenology as “first

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the intention and the concept take on the role of plan, schema, or drawing (‘mechanical’ or done with CAD), in short, exactly what industry names the ‘concept’ of an object. It is defined by the fact that in principle it renders fully intelligible, that is to say, at least imaginable, the structure of the object, but also by the fact that it already integrates its feasibility (its industrialization) and the calculation of the profitability of its fabrication and commercialization—not only its technical definition (its essence), but also the conditions for its entering production and eventually the economy (existence),” in Marion, Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness, 223.
philosophy.” Phenomenology as “first philosophy,” in contrast, makes it clear that a phenomenon, as a given, intends to challenge the natural sciences, historically developed ideas, and pseudo-science by surpassing these systems of knowledge, inviting an interaction with the intuition, absent of the absolutes found in metaphysics. On several occasions, Marion clarifies this point. For example, in his essay, “The Other First Philosophy and the Question of Givenness,” he writes,

In terms of givenness, phenomenology allows us to take up anew the question of a first philosophy. It authorizes it, but with several precautions. For if one expects of a first philosophy that it determines what it brings to light by fixing a priori a principle or collection of principles, in particular by imposing the transcendental anteriority of the I…then phenomenology does not achieve and, above all, no longer even claims the rank of a first philosophy thus understood. For as we have reconstructed it, the decisive originality of its enterprise consists in rendering an incontestable priority to the phenomenon: letting it appear no longer as it ought…but as it gives itself.  

And in his later text, Being Given:

Appearing must remove itself from…the imperial rule of the a priori conditions of knowledge by requiring that what appears force its entry onto the scene of the world, advancing in person without a stuntman, double, or any other representative standing in for it. The emphasis granted to the lack of a priori conditions is essential here: givenness lacks the ability to mimic something already present; it has no other model from which to draw comparison. The individual’s experience and intuition is positioned over that of pre-conceived conditions. In this regard, the principle of givenness is the last to arrive. This understanding of givenness grants the opportunity to distinguish phenomenology as the last philosophy: it has arrived after traditional philosophy has exhausted the proofs-principles-arguments schema that ultimately adulterates the experience of the thing itself. However, the acceptance of the thing itself as a given without precondition, proposes phenomenology as first philosophy. Marion outlines this philosophical word play as such:

The principle of phenomenology—‘so much reduction, so much givenness’—as fundamental as it is, is nothing like a foundation, nor even a first principle. It instead offers a last principle—the last

725 Marion, Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness, 69.
because none other is found after it; and the last, above all, because it does not precede the phenomenon but comes after and yields priority to it…The last becomes the first; the principle is defined as last principle and therefore phenomenology takes up the title ‘first philosophy’ only by inverting it—‘last philosophy.’

The difference phenomenology offers highlights the arrival of the given to the I without relying on pre-existing conditions. The I is responsible for witnessing and internalizing the phenomenon, which gives itself unconditionally: “the I becomes the clerk, the addressee, or the patient, but almost never the author or the producer.”

What the I encounters varies according to what phenomena one is exposed to. As noted previously, I encounter common phenomena regularly. These poor experiences meet our intuition daily in the form of ordinary activities. When presented with ‘saturated phenomenon,’ the intuition is overwhelmed. In order to explain these phenomena, Marion presents four categories which help determine how the saturated is understood. As we will see, Marion blends the theological into the categories, inviting us to conceive of ways in which the I might be overwhelmed by the religious, the spiritual, and even the divine.

4. Marion’s Saturated Phenomenon

4.1 The Flesh

Aristotle’s understanding of the human being extends beyond simply flesh (aspects of the human body, flesh and bones, are comprised of matter. Our concern remains focused on metaphysics and its theological limitations. Marion’s category of the flesh is different insofar as it exceeds the limitations ascribed to it by metaphysics (e.g., skin with textures). An Aristotelean understanding approaches human flesh as something connected to this human being’s material substance. The socio-political understanding is also considered: a human is human by means of

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726 Marion, “The Other First Philosophy and the Question of Givenness,” 797. Emphasis original.
727 Ibid. Emphasis original.
728 Aristotle, Book Zeta, 11.
his or her ability to participate, “make and use tools, play games, judge themselves and others critically, and develop cultural traditions.”

And, to add to the Aristotelean description, humanity wishes to maintain the idea that men and women create the world around them, interpreting the world as it presents itself. The byproduct of this, as we addressed in chapter two, is language and language systems which provide an authoritarian format distinguishing humanity from other creatures and establishing rules relating to the broad Aristotelean concept of flesh.

The saturated form of flesh for Marion engages the world via one’s intuition. Different from Aristotle’s desire to understand the world such that humanity cannot be separated from it, Marion wishes to express the radical: the world constitutes the flesh. Marion, without denying humanity’s matter, emphasizes the experience of humanity and the uniqueness of the single individual. The flesh constitutes the world around the individual, while existing in a state equal to that of the metaphysicians: humans suffer, experience pain, and eventually will die. This conceptualization of the flesh, as it experiences the ebbs and flows of life, passively receives that which appears before it (including suffering, aging, and death), determining the world it encounters. The world shapes the individual and gives purpose to it, while the flesh causes a relation to the phenomenon available to her or him. The flesh is what experiences the world, not the matter or form of Aristotle. The flesh is ultimately that which feels, personally engages with, or relates to what is being offered to one’s body.

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730 Accordingly, Marion writes of Aristotle’s understanding of flesh, “Flesh has nothing optional about it—it alone converts the world into an apparition, in other words, the given into a phenomenon. Outside of my flesh, there is no phenomenon for me,” in Marion, In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomenon, 89.
731 Marion exclaims that the world itself “passes through my flesh. Without [the flesh], the world would disappear,” in ibid.
732 Ibid.
733 “The flesh is defined as the identity of what touches with the medium where this touching takes place (Aristotle), therefore of the felt with what feels (Husserl), but also of the seen and the seeing or the heard and the hearing—in short, of the affected with the affecting (Henry),” in Marion, Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness, 231.
The interaction between humanity and the world is where Marion further separates himself from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. Whereas Aristotle will state that humanity’s intellect, reason, and form will cause the world around her or him, phenomenologically, the flesh and body remain apart. The two remain unable to connect with one another in a way that the flesh is actualized the way the body is.

Flesh can take body [appear]; body can never take flesh…flesh and body are phenomenologically opposed all the more radically that one has for its function to make appear in feeling, to the point that it remains invisible as such, while the other, having for its definition to appear as visible, is never in a position to make appear, or feel, or intend. The body appears, but flesh remains invisible, precisely because it makes appear.\(^{734}\)

While the flesh is that which experiences the world, particularly in the form of the erotic, the aging, and/or the painful, it ultimately remains invisible. Literally, no one human being can experience the flesh of another human being; an analogy or description, despite its detailed expression, will always fall short.

Furthermore, one’s flesh constitutes itself by ordering itself in relationship to the world it encounters; however, the flesh of the individual must furthermore create a separation between itself and the world it encounters. It must be first understood as that which nothing else can affect. “In order to affect itself in itself, it must first be affected by nothing other than itself (auto-affection).”\(^{735}\) The flesh in creating its own identity separates itself from the world around it. Thus, “[such] an affection is at issue each time [the saturated phenomenon] not only exceeds every constitutable object [i.e., the world around it], but saturates the horizon to the point that there is no longer any relation that refers it to another object.”\(^{736}\)

Finally, the flesh cannot be determined by the world around it—including other people—thus causing the flesh to create an identity unto itself. The self creates a relationship to the world

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\(^{735}\) Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, 231.

\(^{736}\) Ibid.
the flesh resides within and is therefore unique to the individual, separate from every other object in the world. “[It] remains by definition mine, unsubstitutable—nobody can enjoy or suffer for me (even if he can do so in my place).”737 Whereas an analogy may articulate how someone is feeling, what pain he or she is in, or what pleasure she or he experiences, the observer cannot know what the subject is undergoing.738 The flesh “provokes and demands solipsism,” as no one can experience the emotions and sensations of the other.739 Theologically, this saturated horizon, in the category of flesh, is expressed in the form of the Incarnation. The paradox revealed in the act of God becoming human, taking on all that flesh entails, including and especially death, is what theologically can be emphasized in this type of phenomenon.

4.2 The Event

The event, as saturated phenomenon, emphasizes Marion’s designation of quantity. In this regard, the phenomena are categorized or impossible to categorize. The use of ‘event’ invites a series of questions, including how other aspects of life—friendship, the erotic or intimate encounter with a loved one, or, religiously, the interaction with the Eucharist—may be included. And like other forms of saturated phenomena, the event may extend beyond the simple comprehension of an historical event, to also include all saturated phenomena as an attribute of phenomenality. More, the event can emulate characteristics found in other forms of phenomena.740 Typically, however, as with Marion’s example of the Battle of Waterloo, this form of the saturated refers directly to an historical or cultural event.

737 Ibid., 232. See also, Marion, In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomenon, 87.
738 Marion, In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomenon, 87.
739 Marion, Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness, 232.
The event overwhelmingly (primarily) saturates one’s sense of sight, as it cannot be fully grasped in a single view. The event incorporates three distinct, yet connected, factors. First, the event cannot be defined as one instance, one battle scene, one individual, etc. It must be understood as a compilation of smaller occurrences that make up one historical moment. Second, the event is so large in scale that it cannot be grasped with one’s single view. The immediate response to the event may be to declare that it can be encapsulated in a history book, through myth or oral tradition, or through a photograph. Any attempt, however, would be done in vain: it is impossible to fully capture all that the event affects. Third, the event is recognized as an historical event when one recognizes that its population comprises a group larger than what is seen by the poet, the participant, or the historian.\textsuperscript{741}

The event’s immensity refutes any possibility of comprehension through science and thereby eliminates any possibility of control in a way that is fathomable. The event’s cause remains foreign, as well, keeping it from the entrapment of language. The scope of this type of phenomenon makes it impossible to metaphysically capture what has taken place. An event’s inability to be completely ‘constituted’ or ‘exhaustively described’ as an object permits Marion to propose that it is, indeed, a saturated phenomenon. As an example, Marion offers the 1815 Battle of Waterloo. The scope of this event “means precisely that nobody can claim for himself a ‘here and now’ that would permit him to describe it exhaustively and constitute it as an object.”\textsuperscript{742} The battle is impossible to capture on canvas, in a narrative, or otherwise. Its scale extends beyond the single battlefield, to the widow at home, the medic on reserve, and the countless others affected by the scrimmage. Neither the soldier buzzed by passing bullets, the Duke of Wellington guiding the

\textsuperscript{741} Marion, Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness, 228.
\textsuperscript{742} Ibid.
soldiers from a distance, nor the Emperor saddled with leading the army against the ‘enemy,’ knows the true meaning of the event.

Three additional notes are offered to clarify this explanation of the event. First, each event is unique, and unable to be reproduced or replicated in any form. Second, the event, as saturated, cannot be awarded a unique description, but requires an exhaustive explanation. While one may assign certain historical reasons, there are many more that could be added—exhaustively—in an attempt to understand the conflict. Finally, no event can be foreseen in its totality. Importance is placed on the singularity and uniqueness of the event, thus separating it from all other events of similar nature. The Battle of Waterloo, for example, cannot be compared to the century later, Battle of the Bulge in 1944-45.

Death too is included in this category. The suddenness of death is viewed as an event insofar as one’s death cannot be repeated. It affects me without the opportunity to respond. It serves as a “perfect event,” one that is “pure givenness.” Birth too is an unrepeatable event, though its significance differs from death, in that it is one that affects me continuously: my birth originated me. Birth “does not phenomenalize itself; but as a pure event, unforeseeable, unrepeatable, exceeding all cause and rendering possible the impossible…surpassing all expectations, all promised, and all prediction.” In either, birth and death, the result is not an object that can be controlled, but one in which I submit to it without precondition.

The battlefield, one’s birth, and death each elicit a response. These saturated phenomena are not to be controlled as though objects, but witnessed as a givenness without precondition(s). Encountering this form of saturation demands the intuition respond accordingly (even at death); it

743 Marion, In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomenon, 36-7.
744 Ibid., 37.
745 Ibid., 40 and 41.
746 Ibid., 43.
does not encourage a passive response. The recipient is mindful of his or her place, the phenomena give themselves to the recipient, and the recipient is expected to respond. Marion’s analogy of a goalkeeper is useful here. The goalie is aware of the attacking offense, aware of the presence of the ball, aware of the pressure associated with her task, and accepts the incoming ball heading her way. The goalkeeper, though passive compared to her defense, remains active and aware of what is being given to her. The event—the press—cannot be repeated in the same format; something will always differ, though the active-passive relationship is expected in each encounter of each event.

Theology can equally incorporate this form of saturation, acknowledging the Biblical event(s) as impossible to recapture in any significant way. Revelation, and specifically, Christ’s crucifixion, represents a saturated phenomenon insofar as the event on Golgotha cannot be replicated with the same meaning, actors, or significance and this event cannot be adequately captured by way of literature or scripture, art, or poetry. If this event is accepted as a theological discourse tool for phenomenology, useful for engaging post-metaphysical theology, it would provide an opportunity for the Christ-event to be explored not in terms of historical absolutes, but an experience that fails to be captured in one instance. Consequently, Marion’s remaining forms of the saturated phenomenon (the idol and the icon) also give opportunity to blend the phenomenological and theological together, providing a resource for renewed discourse. This would support Marion’s attempts to infuse his phenomenological understanding of the event with theology.

747 Ibid., 50.
748 See, for example, Jean-Luc Marion, Givenness and Revelation, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 61-88.
4.3 The Idol

The next two categories—the *idol* and the *icon*—are given greater explanation in this space and by Marion. Each expresses a category of the phenomenon which is far more advanced than the common or poor phenomenon, as well as the *event* or *flesh*. Each offers more than what the categories of metaphysics articulates; they extend beyond the limits imposed by this pseudo-science, capturing—at least momentarily—one’s gaze. The *idol* offers itself as a mere depiction of something, lacking the ability to extend beyond a given horizon. The *idol* is nothing more than that which the individual perceives—the invisible mirror. It is only a conception of what the individual believes, or wants to see. Any sort of assigning of meaning to the phenomenon—asserting control over it—would show a failure to be overwhelmed by the givenness of the thing, making it no longer a phenomenon, but a subject of metaphysics or the natural sciences. In contrast to any type of categorization, the *idol* offers itself without precondition, instead understood as a given, lacking any form of metaphysical intentionality. In Marion’s *Being Given* and *In Excess*, the idol remains outside the purview of metaphysics and the ability of one to assign value or identification to it. Additionally, the idol’s ability to capture the gaze, but remain at a distance from categorization in the ‘scientific sense,’ implies a failure to recognize the invisibility that remains of the given.

To better articulate this understanding of an *idol*, Marion’s focus on artwork is helpful. Several references to masterpieces including (1) the unnamed and unexceptional artists referenced in *Being Given* compared to (2) Carravaggio’s *The Calling of Saint Matthew* and (3) the third abstract art of Mark Rothko, addressed in both Marion’s *The Visible and the Revealed* and *In Excess*, aim to address this unfulfilled experience of the *idol*. One’s experience of art asks of the *I* to gaze upon it, offering more than just an image on canvas; rather, it offers something that captures
one’s gaze, holds it, and potentially floods one’s intuition. Viewing the art invites one to gaze, inviting a form of sensory overload, overwhelming the gaze to the point of blindness. One’s experience in this instance goes beyond a common phenomenon, which otherwise fails to submerge the intuition into a state of amazement or shock. As a painting, the idol can only offer so much. Its limitations exist when one recognizes that it offers nothing more, even after repeated encounters. The necessity to revisit the idol again and again, asserting its ability to cause bedazzlement, disbelief, amazement, etc., is central to Marion’s understanding. He explains, “A work of art is that to which one returns (ce que l’on revoit). The work of art is not something that one sees (voit), but it is to what one returns (revoit), what one goes to see again (va revoir).” This revisiting addresses the idol’s inability to be grasped in a single instance, where each return offers the observer more insight into the phenomenon, but ultimately, the observer remains unfulfilled. By focusing on the subjective and intuition-centered approach to the painting/idol, Marion withdraws any connection to a metaphysical analysis which, by contrast, would imply an already-present determination of the idol. The givenness of the painting itself is what the gaze encounters, its givenness—its visibility—in turn, permitting the visibility of the art, versus applying principles making it visible. His acceptance of the painting as a saturated phenomenon is centered on his understanding of the visible and invisible. The multidimensional qualities

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749 For example, Christina M. Gschwandtner, Degrees of Givenness: On Saturation in Jean-Luc Marion, Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 58 and Marion, Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness, 203.


751 Marion, Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness, 350.

752 See ibid., 215. On this point, Gschwandtner writes, “Overall, visibility and invisibility play an important role in Marion’s work…Even the overwhelming nature of the saturated phenomenon is usually put in visual language and imagery: it is bedazzling, blinding, too much for the ‘too narrow aperture,’” in Gschwandtner, Degrees of Givenness: On Saturation in Jean-Luc Marion, 51 and 58. See also, Cynthia R. Nielsen, "Review of Being Given: Towards a Phenomenology of Givenness," Ars Disputandi 5 (2005): 5.
paintings possess, especially the invisible and unseen, are referred to by Marion as exceptional displays of the phenomenon.  

Meanwhile, the invitation to participate—either as an individual or in community—ultimately fails. The painting serves as “the most classic and most strict phenomenology, because it reduces entirely the phenomenal to the visible,” but nevertheless fails to incorporate the individual into the actual experience of the painting. The idol cannot show the ‘real’ beyond what it is—beyond the framed canvas. The oil and canvas of the painting, does not manifest the real station Mark Rothko conceptualizes or experienced but provides the observer the opportunity to have a glimpse of what is possible. In other words, Rothko’s Subway Scene presents an “idol [to rise] up before us, silent, irresistible, adorable,” but nonetheless is foreign. In each case, the idol does not offer more than what is presented on the canvas provided. Again, the piece of art continues to give itself in a variety of ways to the observer. While one may stand before a painting and admire it, it never ceases to amaze. Thus, it is overwhelming to the observer’s intuition; it floods the intuition, making it a saturated phenomenon.

Marion’s emphasis on art and its ability to capture the gaze of the onlooker reaffirms the limitations the idol possesses: it does not offer more than an aesthetically pleasing (or displeasing) presentation, capturing momentarily the gaze, and returning the gaze back without influencing the gaze any further. One additional example will help articulate an understanding of the idol. In his essay, “What We See and What Appears,” Marion addresses Gustave Flaubert’s description of Madame Arnoux in Flaubert’s Sentimental Education. The emphasis here is the distinction

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754 Marion, In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomenon, 68.
755 Ibid., 74.
between what is visible and what remains absent for most observers. In the novel, Flaubert’s character, Frederic, is the only one capable of ‘seeing’ the total person, the total vision of Madame Arnoux, because of his love for her.\footnote{Marion, "What We See and What Appears," in \textit{Idol Anxiety}, 161.} While another reader may encounter the majesty of Madame Arnoux as described by Flaubert, the gaze fails to capture the subject of this piece of art the same way that Frederic experiences and is overwhelmed—saturated—by her presence or appearance. The casual observer can read Frederic’s admiration for Madame Arnoux and the gaze may be temporarily intrigued, but the love Frederic has can never appear to the observer, despite repeated attempts. In contrast to a painting, the novel’s details invite an observation of the saturated, which largely remains invisible (especially in this case, with the subject of love). Frederic’s vision of Madame Arnoux varies from that of the painting. The unique way in which Frederic’s admiration saturates cannot be replicated in another art form. A painting’s givenness, its appearance before me is unlike the text in a novel and the description of love. I can experience the appearance and I have no choice, it captures my gaze when I encounter it.

The point of this distinction—that of Frederic’s admiration and the experience of the painting—is to demonstrate the visible-invisible distinction offered in this concept of saturated phenomenon. Whereas the character’s love can be described adequately in a novel, its true experience can only be understood by the fictional character, Frederic. The painting in comparison is unavoidable; its appearance cannot be ignored. The painting requires me to observe it again and again, negating the possibility that all aspects of the piece of artwork have been made visible. The painting’s subject, colors, textures, etc., will continue to offer something more to me than just an initial gaze and encounter.
Placing Marion’s understanding of the idol (a painting), as it is used to assess an understanding of phenomena, requires a return to the philosophy of Husserl and Heidegger outlined above. Specifically, we are concerned with Marion’s description of the idol as an idea which extends beyond the phenomena-being motif of Heidegger and the phenomena-object motif of Husserl. The emphasis with the idol is placed on the importance of the givenness of the thing itself, outlined especially in *Being Given*.

Elsewhere, Marion’s example of “the monumental statue of Athena” serves as an explanation of how the idol functions: the idol “fascinates and captivates the gaze” of the observer “precisely because everything in it must expose itself to the gaze, attract, fill, and hold it.” Athena’s statue, however, fits within the ambiguity that exists between Marion’s portrayal of both the idol and icon. Those who believed in Athena believed the statue was something more than what was visibly present (whether the statue could become animated or the statue was a supplement or symbol for the goddess herself). From this perspective, one can deduce how the statue may have been regarded as an icon. The statue today serves as an idol, representing nothing more than itself. It exists as a work of art, a piece of mythology, an artistic masterpiece, or an example of an ancient triumph of man over stone. One’s gaze remains fixed, incapable of traversing the stone or marble features of the fading and impaired statue. Athena’s statue at Acropolis “depends on the gaze” of the passing sailor, but offers no further meaning or purpose. The statue itself cannot cause the observer to gaze and take in its magnificence, but gives itself in such a way that the observer’s gaze is, at least temporarily, fixed to it. Any such statue, referring

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757 See Gschwandtner, *Degrees of Givenness: On Saturation in Jean-Luc Marion*, 57.
758 For example, Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, 49.
760 Ibid.
to Claudel, serves as an idol intent on capturing one’s gaze. It falsely leads one to believe that it is something more than it actually is. Viewed otherwise, the fabricated product is nothing more than common phenomena, limited in its meaning.\footnote{Ibid.}

The Golden Calf of Exodus 32 is an example from a theological perspective. The people, in a desperate attempt to conceptualize Moses’ promised deity, create a large figure intent on capturing the gaze of the desert wanderers. The creation of the calf serves as an idol, insofar as it aims to communicate something to the observer. Its givenness invites a response, one that asks of the observers to bracket both “object and beingness” to arrive at something more: the invisibility of the phenomenon. Ultimately, the jeweled calf is no more than a statue, lacking meaning beyond its size, color, or presence. The idol draws the observer in, as the one gazing is immersed and amazed by the masterpiece’s size, detail, etc.

Whether the idol is best portrayed as Rothko’s Subway Scene, Flaubert’s characters, or Athena’s statue is ultimately irrelevant. What Marion offers is an examination of a saturated phenomenon, which opens up endless possibilities outside the realm of metaphysics or the natural sciences. The idol, as mentioned above, invites the gaze to return again and again, but offers no more than what appears before us (a statue, a painting, a poem, etc.). The enormity of Athena, the magnificence of Tanner’s Annunciation, or another idol are a saturated phenomenon, so long as they invite and re-invite the gaze.

\textbf{4.4 The Icon}

Marion’s articulation of this category develops from the context found in Idol and Distance and God Without Being, in which he juxtaposes idol against the horizon-surpassing icon. His focus on the icon is further developed in In Excess and Being Given. The icon carries...
many of the same qualities as the aforementioned idol, yet it offers more: it invites the gaze to travel beyond its frame, its horizon, offering insight into the phenomenon that the idol cannot. In God Without Being, Marion suggests that the icon is not the result of the gaze, but provokes a gaze. Additionally, this final category of the saturated phenomenon is described by its relationship to the previous paradoxes, encapsulating the phenomenological aspects of the aforementioned categories, offering something that gives more than just one form of saturation. The icon therefore offers more than a simple object appearing before me and theologically, as articulated in God Without Being, Marion will identify the icon as the Divine: God (Gd).764

As noted above, distance is a focal point of Marion’s interest in the saturated phenomenon and this remains evident in the icon. Whereas a painting (an idol) remains accessible, insofar as its givenness appears without impugning its spatial relationship to me, the icon remains forever beyond my gaze. Distance, accordingly, is literally the gap between me (the observer) and the subject that my gaze intends to retrieve, thereby defining the icon as that which remains foreign, beyond my grasp, despite my efforts to internalize and define it. The two poles Marion refers to—one end the human side, which aims to define that which it encounters or wishes to encounter, and the other, the hidden yet intriguing phenomenon that ‘calls’ to the human side—forever remain at a distance. The distance between the two poles remains immeasurable.

Intimacy protrudes from this distance, keeping the two parties separate but longing for one another, as though they were amorous partners seeking each other’s comfort. What emerges from

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762 “Whereas the idol results from the gaze that aims at it, the icon summons sight in letting the visible... be saturated little by little with the invisible. The invisible seems, it appears in a semblance... which, however, never reduces the invisible to the slackened wave of the visible,” in ibid., 17.
763 Marion, Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness, 233.
764 For example, Marion, God without Being: Hors-Texte, 2.
765 Marion, The Idol and Distance: Five Studies, 199.
766 Ibid., 200.
this examination of the icon is Marion’s review of Being and being. This distinction, as it relates to theology will subsequently become clearer. It is a distinction that excludes any understanding of ‘being’ in the metaphysical sense, reiterating Heidegger’s ontological distinction. In this regard, it demonstrates both the distance and difference evident between the icon and the (human) observer; likewise, between Heidegger’s being and Being. The difference Marion insists on here resides in the Heideggerian distinction between beings and Being, insofar as the latter cannot be determined in the same sense as the former. “Being, on the contrary, ‘is’ not in the sense that beings are; it fringes beings with the halo of an invisible light that no prism comes to decompose into colors that are elementary and visible like a being.” Simply, there exists no relation between these two dualities creating a gap, a distance, between the two. Being itself withdraws from beings, leaving the asymmetrical differences with a distance whose chasm cannot be filled. This distance gives definition to the invisible, insofar as it cannot be defined. The invisible remains outside the purview of the gaze, a phenomenon in its own way, and an icon accordingly. Any attempt to harness its phenomenality, its iconic specter—for lack of a better term—is impossible. The incomprehensibility of the icon when encountered by the gaze is accentuated in the explication of distance and difference. The unknowability of the phenomenon leaves one desiring knowledge, contact, or otherwise.

These phenomenological distinctions emphasize the dissimilarity Marion’s theology has from traditional metaphysics. As an authoritative system that expects its participants to determine

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767 “Distance maintains the duality of weights (di-) only by thrusting them one against the other, in order to stop, with an immobile and obstinate shock, in open sky, their two falls (-stance). When therefore the ontological difference exposes itself as a re-port (Aus-trag, dif-ference) that conciliates Being and beings more radically than it polemically opposes them, we rediscover therein the communion that is ultimately aimed at by distance,” in ibid., 201. Emphasis original.

768 Ibid., 202.

769 See also, Heidegger, Identity and Difference, 50-1.

770 Marion, The Idol and Distance: Five Studies, 204.
the thing itself by way of established principles or scientific norms, metaphysics reduces the distance to nothingness in one sense—thereby certifying the distance as mere points between one and the other. The phenomenological approach outlined here, however, insists that the distance not be viewed metaphysically but as a part of the relationship that establishes the distance between two poles as an encounter with a phenomenon.

Theologically, Marion contorts his understanding of phenomenology in such a way that he begins a language-game with traditional (metaphysical) approaches to God. For example, his reference to the father-figure (“the paternal horizon”) carries a theological tone in which the distance is the ‘God’ paradox offered in the Gospels. The emphasis granted to ‘distance’ is not simply an absence or the lack of something (e.g., Being); rather, it implies the intimacy for what is beyond one’s grasp. This disassociation is the very presence of something—though it remains invisible. The place of the Divine, despite the theological and paradoxical claim that invisibility is simultaneously visible, is presented using two Gospel stories which articulate this paradigm. First, Jesus’ journey into the desert-wilderness (Matthew 4 and Luke 4), where the Nazarene is tempted to abandon his ministry in large part because of the perceived distance that exists between Jesus and ‘God.’ Second, Jesus’ crucifixion is marked by the question, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” (Matthew 27:46), a cry of confusion over the perceived abandonment and distance.771 Distance in this sense presents an opportunity for the Divine to be explored; the notion that ‘God’ is confined to a relationship that is amenable to human understanding is dissolved. Likewise, the Gospel of John provides Marion with an affirmation that sight is not required in order that God may be ‘discovered’—God is not absent, but requires belief in order to be seen (John 20:9).772 The icon, accordingly, can be used to articulate theology, insofar as it maintains an understanding of the

771 Ibid., 203.
772 Ibid.
visibility-invisibility and distance primacy necessary to express such a philosophical exercise. In this way, theology can participate in a non-metaphysical form in which ‘God’ remains at a distance and maintains an anonymity foreign to one’s gaze and consciousness. The very distance and unknowability—metaphysically determined—has Marion identify God as literally crossed out, God, void of the metaphysical attributes.

God, as invisible in the metaphysical sense of the word, may saturate via the icon the one doing the gazing, a point he emphasizes in *God Without Being*. Thus, no human conception, imaginative idea, or linguistic description can give full visibility to the icon; it remains outside the scope of metaphor and narrative. Though one may be presented with an icon, Marion argues, “the invisible always remains invisible.”773 Any attempt to envisage the totality of the icon will be made in vain, as the gaze is only presented with the infinite. The icon makes visible only by giving rise to an infinite gaze. The idol captures one’s gaze, as though it were a mirror, but fails to provide a gateway to the icon.774 No one may define, in the strictest sense, that which is an icon, because of its infinite horizon or the vast depths of the infinite which exists beyond it. Marion’s challenge, therefore, is that one overcomes the frozen gaze of the idol and opens to the infinite icon.775 The emphasis on *icon* forces us to clarify the difference between it and the category of the *idol*. In contrast to the *idol*, and the required gaze of the individual, the *icon* gazes upon the individual: “The icon does not result from a vision but provokes it.”776

The *icon* extends beyond the metaphysics relied upon in theology, noting its inability to be quantified (in the *event*), be qualified (in the *idol*), and/or absolutized according to one’s relation

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775 Ibid., 24.
776 Ibid., 17.
to it (as in *the flesh*). The icon, in giving itself is an infinite horizon, unable to be captured in the frame of a painting, experienced through the gaze of one’s temporal location, nor placed in relation to one’s *flesh*. Its totality may not be confined in human-made forms, but far exceeds such quantifiable and “qualifiable” brackets of language. The icon as saturated phenomenon gives itself to the observer in abundance, unable to be reduced to any one form of understanding. Any attempt to quantify or qualify the icon will ultimately remain fruitless.

Important in the analysis of the idol is the ethical imperative that emerges from the phenomenon. Different from most of Marion’s other projects—*Prolegomena to Charity* being the primary exception—one sees the indebtedness to Levinas’s phenomenology here. Specifically, in *In Excess*, Marion draws the connection of Levinas’s concept of the face, and the idol’s inability to offer full visibility to what is portrayed on its canvas. By combining the two phenomenological ideas together—the painting as idol and face as icon—Marion introduces an ethics that demands a response. This invites the questioning of the self-portrait as it attempts to capture the totality of the person on the provided canvas. Any such attempt, à la Levinas, terminates the invisibility the face intends. The face of the other does not offer itself, as an idol (or icon), to the other to be subjected to analysis, but desires anonymity. The only request of the unknown, invisible face is the imperative, “‘Thou shall not kill!’” A self-portrait removes any anonymity, revealing a hiddenness that would otherwise remain invisible. The self-portrait fails to uphold the ethical imperative to not kill. The self-portrait ‘kills’ the painter in theory, by demanding a set of principles be applied to what is observed. The observer immediately turns to categories of race, presumed

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778 Marion offers more on this point: “Rothko…had perfectly foreshadowed what Levinas means: the façade forbids us to paint the face, and therefore it is necessary to choose between either killing the face in enframing it in the flatness [platitude] of the painting and putting it to death in the idol, or ‘mutilating’ oneself as a painter and giving up producing the face directly in visibility,” in Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomenon*, 78.
gender, critiques of hair, makeup, clothing, etc., thereby belittling the infinity the other has to offer, subjecting the subject of the self-portrait to categories that make the observer comfortable and accommodating, neglecting the ability to see the ‘more’ that is not only plausible, but real and exists beyond the horizon of the canvas and frame. A self-portrait can only result in idolatry, in which the observer fails to see the infinity of the other. The idolatry here implies an infatuation with what is known—what is visible—ignoring the invisible mystery that likewise and naturally must accompany the painting and painter.

In summary, Marion’s shift away from absolute metaphysics to phenomenology provides an opportunity to reassess the way in which one encounters the world. Approaching theology via phenomenology opens the possibility of a discourse that no longer relies on metaphysics to shape a being/Being understanding of ‘God,’ but rather one that invites the experience(s) of the individual to assess the phenomenon of the Divine. The result is a challenge to those narratives that rely so heavily on the flawed pseudo-science, without neglecting the Christian master narrative of Revelation, the Incarnation, the life of Jesus of Nazareth, the death of Christ, the Trinity, etc. Additionally, Marion does not surrender phenomenology to a type of spirituality alluded to in Chapter One. He remains committed to a Christian theology grounded in the master narrative and the accompanying ceremonial and sacramental practices associated with Roman Catholicism. His phenomenology, nevertheless, opens the possibility of theological discourse that can explore several aspects of Christianity including revelation.

5. Constructing Marion’s Theological Phenomenology

Aware of the critiques offered against the blend of theology and phenomenology—and not simply Dominique Janicaud versus Marion—there still exists a great deal of validity in its attempt(s) and has been rightly addressed by other scholars. Simmons, for example, points to the
authors of *God in France* and their application of phenomenology in various theological forums. Scholars such as Guido Vanheeswijk, Johan Goud, and Ruud Welton explore these various philosophical ideas—including those originating from Girard, Levinas, and Henry. This type of philosophy evokes a challenge to Husserl’s philosophy and the strict interpretation Janicaud grants it. Simmons explains his reasoning for engaging phenomenology and theology, writing: “I take *God in France* to successfully demonstrate that, without straying too far afield from Husserl’s own thought, God-talk can be viewed as a properly phenomenological possibility.” God should not be the topic discussed in phenomenology however, a point Simmons makes very clear. Viewed another way, phenomenology is capable of addressing theology, but its priorities are to remain elsewhere when it does engage theology. Thus, phenomenology has two possibilities: First, a philosophy that completely avoids the transcendent, theological, or religious altogether, instead reemphasizing the personal experience of the given; or, second, an openness to those intellectual arenas of ‘God-talk.’ Similar arguments are made by Marion in the preface to the 1991 version of *God without Being*, in Merold Westphal’s “Vision and Voice: Phenomenology and Theology in the Work of Jean-Luc Marion,” in Enda McCaffery’s *The Return of Religion in France*, and in Hent De Vries’ *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion*. Marion’s theological work is largely engaged with ‘God-talk.’

To assess his theology and phenomenology, three individuals are explored in terms of how they have helped shape Marion’s thinking: Dionysius and the language of αἰτία; Descartes on the

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780 Simmons, 157.
781 Ibid.
issue of metaphysics; and Levinas’ approach to ‘the appeal’ and ‘the Other.’ Each one of these scholars shape Marion’s theology and complements the aforementioned Continental philosophers engaged with this type of philosophy. This consideration of a nouvelle or better, novel, approach to theology beyond the metaphysics common within the Church is our focus. This particular form of ‘language-game’ provokes a review of metaphysics and its long-standing relationship to theology. This project encourages us to think beyond the horizon of a limited philosophy to one that enters the God-talk arena void of pre-conditions and theological (mis-)characterizations. Language, as noted, develops rules in order to provide an effective means of communication between various bodies. Nevertheless, language fails to encapsulate the totality of what is offered. Marion’s use of language in phenomenology and his frequent misuse of language is of importance. Obviously, language has significance and importance; simply accepting something because of its perceived ability to be interpreted or translated is of concern in this case.

The attention given to Dionysius helps orient Marion’s phenomenology. The use of Dionysius (and Gregory of Nyssa) is both theologically positive (kataphatic) and negative (apophatic). In this sense, Gregory of Nyssa and Dionysius Areopagite provide a basis from which Marion explores the intersection of philosophy and theology; defining his work as theological and philosophical—a blend of both. Dionysius helps to develop an understanding of theological phenomena free of “idolatrous restraint.” Identifying the limitations of metaphysics, and language, Dionysius provides a theology which is not limited by the cultural byproducts

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783 Positively, he seeks to return to all things (the ‘things themselves’); and negatively, he resists the objectification or idolatrous conceptualization of any thing. Holding the opposing forces of these motivations together produces the paradoxical juxtaposition of ‘givenness’ and ‘saturation,’ the radical manifestation as well as the endless hiddenness of phenomena, the universality of a rigorous method and the contextuality of infinite interpretation,” in Jones, 1. Marion’s use of apophatic theology, however, is one that remains ambiguous. His use of ‘negative theology’ implies more than a simple linguistic exercise, but an understanding of ontology and anthropology as it relates to the phrase. See ibid., 7-9, at 9.
784 Ibid., 79.
(language) found in a particular society (or institution). Dionysius’ άτία, for example, materializes in Marion’s theology often in an incorrect way. This is evident in Marion’s ambiguous reveal-conceal analysis of Dionysius’ description of creation, its “universal ‘givenness,’” as well as an understanding of the Divine as “Goodness.” Dionysius (Denys) concludes that the universality and givenness of creation permits phenomena to give themselves without precondition or interpretation.\textsuperscript{785} This use of Dionysius helps Marion establish the distance between humans and the divine, confirming the relationship between the divine giver and all other beings.\textsuperscript{786} This is clearly a departure from the authentic Husserlian form of phenomenology, because of its meddling in theology and a focus on the idea of a “divine giver.”

The reliance on άτία to explain “‘the cause of all things,’” a reference to Dioynsius’ use of the term in Divine Names (VII, 3), highlights this departure from Husserl.\textsuperscript{787} In his usage and understanding of the term, Marion acknowledges the idolatry commonly associated with άτία and the reliance on the word to grant explanation for the cause of all things.\textsuperscript{788} The idolatry emerges when one recognizes this as it relates to the limitations on ‘God.’ Reminiscent of the concerns about language outlined in the previous chapter, the process of ‘naming’ God, an automatic, though

\textsuperscript{785} Ibid., 80. Subsequently, Jones goes on to analyze Marion’s adaptation of Husserl and Heidegger’s understanding of ‘reduction,’ ‘givenness,’ and ‘phenomenon,’ much of which was outlined in the first part of this chapter.

\textsuperscript{786} Ibid., 99. It is worth noting, however, that Jones is critical of Marion’s use of Dionysius in two ways. First, Marion makes no distinction of what writing is widely believed to be the product of Dionysius and what is Pseudo-Dionysius the Aeropagite. Second, Jones questions Marion’s notion of establishing a non-metaphysical absolute, grounded in Dionysius, who carried deep metaphysical connotations throughout his texts. An example of this second critique is Marion’s re-translation of άτια as Réquisit. The change in translation, Jones explains, indicates Marion’s dismissal of άτια and its connection to ‘cause,’ thus completely challenging any metaphysical interpretation Dionysius implied. Furthermore, this change reconnects άτια (“cause”) to ατίκειο (“to ask”); see, ibid., 99-100. The change is admittedly ambiguous for Marion, who admits such a clumsy move, though continues the linguistic shift in The Idol and Distance. See, for example, Marion, The Idol and Distance: Five Studies, 160.

\textsuperscript{787} Marion, The Idol and Distance: Five Studies, 151.

\textsuperscript{788} Ibid., 152.
false, connection made with αἰτία comes to light.\footnote{See also, ibid., 190. In this instance, especially, Marion begins to address issues of language related to αἰτία and Requisit, noting the limitations any form of language (praise, condemnation, etc.) has on attempts to conceptualize ‘Goodness’ (Denys), ‘God,’ etc.} We are also reminded of Marion’s explanation of the category of the idol outlined above. In other words, applying the ‘cause of all things’ to the name of ‘God’ results in idolatry and a reliance on metaphysics, negating any distance and invisibility—common characteristics Marion identifies with the icon previously addressed.

Marion’s αἰτία does not mimic the intended use of the term found in Dionysius.\footnote{See Jones, 101.} On the one hand, Marion dispenses with any sense of a hierarchical system of cosmology or ontology. On the other, it accepts Dionysius’ ontology with little regard for the necessary hierarchy employed here.\footnote{Even Dionysius’ use of ‘hierarchy’ is called into question, specifically as it relates to apophatic theology or apophasis. Jones works through three Eastern Orthodox opinions on the subject in ibid., 101-4. Marion, on the other hand, focuses on Balthasar’s understanding of Dionysius and hierarchy, addressed in, especially, Idol and Distance.} Elsewhere, issues of hierarchy come to the forefront, for example in his address of Hans Urs von Balthasar and his review of Dionysius’ theology, Marion analyzes this understanding of hierarchy to be an aspect of the gift. He will later overlook this idea, leaving behind such a retrieval of Dionysius’s theology. Marion’s debate with Derrida shows his blatant disregard for this early retrieval of Dionysius, instead shifting the focus to the apophatic and cataphatic view of theology (a “de-nomination”), challenging any metaphysical hierarchical system.\footnote{Ibid., 105.} Moreover, the shift he offers in this exchange with Dionysius is both a naming and un-naming of the divine, neither naming God nor denying any name of God. The challenge to Dionysius’ αἰτία, is then found in his substitution of the term Réquisit which suits his own theological project. In this substitution, the theology Marion is concerned with is no longer centered on a linguistic form, but rather upon one that opts to break the metaphysical-hierarchical barriers αἰτία implies. Marion justifies this change, believing that Dionysius intends for a ““new
pragmatic function of language,’” thus escaping the “onto-theological trappings.”

This re-focus on αιτία is not without its critics; namely Jones who concludes that Marion’s limited knowledge of Dionysius—and likewise, Gregory of Nyssa—is evident and disappointing. Because Marion chooses not to take on Dionysius’ use of language as a theologically positive attribute, but rather a metaphysical encumbrance, Jones believes he has conducted a disservice and has misused Dionysius for his own phenomenological project. Jones’ critique of Marion differs from the phenomenological objections Janicaud has towards Marion. If Marion wants to completely traverse the confines or limitations of metaphysics and its corresponding theology, he must do so outside the linguistic systems of the Greek fathers or other theologians upon whom he relies.

The theological language used is of particular interest to this project, especially as it aims to overcome the metaphysical tradition outlined in the previous chapters. In this respect, and similar to his extensive projects dedicated to Descartes, Marion is searching for another model in which one can adequately engage theology, but refrain from the limitations of metaphysics, hence, phenomenology. This primary focus ultimately aims at proposing phenomenology as a suitable discourse partner for the postmodern faith. Marion’s attempts, as I have noted throughout, are not without concern. Nevertheless, his engagement with Descartes and Levinas presents an opportunity for his philosophy to find a place alongside theology. This is, then, a defense of his project insofar as it maintains our goal of overcoming metaphysics. While Jones finds αιτία to be a distraction and incomplete, Marion’s focus on ‘being’ in Descartes helps his cause of overcoming metaphysics in theology. It is to this we turn our attention.

Consideration of Marion’s work on Descartes is addressed in his ‘white theology’ and the

793 Ibid., 106; Jean-Luc Marion, "In the Name. How to Avoid Speaking of 'Negative Theology'," in God, the Gift, and Postmodernism, ed. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1999).
later *On the Ego and on God* offer an explanation for how the infinite may be understood as God. By refuting the medieval understanding, a tradition that accepted God as possessing the same essence as humans, specifically the concept of ‘being,’ Descartes abandons the belief that God is the source of human reason and logic.\(^794\) Descartes’ letters to Mersenne, for example, depart from reason and logic, suggesting that God can be described as infinite, a concept that ultimately eludes human reason and therefore cannot be identified with ‘being.’ Marion’s analysis is such that he accepts Descartes’ infinite idea, as it does not make God susceptible to human logic. Moreover, Marion explores Descartes’ three proofs of God—the notion of the infinite (in the Third Meditation), God as omnipotent (in the Fifth Meditation), and as the *causa sui* (in the replies to the *Meditations*)—acknowledging that these names of God common to kataphatic theology, apophatic theology, and a “‘hyper-essential’ path” used to incorporate both of the aforementioned styles, fall short in their attempts to interpret God.\(^795\) Ultimately, as does Descartes, Marion rejects the notion of the *causa sui*, suggesting that it is idolatrous. Though I have abbreviated Marion’s work on Descartes here, it is clear that a proof-centered approach which arrives at a being-based God is insufficient. This idolatrous form offers only a concept which lacks the infinite possibilities appropriately afforded to the divine. This leads Marion to adopt a theological approach that is more Husserlian and Levinasian than Cartesian.


\(^795\) For more on Marion’s application of *apophatic theology*, see Jones, 7-12. The reviews of Marion’s text, *Reduction and Givenness* (1998), are called into question here. The critiques want Marion to further clarify the importance of the term *apophatic theology*, which he distinguishes from *negative* theology. Marion insists on this linguistic phrase (apophatic) because he disagrees with any theory that suggests his mentioned phenomena is negative. Such an application, he notes, is contrary to his understanding of phenomena. Additionally, Jones points to the almost automatic interpretation when one introduces the word ‘negative’ to discuss theology, one that tends to offer “a single undeviating tradition to either identify with or be distinguished from,” in ibid., 8. Additionally, there is an examination of Derrida’s work, and those who accept it as a form of *negative theology*. Jones suggests that both Marion and Derrida are advocating a form of deconstruction, in which one examines both the originality and the result of the thing itself. In terms of theology, we can see that this examination is a deconstruction of metaphysics, specifically a “metaphysics of presence,” see ibid., 32-3. Additionally, Jean-Luc Marion, "Réponses À Quelques Questions," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* (1991): 68. Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, 328. Marion, "In the Name. How to Avoid Speaking of 'Negative Theology'," in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*. 

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Turning to Marion’s reading of Levinas, we are offered a philosophical perspective that accommodates an avoidance of metaphysics. Levinas accepts phenomenology as a dialogue partner with theology while also maintaining a form of personal ethics. First, Levinas moves beyond the “Hölderlinian-Heideggerian ‘gods’” to that of the Jewish concept introduced in the Hebrew Bible to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This idea of the Divine fits well with the traditional Catholicism Marion is in support of adding the Incarnation as a central tenet of his theology—evident in the aforementioned descriptions of saturated phenomenon. Second, Levinas’ ethical philosophy is championed. Levinas’ anonymity and concept of the Other to refer to “the Father” is celebrated much to the chagrin of those who wish to separate Levinas from theology. Finally, Marion asserts the place of the Catholic Eucharist as an articulation of the icon, one of the categories employed in his saturated phenomenon. Levinas’ idea of the appeal becomes one of the subsequent attributes Marion builds his thought around. This theological approach keeps the appeal, God, at a distance, anonymous and absent from human discourse. His approach is worth highlighting here:

This appeal, identifiable and identified, remains secondary (ontical) and superficial (non-ontological). It must therefore grant priority to another call, the call of Being—Anspruch des Seins. This advance substitution of being for the other person or God—for the â-Dieu—as the origin of the appeal elicits at least two remarks. Note first how it confirms the anonymity of the appeal: the same event which, in the same form, affects and defeats the autonomous ipseity of the I can also move the entire length of the spectrum of possible expressions, including the gap between the finite and the infinite, and between the non-ontological and the ontological. One thus sees clearly that the appeal admits no fixed identity, and what it calls from wherever it wills, like the Spirit which blows from wherever it wills.  

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796 Marion at least introduces this notion of Eucharist as icon in the introduction to God Without Being. While this remains important for Catholic sacramental theology, it is of little importance for this project. Marion and Louis-Marie Chauvet have separately addressed the theology of sacraments elsewhere, inviting the possibility that these practices may be considered using phenomenology. For example, Marion, God without Being: Hors-Texte, 3. Likewise the role of the Eucharist, as a liturgical experience which gives more than the ritual might imply from the outside, has been explored by their contemporaries, Jean-Yves Lacoste and Jean-Louis Chrétien; for example, Jean-Yves Lacoste, Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man, trans. Mark Raftery-Skehan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004).

797 Marion, “The Voice without Name: Homage to Levinas,” in The Face of the Other and the Trace of God: Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, 229.
The incorporation of the icon in which the distance is an attribute of the category is central and the language parallels traditional Thomistic theology. The anonymity of the Divine Being (God), the distance between humanity and this Being (finite/infinite), and the missing or concrete information (identity) relating to God are all recognizable. What distinguishes this concept, however, is the implied relationship between the I (the receiver) and the Other (autre/Autre or God). In contrast to a metaphysical approach that grants authority by way of language, God gives in a way that is intangible, anonymous, and at a distance.  

Subsequently, both Levinas and Marion are concerned with how one responds to the Other. Marion’s understanding of Levinas’ ethical approach is one in which theological language can be infused. Levinas’ philosophy surrounding the appeal and the accepting of the Other has been adapted in this case. The giving of the Other to one’s intuition is understood as a gift to which the I is expected to respond. Though Levinas may never have intended for his philosophy to be adapted in this manner, Marion has clearly chosen to apply this phenomenology theologically—despite the objections of his contemporaries. Arriving at this adaptation means that Marion must first observe the other theories surrounding the invocation to respond to the Other: “one must inevitably ask: who or what summons, invokes, or surprises the devoted? This question develops into a suspicion about the identity of what could exert the claim: God (by revelation), the other person (by obligation), being (by the event), life (by auto-affection, and so forth).”  

This reliance on Levinas aids in the development of Marion’s understanding of gift and givenness. Likewise, the reference to Levinas’ ‘appeal’ finds itself in Marion’s explanation of the saturated phenomenon. In this

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798 This formula indicates that in order to deploy itself as that which lays a claim on me, it is necessary only that its impact on me places me in the accusative and in fact the dative, receiving what gives itself—without presuming that it is a matter of being, the other person, the à-Dieu, of the Father. Receiving the appeal does not require breaking through anonymity, but rather confronting its voices without name,” in ibid. Emphasis original.

799 Ibid., 230.
context the appeal is an experience that has the potential to overwhelm one’s intuition, without establishing the paradox as a definitive thing (rather, it is only a possibility). This carries over into Marion’s analysis of Levinas’ philosophy and the notion of God: “The name par excellence of God, such as it is revealed to Moses, attests precisely to the impertinence of every essential or descriptive name, reducing itself to an empty tautology—‘I am who am’—which opens the way to an endless litany of names.”

The ambiguity associated with the aforementioned phrase, “the Name of God,” is such that it provides the reader with undefined expectations of the Divine. In *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, Levinas points out that the ambiguity remains as such; God’s moment in language—his revelation in word-form—tells nothing and everything. God does not reveal God’s-self in a form familiar (being) to Moses, the being present in that space, but reveals only outside the essence of being. The phrase offers not only a certain ambivalence, but also reaffirms the anonymity associated with the concept of ‘the Other.’ In this case, the paradox remains unknown, absent, and intangible to the one who aims to place her gaze. The anonymity likewise opens itself to the philosophy of *the gift*, in which Marion establishes the giver as one who seeks no recompense for said gift. “The reduced gift, the gift which has been legitimated phenomenologically, deploys itself according to an immanent and intrinsic givenness, which does not at all require one who gives, nor even its identity.” To reiterate this point: the phenomenon (God, the saturated phenomenon, a paradox, the appeal, etc.) gives itself without seeking compensation, recognition,

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800 Ibid., 231. See also, Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, 142. The deity to which Marion refers is the Judeo-Christian phenomenon presented before Moses and expressed in Revelation.
or a return. Levinas’ concepts of the face and the Other, similarly give without seeking recognition; the response, then, is one that should likewise not seek ‘thanks’ or recognition but is free of precondition. The Name itself remains unknown and free of any metaphysical interpretation or control; it arrives as a gift that cannot be recognized by way of a return gift. The Name gives itself, maintaining a distance and an “unknowability.” The expectation is that one honors the Name by recognizing its gift—its givenness—as an act of charity visible in the incarnation for Christians. Thus, the ethical response to the Other is called for without a return ‘thanks.’ This ethical response (to God) is to love unconditionally, without seeking a return appreciation for those acts of love.

Thus far, the appeal has been presented as the unnamed, anonymous phenomenon, which appears before one’s self (me). Prior to this encounter, it has nothing and remains in the abyss of nothingness, becoming apparent only in the appeal. The abstruse identifier noted in Revelation, “I am who am,” offers an opportunity for the one exposed to the appeal to respond and offer a name or other identifying characteristics. Marion does this through the characteristics of his saturated phenomenon (e.g., the event, the icon, the idol, the flesh, the response). Each encounter offers itself differently depending on the appeal to the individual and how the individual responds to said appeal. While remaining anonymous, the appeal itself does not become weak or presumably a subject of metaphysics. Instead, the appeal offers an opportunity for a form of self-discovery, insofar as it begins to offer insight into my own subjectivity. Therefore, any prior knowledge would obviously dismiss the anonymity the phenomenon demands and the surprise that accompanies and overwhelms the intuition.

What emerges from Marion’s reading of Levinas is therefore an appreciation of an ethics

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803 Marion, The Idol and Distance: Five Studies, 142.
which does not rely on the characteristics of the Other, but demands a response in the encounter. The appeal lacks quantification as would be found or expected in metaphysics. Instead, and without precondition, one’s intuition is met by the Other and responds. Any preconditions of the Other are irrelevant and even absent or invisible, leaving me no options as to how it floods my intuition. This phenomenological idea can therefore be understood theologically, insofar as it fits a narrative that is void of the metaphysical practices common in theology. Here, we witness an incorporation of Descartes and the phenomenology of Husserl and Levinas by Marion which develops a theology that seeks to encounter God through a philosophical lens. This overcoming of the metaphysical tradition prevalent in Western philosophy and the exploration of the notion of God through such philosophical machinations as the saturated phenomenon are expressed in their philosophy. This expression of theology invites us to consider a god/God which potentially floods one’s intuition, overwhelming it in a saturated manner, but ultimately remains anonymous. God overwhelms the intuition, saturating it beyond our comprehension; or, because God cannot be conceived of simply, but rather, excessively, we fail to recognize what such excessiveness offers. This is a drastic departure from the metaphysically focused theology which provides often dogmatic descriptions of the divine which should otherwise be sought in the self-encounter and intuition-flooding experience.

Throughout this project, I have argued that metaphysics is the biggest obstacle encountered by Marion and other Continental philosophers entertaining that intersection of theology and philosophy. Specifically, the concern is with Aquinas’ influence on theology. Instead, an emphasis on charity and the charitable act of the Incarnation is stressed in this non-metaphysical approach to God. A theology of God centered on 1 John 4:8, “God is love” (ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν) is more
appropriate. 

God is presented as something other than being. Once again, we are reminded of Heidegger’s exploration of Being; namely, the ‘ontological difference’ outlined in chapter two. Ontology, onto-theology, and metaphysics are described as flawed attempts to adequately discuss ‘Being,’ thus challenging the theological tendency to describe the Divine/God as such. Specifically, my concern remains with the theological language that relies heavily on being-oriented language.

6. Theology and Phenomenology in Discourse: Gד and Revelation

Calling into question the God-as-being motif and moving beyond the ontological/onto-theological formula, we find a theology which emphasizes God’s crossing of Being. This is a move beyond the metaphysical crystallization long adhered to by Christian thinkers. The goal in Marion’s theology is to “liberate ‘God’ from the question of Being,” a question which he believes should be taken with care and in the literal sense of the phrase. This corresponds to the notion that metaphysics is in itself flawed. Such a use of metaphysics necessitates God’s proof of God’s self, a point Nietzsche, and by extension, Heidegger, unequivocally reject. Attempts to define God as being/Being results in nothing other than theiology, a failed attempt to scientifically ‘define’ God in relatable and accessible terms, failing to accept the givenness of God in the first place. Leibniz, Kant, Nietzsche, Descartes, and Spinoza historically had attempted such definitions, ultimately noting their flaws and finite nature. These attempts to ‘define’ God are misplaced and metaphysically bound, unable to separate themselves from onto-theology. The challenges presented to these metaphysical definitions are broken through Marion’s phenomenological approach, departing from the being-based definitions others have offered.

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806 Ibid., 63.
807 Ibid., 64, cf. no. 24.
Secondly, Marion’s shift away from metaphysics allows him to argue for a presentation of “God” that is no longer bound to the confines of metaphysical language, but results in G.pages. Literally, Marion opines the crossed-out God to remind the reader of the phenomenality of the biblical God, presented in the utmost form upon the cross.

This articulation of G.pages is recognizable via Heidegger’s understanding of Dasein. In Marion’s estimation, there have been misinterpretations of Heidegger’s Dasein, including the application of it as “the being of beings.” What follows is a dismissal of the theological interpretations of Dasein, as in the “interpretation of beings,”808 insofar as the theological anthropology related to this term fails to explore the concept analytically. Theology’s failure is its tendency to mix notions of an anthropological understanding of Dasein with that of “God,” leading to a theology that cannot be sustained phenomenologically. This is a dispute between Marion’s understanding of the role of theology and the type of theology whose language employs Dasein to pronounce “God.” A theological motive where ‘science’ is placed back into the realm of faith is what emerges from this analysis of Dasein and theology. On this point, Marion argues,

In short, one must relativize theology, hence put it back in its place, precisely because it does not keep its place and does not recognize the gap between Dasein as such and Dasein as believing. Theology, through one and the same wrong move, does not recognize the scientific character that faith assures it and prevents, by its displaced anthropology, the analytic of Dasein. Heidegger relativizes the dignity of theology only in the name of the exigencies of what is involved in Dasein, the being of beings, hence in the name of what he even names, at the time, ontology.809 The result is a distinction between theology and philosophy, similarly outlined in Heidegger’s Phenomenology and Theology. Christianity’s fault is that it attempts to discover Dasein in the divine setting, applying attributes of being to God. There simply cannot be an anthropomorphous designation given to the Divine. Any appropriation of Dasein in theological terms—as a denotation

808 Ibid., 66, cf. no. 33.
809 Ibid., 66. See also, Marion, The Idol and Distance: Five Studies, 215-7.
of God—is flawed. *Dasein* exists without any (theological) connection to God.\textsuperscript{810} Moreover, belief is not dependent on an authority determining that God is or must be a being, but the very fact that one “exists first as *Dasein*.”\textsuperscript{811}

The reliance on metaphysics, the misappropriation of ‘being’ for God, and the limitations of language has done more to weaken the notion of ‘God’ for Christianity. Rejecting the necessity of being, language offers us an opportunity to challenge the possibility of re-engaging theology beyond the limitations of metaphysics. Specifically, and in this regard, theology is understood to be a study of faith, insofar as it focuses on discovering, explaining, or interpreting divine encounters. In *God Without Being*, Marion addresses the traditional theological ‘explanation’ of ‘God.’ In this tradition, ‘God’ is described as the being par excellence, where onto-theology purports a Thomistic being which, having been described as such, carries the very attributes of other beings.\textsuperscript{812} Second, the theological tendency of reducing ‘God’ to the notion of *Dasein*, in which human-beings and ‘God’ become ontological equals is reassessed.\textsuperscript{813} In this schema, ‘God’ no longer exists at a distance or foreign to human existence, but is radically reduced to an equal on par with a man or woman.\textsuperscript{814} The ontological ‘screen,’ a screen upon which ‘God’ is introduced demonstrates theology’s reliance on the language of being in order to articulate or prove the existence of ‘God’ (existence itself a metaphysical attribute) is thereby flawed. God becomes the prisoner of metaphysical language, space, time, etc. By limiting ‘God’ to the same spaces as other beings, one only limits the very possibility of ‘God’ as more than being. This is our exact concern: modern theology’s reliance on metaphysics and ontology limits God.

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\textsuperscript{810} Marion, *God without Being: Hors-Texte*, 67.
\textsuperscript{811} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{812} Ibid., 68-9.
\textsuperscript{813} Ibid., 69.
\textsuperscript{814} Here, I am mindful of the extensive examination of Nietzsche and distance in Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, esp. 68-80.
The shift to phenomenology implies a focus on ‘God’ outside the realm of metaphysics, being-language, and the significance given to the *causa sui* oriented theology. This treatise approaches ‘God’ outside the being language normalized in modern theology and as a radical application of phenomenology, offers a way that is not ontological. No longer is ‘God’ beholden to the constructs of creation, defined by humanity, but open to the endless possibilities phenomena invite.

G¥d articulates the crossing-out of the metaphysical ideas of the divine. G¥d echoes the unknowability addressed in John 18:36, only recognizable in the very revelation of the Cross, the instrument of torture and death introduced to the faithful in each of the Gospel accounts. The concerns Marion has with the screen of metaphysics echo the concerns of the *ens* outlined below; namely, the primacy of *ens* over other divine names (for example, in St. Thomas Aquinas). This concern lends itself to Marion’s biblical exploration of G¥d, which aims to dismantle the metaphysical approach many theologians have relied on. In this sense, and agreeing with Denys, he concludes the most acceptable way in which G¥d can be more than a mere ‘being,’ is best exemplified in love (1 John 4:8).

Supposing that the preliminary difficulties have found a group of satisfying and coherent solutions, one would still have to define whether the name indirectly implied by Exodus 3:14 inevitably precedes other names, like the one that 1 John 4:8 insinuates, *ho theos agape estin*, ‘God is love,’ or we would have to gloss: what allows that ‘God’ should be G¥d consists, more radically than in being, in loving...No exegesis, no philological fact, no objective inquiry could accomplish or justify this step; only a theological decision could do so and retrospectively rely on literary arguments.

The centrality of *agape* and *eros* as an adequate way from which one can debate ‘God’ or G¥d is offered. This is a step outside the content of metaphysical theology, insofar as it does not rely on being-language to articulate an existence of God, but acknowledges the very existence of being as

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816 Ibid., 72.
817 Ibid., 74. Exodus 3:14, “God said to Moses, ‘I am who I am.’ He said further, ‘Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I am has sent me to you.’”
a function of \( \mathbb{G} \Delta d \), while bringing to the foreground the centrality of love. This is a radical departure from the Thomistic insistence that \( \text{ens} \) is an absolute construct and attribute of ‘God.’ For Aquinas, the centrality of \( \text{ens} \), being, is essential for theology. “Saint Thomas does not hesitate to establish the primacy of the \( \text{ens} \) by the primacy of a point of view that limits one’s view to the measurements of the \( \text{ens} \); the point of view: only a certain taking-into-view permits plotting the position of the \( \text{ens} \), making the \( \text{ens} \) a solid point.”

As noted above, the use of \( \text{Réquisit} \), aims to supplant the \( \text{ens} \) language which favors ontology, replacing it with \( \mathbb{G} \Delta d \) understood to be at a distance, void of the implications of Being/being.

The assertion that the \( \text{ens} \) is essential, absolute, or a certain attribute of ‘God,’ casts everything else aside, including the good. The result, according to Aquinas and Avicenna, is an understanding of \( \text{ens} \) that exceeds any other notions of ‘God,’ while also encountered by the human-being first. Compared to the phenomenology of Husserl, the \( \text{ens} \) does not operate in such a way as to first give itself to the recipient who is then left to interpret the given, but exists first and with a precognitive understanding of itself. The \( \text{ens} \) offers no other possibility but itself. When applied to ‘God,’ \( \text{ens} \) instructs the other (being) to process it as such: as a being, placing the good at the detriment of metaphysics. For Aquinas, the \( \text{ens} \) comes first: “the primacy of the \( \text{ens} \) over the other possible divine names rests on the primacy of human conception, Saint Thomas attempted…to abstract the \( \text{ens} \) from the doctrine of divine names.”

Aquinas’ preference of the language of the \( \text{ens} \), and thus, \( \text{esse} \), presents no other option but to place ‘God’ within the confines of metaphysics, a point Suarez will likewise acknowledge. Acknowledging metaphysics as the \textit{modus operandi} of theology under Aquinas, Suarez, and others, Marion argues that there can only be one possibility to restore a theology of the infinite—outside metaphysical limitations—and that

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818 Ibid., 79.
819 Ibid., 81.
is to accept the Gôd of Jesus Christ as agapê or caritas; to accept Gôd as love (1 John 4:8). In doing so, Marion’s philosophical theology challenges us to look beyond the limitations of metaphysics and witness the Gôd that exists beyond “dominion of the Being of beings.”

The ens Aquinas asserts is the basis for metaphysically-based theological dialogue. In contrast, goodness as a way, though inadequate, in which one can relate to Gôd, even if Gôd remains at a distance. And this is a crucial point this project is making. Moving beyond metaphysics and ontology, we are left with an appeal to the Other; a recognition of Gôd absent of the command one is permitted with beings in general. What is revealed is not a God addressed by or through science—however loosely defined we might understand this term—but a divine which overwhelms one’s intuition in an iconic way. The Gôd of the cross is meant to shock our senses: we are presented with an abused, bloody, and naked human crying out for the absent loved one atop the Roman killing device. Goodness is present at the foot of the cross, with the soldier who questions what happened and the disciples left in shock and with sadness. Marion expands this point further, writing, “The first praise, the name of goodness, therefore does not offer any ‘most proper name’ and decidedly abolishes every conceptual idol of ‘God’ in favor of the luminous darkness where Gôd manifests (and not masks) himself, in short, where he gives himself to be envisaged by us.” The distance, and thus darkness, is central to this reading of Denys. Whereas metaphysics, and the ens, proposes a system in which humans can relate to ‘God’ because of a shared understanding of being (as a [human] being, I recognize other beings, and they too recognize me), goodness becomes the central and tantamount way of encountering Gôd.

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820 Ibid., 83.
821 Ibid., 76.
822 It is important to note, however, that Marion remains critical of Denys’ metaphysical language, insofar as Denys consistently relies on “Platonic” terminology to assert his hypothesis of a ‘God’ who is grounded in goodness. Thus, though the emphasis on goodness versus substance differs from St. Thomas Aquinas, Marion questions the way in which Denys develops his theology here. See ibid., 77-8.
Moreover, the idolatry offered through metaphysics is supplanted in this approach, leaving the Exodus passage and the vague presentation of ‘God’ as one that permits only the givenness of God to flood one’s consciousness in ways that extend beyond revelation and certainly all forms of being.

To refute the claim that theology should be grounded in ens, one must recognize that the science behind ens offers nothing more than an attempt to categorize ‘God’ the same way humanity categorizes other aspects of the world. In turn, theology has become idolatrous, relying on ‘divine names’ in order to articulate something about the divine. The imagination is left to conceive of an object, ‘God,’ based on what is offered in the language of being. The flawed appropriation of ens, Dasein, ontology, etc., when mixed with Revelation, is problematic. Revelation as sacra doctrina, declared as such in the Summa, is likewise disconcerting. The application of the being-centered dogma to the God of scripture only causes harm to the theophanic, miraculous, amazing descriptions of God offered throughout Revelation. The “I am, who am” is thereby reduced to mere proofs, theological equations with “definitive” answers, rather than an acceptance of infinite possibilities.

After establishing the limitations of a Being-oriented theology, we must likewise examine theology’s source (or at least one of its sources): Revelation. The task here is to determine whether we must ground the givenness of Revelation in metaphysics which is maintained by an authority, or it can be viewed phenomenologically, meaning it gives itself without pre-condition or authority. Marion’s Givenness and Revelation outlines the flaws of metaphysical approaches to scripture.\textsuperscript{823} Specifically, he addresses Aquinas, Francisco Suarez, the Council of Trent, and the Second Vatican Council as sources distinguishing the significance of revelation as a source of (theological)

\textsuperscript{823} Marion, Givenness and Revelation, esp. 8-29.
knowledge. For our purposes, I have chosen to focus solely on the Aquinas portion of the first chapter, considering the attention granted to Thomistic metaphysics in this chapter and the two previous. Aquinas insists on a relationship between God and human beings in which the former is the ultimate end, without any possibility of another. Second, Aquinas argues that humans are incapable of loving or desiring that which one cannot know and as such, God remains unknown, especially under the tradition of “theologica philosophia” or “metaphysica.” And finally, scripture is the only possible way in which humans can come to ‘know’ God, the source of such revelation. The first position, supported by Suarez and Henri de Lubac, are classic metaphysical approaches to thinking about God (i.e., through theologia philosophia). The first upholds a natural desire found in humans, de Lubac suggests, of reaching an ultimate telos, “a supernatural end” which cannot be attained “without the supernatural aid of a divine revelation.” This echoes the sentiments of Aquinas who argues that humanity’s ability to reason and envision an ultimate or supernatural end is unlike other animal species. Reason is thus informed by revelation, which in turn provides a formulation for the supernatural, identified as God.

The metaphysical approach insists on the givenness of scripture to in turn interpret revelation and the supernatural desire of human beings (especially in regards to ‘their end’). The paradox exists, as Marion notes, in the Thomistic distinction that humans are both rational creatures and in need of a supernatural source for knowledge about an otherwise unreasonable source of divinity (the supernatural in itself). Whereas Aquinas wishes to first applaud the ability of humans to reason, he subsequently rebukes such praise in and through the necessary givenness of revelation; epistemology, in this case, fails. Human beings cannot rationalize the existence or

824 Ibid., 12. Emphasis original.
825 Marion is referencing Henri de Lubac’s Surnaturel (1946) and Le Mystère du Surnaturel (1965). See, ibid., 13, cf. no. 17.
826 Ibid., 14.
makeup of God; reason remains insufficiently capable of doing so.

The argument goes like this: supposing that God could be known by human reason pure and simple, revelation would nonetheless be necessary…if such were not the case, if the knowledge of God were summed up by what human reason restricted to its own light could say of him, there would follow a triple limitation: only certain people…would know God, after such a long search…and not without the admixture of many errors.  

In this case, Marion builds on his previous argument that there is a difference between philosophical theology and metaphysics. Whereas Marion’s philosophy is unable to achieve an accessible or rational understanding of God and metaphysics remains grounded in so-called absolutes, revelation is a way in which Aquinas can argue that God can be rationalized—even metaphysically conceived. Aquinas is opening the possibility of God to all, not just the intellectually astute.

A re-examination of this view of metaphysics and theology permits the study of scripture to be interpreted differently; this time in a way similar to science. The reader opts to either observe the text as one that can be rationalized or another that engages the text as something more, whose source comes from beyond the horizon of human rationale. A new theology, a “theologia sacrae doctrinae,” surpasses “theologia philosophiae.” When scripture is considered as theologia sacrae doctrinae, it is void of any source but understood to originate from the supernatural, given to one’s reason without full recognition of the source. Rather than revelation remaining a category unto itself (because of its ‘origin’ or supernatural qualities), the traditional epistemological elucidation of scripture understands such a review of scripture to be—perhaps, paradoxically—a science. By extension, much of theology has been placed under this category; one of science, specifically metaphysics. Book IV of Summa contra Gentiles categorizes aspects of the natural

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827 Ibid., 14-5.
828 Ibid., 15.
829 Ibid., 16. Emphasis original.
830 “Henceforth, revelation as science joins itself to the philosophical science of God and first itself to what will become, as the constitution of the system of metaphysica develops, the system of sciences,” in ibid., 17.
and supernatural world under the guise of metaphysics, and specifically, a theological epistemology grounded in metaphysics. This text of Aquinas presents ways in which human beings can retrieve God, so to speak, while also keeping a distance between the two. In this regard, all things (1) connect directly to God, ascending to God, especially that which remains “obscure”; (2) God provides knowledge (accordingly, it descends), though it remains “unintelligible…to reason alone, and rests only on the accepted authority of the Scriptures”; and (3) knowledge can likewise be accessed “through the vision of the blessed.”\textsuperscript{831} The medieval view Aquinas is articulating can largely be attributed to his own context: there is no large body of (modern) science that can explain a vast majority of natural and ‘supernatural’ occurrences. The only possible solution is one derived from an understanding of the Divine. The world becomes packaged into scientific divisions that intimate a divine science (one that is unique to God; \textit{sacra doctrina}) and everything else. This division leads to a pseudo-religious division of the sciences where the \textit{theologia philosophiae} becomes subordinate to the \textit{theologia sacrae doctrina}. The latter, the superior, remains unobtainable in terms of its ability to fully reveal the knowledge of God. Such knowledge can only be achieved in the eschatological moment, the end time. Phenomenologically, its full givenness remains absent in the here-and-now, though one may continue to anticipate it and expect it at the eschatological moment. The Second Vatican Council and Pope Paul VI chose to buttress the position outlined by Aquinas, upholding revelation as a communication device between God and humanity (a descending attribute to assist the ascending desires of humanity toward God), without rejecting the natural-supernatural dichotomy that Aquinas also upheld.\textsuperscript{832}

Revelation faces a similar challenge with regards to metaphysics. It can either accept

\textsuperscript{831} Ibid., 18-9.

\textsuperscript{832} Ibid., 27. See, especially, Council, "Dogmatic Constitution: Dei Verbum," in \textit{Vatican Ii: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents}.
metaphysics as an epistemologically suitable system for the discovery of religion or dismiss it in favor of something else. The focus here is to move beyond the debates and absolutes found in metaphysics. Overcoming this attempt at a scientific discovery of the divine then invites consideration of Marion’s phenomenological and theological ideas. The resulting philosophy offers three points important in this claim. First, there is a move beyond the Thomistic formula as it relates to a metaphysical interpretation of revelation. Second, attention is given to the *apokalypsis*—the revealed knowledge—found in Christianity (and presumably, but not clearly, other religious traditions). And third, examining the *apokalypsis* as a paradox, a phenomenon, and/or a saturated phenomenon, is best articulated in the form of Jesus Christ.

In his attempt to illustrate his concerns regarding metaphysics, Marion turns to position philosophy as human rationale concerned with revelation and as something not dependent on metaphysics or *sacrae doctrina*. There is a general departure from traditionalism, favoring an approach that permits one’s ability to rationalize through something or the permitting of one’s intuition to accept the givenness of the thing itself; in this case, the ‘thing’ is revelation. For one to rationalize, Marion relies on the philosophical terms ‘concept’ and ‘critique,’ and departs from the need to turn to an outside resource favored by the Thomists. Philosophers such as Spinoza, Hume, and Kant help articulate the shortcomings of biblical exegesis via metaphysics.833 Viewing the metaphysical approaches as either lacking, irrational, or requiring reformulation, allows us to question the connection between reason and religion, insofar as the two at the outset appear distant. Referring to Kant, the limitations of logic are a finite “theoretical exercise,” one that is unable to

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833 “‘Critique’ lays claim to the limits of ‘reason,’ either in order to challenge biblical affirmations (or affirmations supposed to be biblical) as irrational (Spinoza called them thoughts of the imagination, Hume mere beliefs), or in order to reformulate them according to its norms (sometimes by consciously straining the texts, as Kant claimed the right to do),” in Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 31.
consider anything beyond its limited horizon. Reason’s reliance on metaphysics only compounds or reaffirms Marion’s suspicions of it, insofar as it is limited and unable to extend beyond what is defined already. Marion explains, “Thus ‘reason,’ by extending the jurisdiction of its finitude to that which at the very least claims to be free of it, namely the infinite, attests to the indecisiveness of its own concept.”

In this examination of reason, Marion argues that it generally lacks the ability to see beyond what is offered in plain sight; it cannot conceptualize something unknowable. Borrowing from Kant, there is a demonstration about the finitude of reason; it fails to conceive of anything beyond what it knows or what it can abstractly imagine. Anything beyond—a ‘concept’—must be considered by what it has available to it: the metaphysical definitions from which it already operates. By way of a weak example, the flavor or taste of wine is often accompanied by descriptors that are identifiable (oaky, earthy, bitter, sweet, etc.), but the substance itself remains distant. Once again, we see the limits of human language in which metaphors are used to produce a concept of something considered beyond the horizon of human thought. When one is able to move beyond the limitations of language and metaphor, to consider the infinite, an individual may be able to welcome the possibility of the divine.

When exploring the revealed, Marion addresses two terms common to scripture and theology: *alētheia* and *apokalypsis* (revelation). The former refers to the “unconcealing” of the truth, a term borrowed from the Greeks and later addressed by Heidegger. In this case, one goes beyond the obvious exegesis that accompanies scripture (and its subject, the Divine). This

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834 Ibid., 31-2.
835 Ibid., 32-3.
836 “Finite reason can legislate only within the field of what it can know—finite objects—as well as its own intuitions, concepts, and apperception,” in ibid., 33.
“obviousness has masked the originality and the difficulty of the concept,” since it lacks any critical analysis. Following ἀλήθεια and ἀποκάλυψις, logos (logic) and its relationship to metaphysics must be considered. The connection made between logos and Logos, in which the latter (regarded theologically as the Word of God) is an ἀποκάλυψις, an uncovering of the Divine as a phenomenon is important. “At least as the biblical event claims, the Logos uncovers itself, it phenomenalizes itself.” Certainly, we can see this in the Baptism of Jesus (e.g., Matthew 3:3-17), the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1–8, Mark 9:2–8, Luke 9:28–36, and 2 Peter 1:16–18) and the Resurrection (e.g., Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and Romans 6). I will return to these momentarily. The limitations of metaphysics and a corresponding reading of these scriptural passages deny the possibility of the phenomenon, at least as the phenomenon itself. The phenomenon separates itself from this metaphysical approach often relied upon to make sense of something. This approach invites an overcoming of the *a priori* conditions that are generally associated with an experience of an object. The phenomenon instead appears as itself, giving itself to the observer without any prior conception.

There is nothing new in this philosophical approach. Marion is simply arguing from the phenomenological point of view in which no pre-conditions or authority is necessitated. An individual’s intuition, in turn, becomes the source of observing and understanding the phenomenon. Moreover, when the intuition encounters the thing itself, there is a change: from an object to an event. This event consideration is amplified theologically in the Christ-event, a saturated phenomenon which cannot be conditioned or crystallized through metaphysics. The

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837 Ibid., 34.
838 Ibid., 47.
Christ-event, the incarnation of God revealing himself to humanity as a human, theologically articulates the phenomenal way in which God gives himself “in an exceptional way.” As a saturated phenomenon, we are left with a (biblical) description of Christ that extends beyond the horizon of possible descriptions. This contrasts with the common-law phenomenon, or the metaphysical encounter with the divine, which offers nothing more than a partial encounter with the subject (Christ) or a parsing of the biblical text that does nothing more than equate Christ as equal to another man. As a saturated phenomenon, Christ fulfills the categories (as an event, idol, flesh, and icon), making revelation articulate something beyond what metaphysics can attempt to describe.

As a phenomenological event the text offers more than words on a page or a story in another book. This exegesis asks the reader to go beyond the text’s horizon, inviting one to encounter what happens in the story: God’s gift of ‘self’ in a form human beings can understand (that of another human being) and not a reticent celestial character. These revelatory stories are thus considered saturated phenomena insofar as they go beyond the possibilities common to other philosophical systems (e.g., metaphysics, ontology). In other words, the encounter with God in these instances is something that lacks the ability to be apprehended by any other means outside of phenomenology. The impossibility of the encounter is what permits Marion to articulate revelation in such a form; the encounter, as event, “leaves us speechless and with no way out, because in the event we are deprived of every signification that would make it conceivable, which is to say possible (in the metaphysical sense).” The inability to construct appropriate structures from which one can present revelation reflects the earlier arguments regarding language addressed by Nietzsche and others. The event leaves us speechless, unable to develop concepts to better shape

841 Ibid., 49.
842 Ibid., 50.
our understanding of what takes place in the event of the self-abasement, the suffering of the deity, and the death of God. The attempt to work through it metaphysically fall short as we become too reliant upon metaphors, theoretical exegesis, and even hyperbole. In the end, we are left with a series of trite platitudes, described using common language, ultimately failing in its attempt to articulate the givenness of the incarnate God.  

As I noted above, several biblical events express how phenomenology can be applied to Revelation. The Transfiguration, for example, expresses an overwhelming event and features God, Christ, the two other biblical figures, and the disciples. The intuition flooding event is a saturated phenomenon as it not only lacks adequate descriptors of the encounter but overwhemls those gathered at the illumination. Similarly, the story of Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan River, during which those gathered are overwhelmed by a luminous-cosmic event, again described as something that floods the intuition of those gathered. And finally, in the Resurrection event, we observe Luke’s disciples and their encounter on the Road to Emmaus (Lk. 24). The disciples did not lack knowledge of the events of Jesus’ suffering and death or the predictions he had made prior to his death; however, they lacked an understanding of who stood before them and what the implications of the Resurrection were. Christ must be considered more than a common phenomenon. How one comes to encounter Christ is of concern to us at this point.

Christ, as a phenomenon, can become conceived of insofar as “the I takes on the status of a witness.” In this case, what appears before me is processed according to what I already know and categorize accordingly. Whereas the concealed phenomenon never permits individual access

843 Ibid.
844 “They understood nothing (anoetoI), and thus they see nothing (bradeis tie kardia tou pisteuein, Lk. 24:25),” in ibid., 52. Emphasis original.
845 Ibid. Emphasis original.
to the thing itself, the unconcealment (*alētheia*) introduces the phenomenon to my intuition, resulting in an interpretation.

The *I* always determines the phenomenon through anticipation, or that of its intentionality; by definition, the phenomenon will be known to the *I*, since the *I* will organize its entire possible intuition according to the concept or signification that it will have assigned to it *in advance*. The *I* knows of what it speaks, since in a radical sense it speaks of what it has itself rendered visible…on the basis of its aim.\(^{846}\) The *I*—the ego—always aims to appropriate the phenomenon, according to its own perceptions.

There is a presumption of what the phenomenon is or what it does, even prior to the phenomenon’s full reveal.\(^{847}\) The *saturated phenomenon* offers too much for the intuition to process in the same sense, it offers too much for the *I* to witness or comprehend. The intuition is blinded by the content or exposure before it. This does not, however, preclude the seer from witnessing something, though it may remain indescribable.\(^{848}\) When asked to describe the *saturated phenomenon*, the participant in the event is left with an impossible task, leaving the seer to imagine the *phenomenon* by way of her own concepts. This exchange reduces the witness to the level of the *I*, and causes the general objectification of the *saturated phenomenon* to nothing more than a common phenomenon. The Transfiguration becomes a narrative without meaning, an event that is told using words common to everyone’s experience, subjecting the original witness’ story to a common phenomenon. The event, as a description, faces the danger of becoming nothing more than a metaphysically described narrative, void of any deeper signification. The impossibility of appropriating a signification to Christ that lacks any deeper sense of phenomenality is what is proposed. Christ extends beyond the *I*, offering something that exudes astonishment, beyond what the biblical words invite participation in. Overcoming metaphysics in these theological and revelatory moments suggests that this flooding of the intuition finds the *saturated phenomenon* impossible to articulate.

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\(^{846}\) Ibid., 52-3. Emphasis original.

\(^{847}\) Ibid., 53. Emphasis original.

\(^{848}\) Ibid.
adequately, positioning the experience of the Transfiguration, Christ’s baptism, or the Resurrection beyond the scope of a system built on proofs, natural law, and the like. In short, metaphysics fails in its quest to fully encapsulate the totality of the Incarnation and the life of Christ.

Put another way: Christ is a paradox. As a paradox, Christ is simply a counter-experience: Christ is a contradiction to the conditions to which I am most accustomed, imposing them on me without a clear understanding of what is engaging my intuition. The counter-experience offered is exactly as this idiom implies: the paradox is contrary to our experience as human-beings and simultaneously approachable because of our shared experience of being human. God’s incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth is a contradiction, insofar as God appears paradoxically to the known or common possibilities. While simultaneously complex, because of Christ’s divinity, revelation also offers a common experience where one can understand the human expression found in the incarnation (i.e., Christ is human). This demands repeating: the experience of God making himself manifest in the form of a finite, mortal, and simple human being is in itself familiar and contradictory. Familiar, because we can relate to the finitude offered in the form that we likewise occupy; paradoxical insofar as there is more to the individual of Christ than the horizon of humanity reveals. We are, nevertheless, capable of describing those finite and limited aspects, making the experienced ‘objectifiable,’ and accessible. The complexity of the description of Christ is what makes the encounter a counter-experience: nearly impossible to comprehend but accessible enough to one’s consciousness.

In this presentation, there are no pre-conditions or outside categorical explanations for the things themselves. The event of God-incarnate escapes comprehension as such, leaving only the experience of said event to be observed as a phenomenon—nothing less. As a paradox, the

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849 Ibid., 56.
incarnation escapes the possibility of metaphysics, insofar as it goes beyond the horizon of the defined norm. The incarnate God articulated in Revelation exceeds the parameters given to us in other contexts. The appearance of a divine form in Exodus 3 or the clouded mystery of the divine form in Exodus 19, mere theophanies, pale in comparison to the Incarnation. These biblical stories hide the mystique of God, leaving the human participant (Moses) examples of natural anomalies, concealing the actuality of the divine itself. The Moses events highlight a theological conundrum introduced in revelation; notably, the question of who can stand before God, without dying from such a vision. Any vision, encounter, or interaction with God could only be considered idolatry—it could not possibly be God, as the person would be dead standing before the divine.\textsuperscript{850}

Emerging from this lengthy review of Marion’s phenomenology is a clear articulation of how he adequately converses with theology. What then emerges is a system of thought grounded in givenness versus an ontology of being. This system appropriates a philosophical formulation which is counter to the authoritative structure found in the strict metaphysics of Thomism, for example. As a discourse partner for postmodern theology, this form of phenomenology grants potential for theologians to re-engage the infinite possibilities of the crucified God, without sacrificing the unmistakable identity of Christianity. The task of the theologian must be to then engage new dialogues about God in accessible, phenomenological ways with their lay neighbors. And this daunting task is not without its obvious challenges. For starters, one must deal with the already accepted metaphysics which undergirds not only theology, but so much of society.

7. Significance of Marion’s Philosophical Theology for the Postmodern Faith

The theme of the theological turn or return has been alluded to in this chapter and reflects a philosophy focused on theology freed from the shackles of metaphysics. This type of

\textsuperscript{850} Ibid., 58.
phenomenology—despite its critics—offers a renewed way to engage Christology and Revelation without maintaining an absolute adherence to metaphysics outlined in *Aeterni Patris* and elsewhere. Proposing this form of philosophy in place of metaphysics also asks us to reconsider the language of the Other, in contrast to being-language, helps illustrate the distance between the divine and humanity: the Other remains at a distance, never able to be captured via language or category. The distance remains infinite, unable to be captured in a single gaze or through a simple linguistic analogy. Second, and whereas the language of the Roman Catholic Church has long asserted a Being/being motif to describe the divine, this project has placed an emphasis on the infinite, which moves beyond the limited horizon of metaphysics, ontology, and the reliance on being-language. This is reminiscent of the infinite language found in Descartes’ *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Third, the saturated phenomenon invites one to consider the divine in various ways. As noted above, the metaphysical attributes commonly ascribed to God are overcome in the saturated phenomenon as it is applied to the divine. Most notably, the *icon*, offers a form—via language, nonetheless—which sufficiently presents God in a form beyond the horizon of metaphysics. The *icon* is kept at a distance from human knowledge; only the intuition is able to encounter it via an overwhelming (saturated) flooding. Related to this, scripture offers God’s involvement with humanity through the limitless myths of the Torah and Hebrew Bible, not especially in the Name-event (“I am, who I am”) and subsequently in the self-abasement, kenotic event of God. The *icon* again floods the gaze of those gathered (e.g., the disciples are overwhelmed by the theophanic appearance of God at the Transfiguration). The *icon* helps demonstrate the impossibility of analogy, description, or otherwise, leaving the observing human and her intuition overwhelmed. Finally, and worthy of a lengthier description below, a description of God that can only be articulated as *caritas* or love extends the iconic presentation of the divine. All of this is
proposed as a suitable discourse partner for the postmodern faith. If the authoritarian metaphysics is partially responsible for the contemporary withdrawal of participants from the Church (and this implies more than a departure from the pews; it would also extend to one’s religious self-identity), then phenomenology can be the discourse partner aimed at returning the faithful to the religious.

As I proposed in the first chapter, people leave for various reasons.\textsuperscript{851} The disinterest of many offers an opportunity for the return McCaffery, DeVries, and the authors of \textit{God in France} suggest; only, the return must extend beyond the confines of scholars and universities. Moreover, and observing Marion’s admiration for those in authority within the Church,\textsuperscript{852} there must be an acknowledgment that the institution is flawed. As we will see in the next chapter, Gianni Vattimo looks at both of these complexities—the authority within the Church and a philosophy centered on the individual’s intuition versus metaphysics—to establish a space for a return to religion. Vattimo’s emphasis is placed on ‘the event,’ God’s participation in history. Before moving to this proposal, however, I wish to emphasize the role of \textit{caritas}, a virtue common to both Marion and Vattimo.

\textbf{8. Loving the Other}

Drawing together a phenomenological idea of the divine and a Levinasian ethic which permits the iconic God as other-than-being, attention is given to charity and not authority. In this proposal, emphasis is granted to 1 John 4:8 which offers an overcoming of ‘being’ as the primary philosophical focal point of theology, replacing it with an articulation of \textit{love}. Marion’s


Prolegomena to Charity, his In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena, and his essay, “What Love Knows,” addresses this theological shift. This is explained in two ways. First, this intended shift draws our attention to the good suggested above in Dionysius’ work and is emphasized in the unknowability of ‘God’ (John 18:36). Second, echoing Levinas, the call to not only acknowledge the other, but to love the other is accentuated. Overcoming metaphysics through love, Marion argues, requires the individual to act charitably towards the other. Levinas’ consideration of the other and Marion’s correlation to God, elicits a response, similar to the ethical imperative outlined in the first section of this chapter. The philosophy offered here is one in which the space between humanity and the divine is not only acknowledged, but filled with a response and action. We must add that this givenness—of space and caritas—requires nothing in return. The exchange is freed from an economy of give-and-take or give-and-return.

Theological word play using analogy, metaphor, etc., has commonly been used to express or give definition to God, providing a ‘reasonable’ way in which the faithful can attempt to understand God. The pitfall of language exercises is that they can never articulate a divine presence adequately. In its place, this ethics is proposed, one that emphasizes the gospel virtue of caritas and the call to care for one’s neighbor. Acting as the Samaritan, following the principles of the Beatitudes, and being hospitable to a stranger are all examples of understanding love in this way. This requires an awareness of the other in which two options arise, “either I do not love him and I pass him by going around him (Luke 10:31-32); or I ‘approach him and, seeing him, am settled’ (Luke 10:33).”

854 Ibid., 166.
Despite the call to charity, Christians have historically misunderstood the theological virtue of charity.\(^{855}\) Eroticism, passion, or lust for the other is done to get something, even temporary (e.g., sexual pleasure), are often the immediately conceived notions of love, void of the discipleship to neighbor the Gospels are calling for.

We experience without any doubt whether or not ‘we are rooted and grounded in Christ’s charity’ (Ephesians 3:17). Indeed, charity plays itself out in the present: in order to love, I need to wait, I have only to love; and I know perfectly well when I love, when I do not love, and when I hate.\(^{856}\) My intention here is to illustrate that charity is directly connected both to discipleship and to Christ. The importance of charity is stressed repeatedly in these works of Marion, accentuated by the Christian call to wait for those in need (the other) and the Final Judgement. In this ‘conservative’ reading of scripture, only the faithful and charitable disciple is singled out in the final judgment.\(^{857}\)

The demand, by virtue of Christ’s charity, is that we are called to be charitable to others. Choosing to be the Good Samaritan results in one’s choice to be aware of the other’s gaze, “the space in which [he appears].”\(^{858}\) The stage is therefore open to the other, whose fate, as it were, rests in the bystander’s hand. The Levinasian invocation not to kill, but respond charitably is emphasized in this exchange. The discipline surrenders whatever metaphysical authority he may want to hold over the other, succumbing to Christ’s call to love without condition. The reduction of the other reveals one in need, and not one I can master.\(^{859}\) The daunting challenge is to overcome today’s interpretation of charity, where “love is reduced to ‘making love,’ charity to ‘doing charity’—words prostituted in the first case, betrayed in the second, each equally submitted to the iron law of ‘making or doing,’ and thus of objectification.”\(^{860}\) This engagement mimics the life

\(^{855}\) Ibid., 153. Marion will note, for example, the influence of both passion (pp. 156–7) and eroticism (p. 158).
\(^{856}\) Ibid., 154.
\(^{857}\) Ibid., 155.
\(^{858}\) Ibid., 166.
\(^{859}\) “It is up to me to set the stage for the other, not as an object that I hold under contract and whose play I thus direct, but as the uncontrollable, the unforeseeable, and the foreign stranger who will affect me, provoke me, and—possibly—love me,” in ibid., 167.
\(^{860}\) Ibid., 168.
and message of Christ and pushes aside both control over the situation or the other and any other dogmatic response an institution would demand. In other words, the call to charity is the Christian opening his attic to the Jewish family in German occupied Amsterdam, without concern for the propaganda, policies, laws, and punishments associated with such subversive charity. Such charity, fills the void between God and humanity. The space once occupied by authority (good or bad) is replaced by charity. In this instance, one witnesses God and therefore love, not in an ill-contrived language game, but in the other the I encounters.

The face—the concept articulated by Levinas—and the category of flesh, outlined above returns to the forefront. Marion’s attention is placed on the role of flesh in conjunction with his understanding of love or charity towards others. The incarnation of one’s body, or “the possibility for a body of the world (physical) to invest itself with the passive capacity for affection,” is central to Marion’s ethical argument.\footnote{Ibid., 158.} The responsibility of the other is focused on the flesh. By way of Husserl, the assertion is that the reduction of the self, the “strict opposition to the body ([which is] always physical, of the world),” finds primacy.\footnote{Marion, In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomenon, 87.} The flesh provides the space for one to experience pain and suffering or joy and pleasure. This ethical imperative asks us to recognize the flesh and respond, maintaining a responsibility toward the other. “Without flesh, no body can accede to love, for it remains unaffected by another person, or even any sort of other.”\footnote{Marion, “What Love Knows,” in Prolegomena to Charity, 159.} Failure to do so can result in hideous crimes against humanity: “the extermination of the Jews and others rested expressly upon the denial of their status as flesh (refusal of the analogy), or, worse, upon the irrelevance of this very flesh to assure their status as other persons.”\footnote{Ibid., 163.}
Choosing to extol the other through charity reemphasizes the Gospel call to love—a call articulated best in the invisibility of the Divine. What I mean to say here is that the way in which one can ‘love’ in a manner similar to Christ is to relinquish all pre-conceived notions of the other, just as we must surrender the reliance on metaphysics. Phenomenology opens these possibilities, providing a philosophical system which no longer applies a false set of principles of ‘Being’ using language. The experience of the Other opens the endless possibilities available to me, possibilities that are not weakened by the natural sciences, metaphysics, or otherwise. The possibilities available to me in the *icon* especially permit the infinite and unimaginable the space to flood my intuition, leaving me literally speechless, void of the metaphysical being-language initially forced on me. Recognizing that the Other has no limitations provides me the freedom to relate to ‘God’ in ways previously unthinkable. In turn, and mirroring the unknown qualities of the other, I am called to respond to that *flesh*, without deliberation or regard for appearance, status, or other qualities assigned using metaphysics. Charitably, I recognize the other as one who simply asks to live, and I respond accordingly.

9. Conclusion

At this point, I have outlined how Jean-Luc Marion arrives at a phenomenology that works effectively with postmodern theology. Observing the influence of the Patristics, Descartes, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, and Levinas, I have examined how a post-metaphysical theology is centered on an individual’s intuition and the possibilities an intuition encounters via phenomena. The role of metaphysics in modern and postmodern Christianity has been the focus for this project. This chapter has outlined Marion’s phenomenology, suggesting that it offers an alternative to the traditional methods of doing theology. His philosophy offers a place of theology to methodologically operate beyond the limitations of being-language and metaphysics. Certainly, as
I addressed in the first half of the chapter, Jean-Luc Marion has his detractors especially when it comes to his use of Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology. However, the strength of his phenomenology sets theology free, and provides it latitude to consider the divine beyond the confines of metaphysics, discovering the crossed-out God ($\text{God}$). This very paradox drives Marion to consider the divine as the infinite, absent in relationship and distance from humanity. This theology reminds us not only about the crucified death of the incarnate divinity, but also about the divine who resides outside the attributes of being. What I have presented in this chapter echoes a centuries long debate: one that rejects philosophical ideas that go beyond the comfort of ‘being’ and ‘seeing.’ If nothing else, Marion offers an interesting epistemological way forward that avoids ‘being’ as the central topic—instead relying on one’s intuition and the saturated experiences it may encounter. Of course, this is a direct challenge to the traditionalism espoused in the Church, addressed in the previous chapter and its reference to Benedict XVI. Again, the Church has long preferred a faith grounded in metaphysics and not a theology which diminishes concepts of faith or personal notions of religion.

We must add that Marion is not alone in this exploration of ‘God’ outside the realm of Being and metaphysics. He joins a growing chorus of philosophers, from various schools of thought, who have begun exploring philosophical theology in the aftermath of Nietzsche’s “God is dead,” proclamation. Jean-Yves Lacoste, Maurice Blondel, Emmanuel Levinas, Emmanuel Falque, and Gianni Vattimo have explored theology outside the confines of onto-theology, opting to refocus ‘God-talk’ in ways not confined to an outdated pseudo-science/philosophy. What presents itself is an opportunity to explore ‘God’ in such a way that offers an opportunity to engage theology intellectually without a reliance on a system that introduces limitations from the start. And though many of the aforementioned scholars remain attached to their faith denominations
(even Marion’s Roman Catholicism), there are others who believe the institutions built up on the premise of metaphysics are antiquated, and leave nothing for the individual to encounter on her own. This brings us to the post-modern Christianity introduced by the Italian philosopher, Gianni Vattimo.
CHAPTER FOUR

GIANNI VATTIMO’S POST-CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY

1. Introduction

Metaphysics and the turn to religion has been the primary focus of this project. Coupled with the changing demographics of the Roman Catholic Church, I have noted several philosophers, historians, sociologists, etc., who have addressed various reasons for leaving institutions of Christianity. Several, however, including McCaffery, DeVries, and Taylor, have granted attention to the return of religion in Europe. McCaffery, for example, scrutinizes religion in France, and by extension Continental Europe, critiquing the re-examination of religion and in particular, Christian theology. McCaffery includes in his analysis a review of Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo, who calls into question the role of metaphysics and the institution of the Roman Catholic Church. Focusing on a ‘return, Vattimo seeks to bind the philosophical complexities of Martin Heidegger and Friedrich Nietzsche together to develop a post-metaphysical theology void of a reliance on Being language. Vattimo comments on this extensively in After Christianity:

These processes, which comprise the content of modernity and are the true basis for the dissolution of metaphysics, can be described as process of weakening. Only within this framework is it possible to realize that there are no strong reasons for atheism and to open thought to the possibility of religious experience. However, what is recovered has nothing to do with the hard discipline and strict antimodernism of dogmatic religion, which is expressed in varied forms of fundamentalism and above all in the Catholicism of Pope John Paul II. The recovery of religion is not a return to metaphysics but an outcome of metaphysics’ dissolution.865 Again, this is not to propose a return to institutions of religion (e.g., the Roman Catholic Church).

What is suggested here is a renewed interest in the philosophy of religion, a coming to grips with what might be considered a rethinking of Christian traditions in light of a growing immigrant population and allochthonous religious communities.866 For much of the Western hemisphere, the

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865 Vattimo, After Christianity, 90.
866 Lieven Boeve refers to ‘allochthonous communities’ in reference to the growing Buddhist and Muslim communities taking root in Belgium and other nations across the European Union. Most have found welcoming
framework for this ‘return’ is conducted within the context of a European culture whose relationship with Christianity has been challenged of late by secularism and a changing cultural demographic. What shapes or even holds together a European continent exposed to the diversity which accompanies globalization is, for Vattimo, its link to culture, philosophy, and religion.

The common root of the religious need that runs through our society and of the return of (the plausibility of) religion in philosophy today lies in the reference to modernity as an epoch of technoscience, or in Heidegger’s words, as the epoch of the world-picture. If critical reflection wishes to present itself as the authentic interpretation of the religious need of common consciousness, it must show that this need is not adequately satisfied by a straight-forward recovery of ‘metaphysical’ religiousness, that is, by fleeing the confusions of modernization and the Babel of secularized society towards a renewed foundationalism. What emerges from this approach is a two-fold examination of a renewed interest in the philosophy of religion and its place in postmodernity. First, Vattimo invites us to consider the role of religion in a postmodern world riddled with various religious traditions, several of which have influenced postmodern and European Christianity—we can think here especially of the migrant religious traditions affecting Europe today and over the past few decades. Second, Vattimo outlines a possibility of how Christianity reacts to a postmodernity reticent in its approach to metaphysics. He defines metaphysics here as not only a guiding philosophy for much of Christian theology, but as a violent byproduct of the Christianized-society. Focusing on the renewed interest in Christian theology, Vattimo, like Marion, invites philosophical examples of how such renewed interest has come to pass in Europe.

This approach echoes the myriad philosophers mentioned in passing throughout this project. McCaffery explains that “religion was revitalised in French secularism as an expression of individual identity and resignified within a new strand of philosophical phenomenology.”

accommodations in Belgium but there certainly are those who are outspoken and fundamentally opposed to their residency. See, Boeve, God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval, 25.


McCaffery, 1. It is worth challenging McCaffery’s claim that phenomenology is the only byproduct of a revitalized interest in religion.
suggest that since the Second World War and the later formation of the European Union, the retrieval of religion has brought about shifts in religious discourse. The social, political, and philosophical changes emerging in the 1980s, during the height of the Cold War, the economic challenges across the Continent, the emergence of a unified Germany, and the challenges to ecclesial institutions by secular human rights groups all demonstrate vast social changes to the Continent. McCaffery claims that this 1980s “‘retour du religieux’ (the return of the religious),” is a re-emergence of phenomenology—and as noted in the previous chapter, includes a retrieval of the patristics—and the historically established relationship between philosophy and theology.

Aware of these changes in Continental Europe, I turn my attention in this chapter to the philosophers who have helped shape the renewed interest in philosophical ideas and the post-metaphysical thought. As I have noted throughout this project, Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Lévinas, Michel Foucault, and others have impacted the emerging post-metaphysical views of religion in the secular state of France. Jean-Luc Marion, Michel Henry, Jean-François Lyotard, Alain Badiou, and Gianni Vattimo (the noted Italian of this group), are all referenced as scholars who have developed varying thought methods that seek discourse with theology, developing their own theories on these and other predecessors in the field. In this chapter, I am focused on the work of Vattimo who has sought to re-examine conversations concerning theology, adopting the philosophical ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger.

According to Vattimo, this retrieval of the religious is first experienced in the ‘trace’ of something that once was prominent. Religion was once forgotten, even abandoned, and now finds itself “made present again.” The “dormant trace” of religion is re-awakened by way of an

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869 The first chapter of Lieven Boeve’s God Interrupts History is helpful in identifying some of the changes that took place in the 1980s. Boeve, God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval, 17ff.
870 McCaffery, 3.
overcoming of metaphysics, insofar as this historically prominent philosophical system is no longer recognized as the driving force behind religious traditions. This re-emphasis does not imply that humanity completely forgot about religion, as though it were hidden, waiting to be rediscovered in a library or found amongst the scrolls of an ancient cave in the Middle East. There is a renewed interest in exploring theology and developing a philosophy around this historical bond between people precisely because of Europe’s evolving relationship with organizations and its own history. The end of the Second World War, Vattimo argues, caused a change in the way individuals approached the religious. In post-war Europe, religious traditions and institutions were arguably ignored, given the previous decade’s propensity for propaganda and institutional indoctrination. Nevertheless, there have been many socio-political events, international threats, economic shifts, etc., which have led some to a re-examination of the religious. Vattimo argues the following:

[The return of the religious] began immediately after the Second World War with the fear of possible atomic war, and now that the new state of international relations makes this threat seem less imminent, there is a growing fear of an uncontrolled proliferation of these same weapons, and more generally an anxiety in the face of the risks to the ecology of the planet, not to mention those associated with the new possibilities of genetic engineering. A no less widespread fear, at least among advanced societies, is that of losing the meaning of existence, of that true and profound boredom which seems inevitably to accompany consumerism.\textsuperscript{872}

There is a resurgence insofar as people have questions about the historical and intellectual origins of religion (and we might add a general curiosity about spirituality). In contrast, there are instances of fundamentalism and institutionalism that have sought to limit this exploration outside the defined parameters an authority has established.\textsuperscript{873} More specifically, the influence of the Roman Catholic Church and Magisterium—whose purpose, in part, is to defend its historical fundamentalism—is questioned by Vattimo. There is a clear suspicion of any renewed interest that

\textsuperscript{872} Ibid., 80.
\textsuperscript{873} Ibid., 81.
interacts with and clashes with traditionalism, itself a challenge to Vattimo’s proposed secular Christianity. “It may be that the new vitality of religion depends precisely on the fact that philosophy and critical thought in general, having abandoned the very idea of foundation, are not (or no longer) able to give existence that meaning which it therefore seeks in religion.” What one faces in his or her exploration of religion is whether ‘new’ explorations can escape the trappings of metaphysics. Can these explorations go beyond (Überwindung/Ueberwindung) the metaphysics using philosophy à la Nietzsche, Heidegger, Husserl, Levinas, etc.?

This Ueberwindung is an analysis of the history of the Christian faith, while not distancing itself from the advancements of technology, science, engineering, etc. This leads us to conclude that Vattimo’s philosophical re-engagement with religion can be understood in two ways. First, it is a return to the historical expression of religion. This implies an acknowledgement of the development of the faith, from the biblical accounts to the present expression of the tradition. This does not imply that religion exists outside secular history. In Vattimo’s articulation, religion and history exist simultaneously, affecting one another. Secondly, this ‘return’ is deemed a positive attribute of religion. Vattimo emphasizes that this return does not insinuate a reversal of human development or a return to a dark age, one in which humanity is forced to put aside any further technological development. This renewal, however, runs the risk of emerging as either Trinitarian or natural. The former, he suggests, is the true theology, grounded in an understanding of scripture (without a hermeneutical filter) and a subjective understanding of the sacred texts. The latter is determined or manufactured and maintained by an authority (i.e., a religious institution like the Roman Catholic Church).

874 Ibid.
875 Ibid., 85.
876 Ibid., 91. See also, Guarino, 58. Guarino, analyzing Vattimo’s work, notes the importance of Trinitarian theology in not only Vattimo’s texts but also Martin Luther, whom Vattimo references to demonstrate this point.
As an introductory summary, this chapter seeks to outline the philosophy of Vattimo, one that sees Christianity not as a tradition of metaphysics, but rather one that finds its ultimate fruition in secularism. Differing from the previous chapter’s subject, Jean-Luc Marion and phenomenology, Vattimo hardly minces his words against institutions of authority, including the Roman Catholic Church. Instead, he offers a theology that addresses Being as event and a philosophical method which encourages an Ueberwindung of the traditional interpretations. Vattimo invites his audience to consider the givenness of the faith, invoking pensiero debole (weak thought) and thus thinking beyond the limitations metaphysics offers.

2. Challenging metaphysics

Thomas Guarino’s *Vattimo and Theology* offers insight into the philosopher’s understanding of Christianity in a postmodern, post-Nietzschean era in which secularism overcomes the traditional and metaphysical structures found within the faith tradition. Guarino offers an overview of the many topics Vattimo has published on since completing his doctoral work in 1961, including an examination of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Gadamer. Secularism, nihilism, metaphysics, authoritarianism, Christianity, etc., are subjects of Vattimo’s work, influenced by these authors. In particular, secularism provides the basis from which Vattimo explores the ‘postmodern,’ and its critique of the Enlightenment, while granting emphasis to both discontinuity and pluralism.\(^{877}\) Simultaneously, Vattimo embraces the scientific achievements, artistic masterpieces, and technological advancements that make the ‘postmodern’ available. His philosophy encourages one to think beyond the confines of the Enlightenment, to embrace Nietzsche’s lament, “God is dead,” and to consider a theology that extends beyond the limited

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\(^{877}\) Guarino, 6.
horizons of a “flat-footed metaphysical pronouncement” of God. His critique is an attempt to overpower the traditional and given hermeneutics, which have shaped both church and state for centuries. This theological shift—one that seeks to overcome metaphysics, explains Santiago Zabala—has been an ongoing philosophical idea.

The new culture of dialogue inaugurated by [Richard] Rorty and Vattimo invites us to follow, on the one hand, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and Jacques Derrida in their drastic deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence and, on the other, John Dewey, Benedetto Croce, and Hans-Georg Gadamer in going beyond that same metaphysics. What unites all of them is the conviction that philosophical questions regarding Being and nothingness, language and reality, and God and his existence are pointless because they presuppose that philosophy can be practiced independently from history and that examination of our present way of proceeding might give us an understanding of the “structure” of all possible ways of human proceeding. These postmodern philosophers have not sought a strict denial of the divine, à la atheism; rather, they have embraced an approach to a theology that is no longer reliant on a metaphysical foundation. Vattimo’s philosophy builds on this assertion, calling into question the role of metaphysics as the guiding principle for philosophy, as well as introducing the idea of the event. The attention is granted to the infinite possibilities available to us when belief in “God” is not dependent upon metaphysics. Breaking from the ascribed norm found in such absolutes permits one to seek a “God” who relies less on institutionally determined edicts and more on the infinitesimal interpretations available to the individual. It is an approach, that is essentially an

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879 Rorty and Vattimo, 4.

880 See, for example, Vattimo, After Christianity, 3 and Vattimo, Nietzsche: An Introduction, 85.

881 Vattimo, Nietzsche: An Introduction, 85. Guarino explains this point further, writing, God is no longer available to us as the unchanging and immutable first principle who now serves as the basis for morality and truth, as a warrant for stable and fixed “metaphysical” positions. In the postmodern age, we must live with endless contingencies rather than with secure and available foundations. And this contingency and provisionality includes the affirmation of a “God” who himself does not escape interpreted existence. Our understanding of God is, and relentlessly so, also an interpretation. So, Vattimo says, “when Nietzsche teachings that God is dead, he doesn’t only mean that there are no longer supreme values, he also means that a multitude of values has taken their place at the ruined foundation,” in Guarino, 7. See also, Vattimo and Zabala.
overcoming (*Verwindung*) of the absolutes established in modernity. The overcoming of metaphysics is introduced in Vattimo’s explanation of *pensiero debole*. Additionally, Vattimo’s philosophical theology confronts a society that requires a reasoned, logical thought process to develop a Christianity that fits within a secularized context. His understandings of *pensiero debole*, and the related *teologia debole* (weak theology), which seeks to dissolve metaphysical dogmatism, allows for the possibility of overcoming “fundamentalist superstitions” and the “disciplinary masks” of the juridical Church.⁸⁸² For Vattimo, metaphysics and authority are inseparable.

The approach offered in this postmodern scenario is one that (1) emphasizes Christianity’s existence within a culture and (2) allows Vattimo to focus on the secularized shift the faith experiences. This is a statement of defiance, one that challenges dogmatic absolutes administered by systems of authority. Vattimo’s progressive hermeneutic offers both a rejection of absolutes found in dogmatic teachings and an opportunity for such communities to exist in a postmodern context. Vattimo understands this ‘transfiguration of religion’⁸⁸³ to take place only when the traditional forms of authority are overcome. This approach follows Vattimo’s understanding of a renewed engagement with the spiritual and religious:

To be faithful to the end of metaphysics, which makes [religion’s] renewable possible, the religion that presents itself anew in our culture must abandon the project of grounding religious ethics upon knowledge of natural essences that are taken as norms, observing instead the freedom of dialogic mediation.⁸⁸⁴ The questioning of metaphysics is thereby considered a natural progression of religion. It opens the doors for a post-metaphysical community, guided by science, technology, and a renewed sense of tradition, while emphasizing the individual and his or her ability to interpret the given. It is, for Vattimo, a process of weakening: “Increasingly, the outcomes of science are irreducible to the

⁸⁸³ Vattimo entitles the sixth chapter of *After Christianity* using this phrase. See, ibid., 83-92.
⁸⁸⁴ Ibid., 90.
unity of a ground, making metaphysics implausible. The structures of society have become more flexible, replacing the natural community with a more heterogeneous and divided society where the single individual is less identifiable.\textsuperscript{885} The result of Vattimo’s thought is an opportunity for individuals to reengage a narrative and the possibility of transcendental experience(s). “Despite its limits, this vision might well define the horizon for resuming the dialogue between philosophy and religion in the Western world.”\textsuperscript{886} The event of the Incarnation provides a platform from which a classical Trinitarian theology can merge with the ever-evolving postmodern era.

3. Nietzsche, Metaphysics, and Language

To understand these introductory remarks regarding Vattimo’s rejection or overcoming of metaphysics, it is important to note the Torinese’s endearment of Nietzsche’s philosophy. Beyond the statement Nietzsche is most well-known for, “God is dead,” our concern here is Vattimo’s reading of the nineteenth century philosopher and his ideas on “Christianity, morality, and metaphysics,” which are all “closely interconnected,” as important aspects of nihilism.\textsuperscript{887} These components help construct a postmodern Christian nihilism for Vattimo that addresses the complexities of a tradition said to hide the transcendental by its use of dogmas centered on “creation, sin, penalty, and redemption,” concealing the mystery in a shroud of authority.\textsuperscript{888} Of metaphysics, Nietzsche will articulate that it has limited humanity’s ability to see what is true; instead, individuals are given interpretations to satisfy their curiosity.

Nietzsche and Vattimo challenge the absoluteness associated with a metaphysical hermeneutics upheld by an authority (the Magisterium). In its place, they acknowledge the

\textsuperscript{885} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{886} Ibid., 91.
\textsuperscript{888} Ibid.
interpretations that have developed within the tradition. For instance, as Vattimo notes, the Sinai event, in which Moses returns down the mountain with the Commandments, is not read as a literal reception of event, but a “product of interpretation.”\footnote{Vattimo, "Toward a Nonreligious Christianity," in \textit{After the Death of God}, 34.} The New Testament accounts, written well after the Crucifixion, are similarly regarded as interpretations of the Jesus-events, written for specific communities confronting the resurrection events, devising their own understanding, and preserving what was believed to be true accounts of the Nazorean. In the subsequent development of Christianity, the Church would authorize these accounts and corresponding dogma as the valid portions of the tradition—excluding, for example, documents like the Gospel of St. Thomas—making certain only four accounts would serve as valid testimonials of the tradition. Relatedly, the application of metaphysics to dogmatic interpretations of these accounts (in the form of papal decrees, encyclicals, etc.) solidified these as the tradition from which Christianity would subsequently operate. The critique refers to the limitations metaphysics places on the tradition, a topic both Nietzsche and Vattimo emphasize repeatedly.

Notably, these concerns find their way into Vattimo’s understanding of both nature and art, aspects of which he borrows from Nietzsche. Vattimo suggests that we are conditioned to think things in a particular form, which often neglects a significant appreciation for the natural around us. For example, the elevator has become an accepted part of the world we operate in, essentially part of its nature (typically, any high-rise or multi-floor building has one). Meanwhile, nature itself folds into the advances of technology and scientific advancement, leaving us to designate such unnatural devices as part of our natural understanding of the world. There is also the tendency to observe something more shrewdly if we encounter it not in the natural world, but in other media forms (TV, on the Internet, etc.). This supports Nietzsche’s nihilistic view of the world, one which
concedes that we have preferred a dream state versus reality. "As the objective world consumes itself, it gives way to a growing subjective transformation not of individuals but of communities, cultures, sciences, and languages."890 This is evident not only in how we situate ourselves in relation to the world and its transformation (the addition of the first patented electric elevator in 1887 has become so common, we accept it as natural) but also how we dialogue about something beyond our control or comprehension. With regard to this project, I am of course talking about the language granted to the Divine, especially the Christian concept of God.

The culturally conditioned role of language demands a certain perspective or a certain way in which we communicate with one another. With few exceptions, theologians have preferred the masculine language to interpret God’s involvement with humanity (the Incarnation, kenosis, etc.), essentially normalizing the authoritative interpretation of God:

When I think about the masculine language of God as father, I cannot help but wonder why God must be father and not mother or some other form of parenthood. The language of God as father is so obviously an allegoric language. Once you begin down this road, you do not know where you are going to end up.891 The message relating to God’s kenosis, and all other corresponding theological ones, were developed through history; they were not conceived of at the time of Christ’s birth, life, death, or resurrection.892 The point here is to demonstrate the ability of an institution to determine and authorize a ‘fact,’ which then dominates other aspects of philosophical and theological thought, insofar as theologians are expected to follow the model established by such an authority. Similarly, Vattimo observes Nietzsche’s rhetoric regarding art—paintings and poetry being two areas of concern. In this regard, an art-historian, textbook, or museum guide may come to demand that one observe a painting in one form, leading the observers to witness only one or two aspects of it,
leaving out the infinite possibilities that might otherwise present themselves. The piece of art can become void of deeper meaning and be analyzed as simple geometrical shapes, structures that can be dismantled or deconstructed. He goes so far as to echo Nietzsche’s claim that such a deconstruction may induce an opiate-like participation among its viewers.\(^{893}\)

Vattimo turns to Nietzsche’s *Human, All Too Human*, to help delineate the concerns regarding metaphysics. In this text, Nietzsche suggests that metaphysics limits knowledge of the thing itself. When presenting his understanding of the ‘deconstruction of metaphysics’ (the title of Vattimo’s second chapter in *Nietzsche: An Introduction*), Vattimo articulates a primal desire to comprehend existence—including notions of reason and being—explored in part by what is available to them, namely science and art. To elucidate this point, I mean to suggest that without a philosophical system to support humanity’s desire to understand existence, forms of science and artwork were used to articulate what was occurring in their lives. To that affect, Nietzsche appeals to phenomenology insofar as it offers a way to experience the world that is not reliant upon the sciences to express what appears before us.

That which we now call the world is the outcome of a host of errors and fantasies which have gradually arisen and grown entwined with another in the course of the overall evolution of the organic being...Rigorous science is capable of detaching us from this ideational world only to a limited extent—and more is certainly not desirable—inasmuch as it is incapable of making any essential inroad into the power of habits of feeling acquired in primeval times.\(^{894}\) His statement invites the reader to reconsider his or her own experiences, all of which have become beholden to the scientific or pseudo-scientific explanations of the world around us.\(^{895}\) The repeated example of the elephant is helpful here. Our experience has been defined by science, measurement,

\(^{893}\) See, for example, Vattimo, *The Adventure of Difference: Philosophy after Nietzsche and Heidegger*, 99-100. As Vattimo attempts to draw a parallel between Nietzsche’s understanding of art and religion, we may read into this caution something similar to one’s faith devotion; one’s faithfulness to (a) religion may resemble that of an opiate addiction, while also regarded as fragile.


and textbooks on the animal versus our intuition’s experience of the massive creature as itself. Science, in this regard, “can, quite gradually and step by step, illuminate the history of the genesis of this world as idea—and, for brief periods at any rate, lift us up out of the entire proceeding.”  

And though science has its place in Nietzsche’s *Human, All Too Human; Daybreak;* and *The Gay Science*, its role in pre-determining what one sees is questioned, as it limits the exposure of the intuition to the thing itself.  

The reliance on these determinations has in turn blinded our experience of reality, ultimately affecting truth. There is a certain desensitization, Nietzsche and Vattimo explain, because of the language of metaphysics employed to govern the way in which we think. We are more likely to find comfort by way of metaphor, reducing the purity of something such that the controlling body of the metaphor continues its “domination.” Language has the ability to control how a collective thinks and processes information. Though our concern is theological in this project, Vattimo points to Nietzsche’s statements on science to make this point:

> It becomes clear here that Nietzsche does not expect a truer picture of the world from science, but rather a model way of thinking which is not fanatical and proceeds methodically, soberly and ‘objectively’ in the sense that it remains capable of making judgments outside the immediate pressure of interests and passions. Nietzsche’s turn to science invites consideration of the world around the individual, one that relies on predetermined language systems to help determine what it encounters. Science, because of its focus on discovery and evidence-based outcomes (or truths), fails to offer a platform in which something can be viewed phenomenologically. Art, however, is introduced to dispense with the traditional forms of metaphysics, offering a view point that is different from science. The introduction of phenomenology in this context permits one to think outside the confines of a

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scientific body of work given to us through predetermined and external sources (including a language-system). Nietzsche’s examination of artwork aides in this distinction, insofar as it demonstrates the restrictions placed on the individual, versus the independence the intuition is granted when freed from the rules of science, metaphysics, etc. Art offers a glimpse into a world often outside or beyond the horizons of science, inviting, among other things, an opportunity to find humor or to be enamored beyond the rules or language systems which typically govern us. It is important, according to Vattimo, that one understands the complementary nature of the two forms (science and art), which invite individuals to experience the world in multiple ways. Art offers a way in which Nietzsche can explore the world outside the language exercises of science. Nietzsche’s focus therein transitions from one that considers art and the artist as acceptable interlocutors.

The dialogue used to examine the curiosities of philosophy and the questions that have confronted humanity for centuries are what Vattimo is (re-)considering in his work and focus on Nietzsche and Heidegger. Again, language is central to this examination of philosophy and the retrieval of religion: “[the] philosophical problems ‘once again pose the same form of question as they did two thousand years ago: how can something originate in its opposite, for example rationality in irrationality, the sentient in the dead, logic in unlogic, disinterested contemplation in covetous desire, altruism in egoism, truth in error’?” Art offers a way into the unknown, the

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901 Vattimo adopts this Nietzschean critique in his examination of the Roman Catholic Church’s opinion of Natural Law. The language associated with Natural Law, determined by the authority, has determined certain perspectives on nature are acceptable. This would include Catholicism’s teachings on homosexuality. For his discussion on Natural Law, see especially Vattimo, After Christianity, 115-8.

902 “In a mature person’s attitude to the world, art and science complement each other. If, from the point of view of their simultaneity and actuality, they appear as power-source and regulator respectively, their profound connection emerges in their shared origin where we see that science is only a later, more mature development of that drive to which art owes its existence,” in Vattimo, Nietzsche: An Introduction, 58.

mythical or transcendental, etc., inviting the viewer to participate as an observer. The participant is not focused on responding to an authority, but rather responds to the piece as it gives itself without precondition. The point of this discourse is to reiterate what has been stated throughout this project: language has its limitations, specifically in its attempts to demonstrate or express something that remains eternally transcendent. The lack of accessibility to the mysterious—a point reiterated by Vattimo’s references to Joachim de Fiore—demonstrates this point. Metaphysics can only go so far using metaphor or other linguistic algorithms to articulate something that escapes human knowledge.

Religion is subsequently challenged as something transcendent, specifically as it pronounces with certainty an ontology determined to be first, adhered to by its subjects; and second, understood to exist beyond the confines of history. This produces the problem of hermeneutical ontology, which seeks to present the world in a context familiar to the viewer or participant. Hermeneutical ontology, Vattimo suggests, is no different. In this scheme, Vattimo suggests, an individual (1) questions and rejects any objectivity of an ideal historical knowledge of the form existing before the viewer, (2) acknowledges that such a model is “an extension” of “all knowledge,” and (3) understands that hermeneutical ontology is directly connected to our use of language. Elsewhere, to demonstrate this point, Vattimo explains that certain rule systems govern how we participate: the rules of baseball would not apply to a game of basketball or vice versa. Adopting a methodology which relies on language generates a limited horizon upon which one processes data. The data available, however, appears only to the person’s limited

905 Vattimo understands that this form of knowledge has historically coincided with language and the authorities who manage interpretations. Vattimo, The Adventure of Difference: Philosophy after Nietzsche and Heidegger, 19.
906 Ibid.
907 Vattimo, “Toward a Nonreligious Christianity,” in After the Death of God, 33.
experiences, what is known to him or her previously.\textsuperscript{908} This is true of Christianity as well. Relying on its own system of language, Christianity becomes a philosophy of interpretation resulting in a subjective understanding of the world, grounded in its own system. Combined with a culture (European in this case) the complexity of the situation emerges. Vattimo reflects that as a Christian European, his cultural connection to Scripture would limit his own contrived sense of self and world: “I recognize that if I were to strip myself of the biblical world of meaning and reference, I would strip myself of meaning altogether.”\textsuperscript{909} The freedom to engage Christianity, which at minimum is a spiritual exercise, is of concern, particularly as it relates to the authority granted to metaphysics.

The Christian language-system extends to the mythological passages of Christian scriptures—the virgin birth, the event of Pentacost, walking on water, etc.—situating this language system apart from the Greco-Roman philosophers mentioned above. This is a deviation from the essence and being language common to their philosophies, much of which was alluded to earlier in this project, because of its discussion of Being, \textit{Dasein}, and/or \textit{Ereignis}. We have become dependent on the rules that govern our discourse. It is this dependency Heidegger seeks to challenge when discussing Being as event.\textsuperscript{910}

\textbf{4. Nietzsche’s Overcoming of Metaphysics}

Vattimo argues for an \textit{overcoming} of the authoritarian models evident in hermeneutical ontology, metaphysics, etc.\textsuperscript{911} Vattimo clarifies his understanding of \textit{overcoming} compared to other contemporary figures:

\textsuperscript{908} Vattimo, \textit{The Adventure of Difference: Philosophy after Nietzsche and Heidegger}, 63.
\textsuperscript{909} Vattimo, “Toward a Nonreligious Christianity,” in \textit{After the Death of God}, 36.
\textsuperscript{910} Vattimo, \textit{The Adventure of Difference: Philosophy after Nietzsche and Heidegger}, 124.
\textsuperscript{911} In fact, in \textit{A Farewell to Truth}, Vattimo questions phenomenology as a system which re-establishes its own ontologies. “To me it seems that such a rethink is needed precisely in order to liberate phenomenology from the
'The philosophy of difference’...in a certain sector of French culture...tends instead to begin with the actual forgetting of difference, contrasting that with a type of thinking which strives rather to remember difference, rediscovering and presenting it in various ways, thereby aiming to position itself in some sense beyond ‘metaphysics.' Here, I think, is one of the essential ways in which the philosophy of differences as practised [sic] by the French diverges from its original manifestation in Heidegger.”\textsuperscript{912} The French interpretation of Heidegger leads to a misinterpretation of Nietzsche’s understanding of difference. Heidegger’s discussion of being and Being is centered on “the problem of difference,”\textsuperscript{913} a problem Heidegger believed Nietzsche did not address adequately. Heidegger was of the opinion, in fact, that Nietzsche was truly a Platonist. Vattimo argues that Nietzsche is the philosopher responsible for the end of and the overcoming of metaphysics (as problematic as that has been).\textsuperscript{914} Notably, Vattimo cautions that a French reading of Nietzsche (e.g., Derrida’s reading), fails to observe the importance given to myth and narrative. In place of a dogmatic exhibition, Nietzsche’s use of imagery is used to explain or discover ideas related to being.\textsuperscript{915} Nietzsche invites a discussion on being which is void of the metaphysical attributes often afforded to it in other, more traditional, systems. These other modes of discussing being are flaccid attempts to situate being in forms understandable to the masses. Vattimo’s reading of Nietzsche permits the Italian an opportunity to echo the idiom, “There are no facts, only interpretations.”\textsuperscript{916} Such a reading—one that differs from Blanchot, Jasper, and Heidegger—leads to an understanding of how Nietzsche arrives at a nihilistic philosophy. Whereas metaphysics repeatedly

\textsuperscript{912} Vattimo, \textit{The Adventure of Difference: Philosophy after Nietzsche and Heidegger}, 64-5.

\textsuperscript{913} Ibid., 65. Emphasis original.

\textsuperscript{914} Ibid., 66.

\textsuperscript{915} Ibid., 68.

\textsuperscript{916} Ibid., 70, cf. no. 7. Later in the text, Vattimo points to Nietzsche’s claim in light of art and literature, both of which offer insights into the world, but fail to capture it in a form metaphysics attempts. Vattimo explains this writing, “There are only fables, and the fables are symbolic productions resulting from certain hierarchies of propulsive forces, giving rise to determinate configurations; for example, a certain interpretation ‘prevails’ as ‘true’ and becomes the norm, but it is actually a matter of force,” in ibid., 92.
offers language systems to present being/Being, the poetic forms introduced by Nietzsche are free from such structure and can be renewed in various forms without concern for the rules that govern the aforementioned.\textsuperscript{917} The descriptions, though atypical, offer insight into a philosophy that overcomes metaphysics (i.e., the rules):

Notwithstanding all those frequently illuminating observations on the anti-metaphysical significance of the peculiar language of the Nietzschean text, the only conceivable point of contact would be a view of Being that no longer understands it as fullness, presence or foundation, but rather as fracture, absence of foundation, work and pain.\textsuperscript{918} Nietzsche’s challenge to metaphysics is therefore one that shifts the discourse toward something beyond structures of language, much of which was discussed in the previous chapters. For Vattimo, this overcoming will help shape his understanding of metaphysics and subsequently, weak thought. Zarathustra suggests a way in which philosophy can be explored without maintaining the rules administered by an authority. The problem, admits Vattimo, is that human beings are grounded in a history of metaphysics, making it difficult to escape its rigor and control over us. He will suggest that we are in fact constituted by metaphysics and being, suggesting, at one point, that only Nietzsche’s Uebermensch is formidable enough to escape metaphysics’ control.\textsuperscript{919}

Zarathustra’s overcoming of metaphysics, or at least the claim to have done so in The Gay Science, is where Vattimo suggests Nietzsche opens the possibility of challenging metaphysics for the rest of us. Though the ‘death of God’ is expressed in The Gay Science, Vattimo suggests that this locution was never meant for one’s immediate consumption. Only later would it be accepted by those seeking to see beyond metaphysics.\textsuperscript{920} Our flawed historical existence as individuals trapped between an era of metaphysics and its overcoming (best witnessed by the Uebermensch),

\textsuperscript{917} Ibid., 73. It is important to note, however, that Vattimo acknowledges the necessity of language systems, otherwise “the world would appear to be an indistinct mess,” in Vattimo, After Christianity, 7.
\textsuperscript{918} Vattimo, The Adventure of Difference: Philosophy after Nietzsche and Heidegger, 73.
\textsuperscript{919} Ibid., 79.
\textsuperscript{920} Ibid., 80, cf. no. 19. See also, Nietzsche, no. 343.
means we have difficulty identifying Being as other-than. The common person has trouble identifying Being as something different than (human) beings.

Metaphysics dismissed the possibility that such ideas (logic) regarding Being/being could be conceived of only by and through its opposite (unlogic). These philosophical questions emerged even before the development of metaphysics, demonstrating the desire to understand “the basic elements of things…their differences and variety in terms of the composition of these elements.”

The evolution of these ideas required a system able to theorize the infinite possibilities associated with them, leading to Nietzsche’s depiction of a philosophical system that divides the ‘moral’ from everything else. Religion and metaphysics, accordingly, are regarded in a particular fashion, one which requires that both are ‘deconstructed.’

To Nietzsche, there lies at the root of all prejudices, even those of religion and metaphysics, the problem of man’s ‘practical’ relationship with the world, and in this sense everything spiritual has to do with morality as it is practised…Nietzsche’s analyses, which are often carried out using very diverse materials, show that, in his opinion, truth itself is nothing more than a kind of prop for, and amplification of, a certain form of life. The opening aphorism of Human, All Too Human takes the first step and makes clear the general direction of Nietzsche’s critique of morality. Everything that declares itself superior and transcendent, in other words everything we deem valuable, is nothing more than a product of the sublimation of ‘human, all too human’ factors; and not in the sense that moral values and the actions that result from them are only conscious lies on the part of those who preach them and act accordingly. Instead, errors come to light in them, to which one can subscribe in all good faith.

The language-games of metaphysics are apparent. To frame what appears before the observer, the observer relies on a system of words to make sense of the given. Such language-games, Vattimo will stress, are in themselves interpretations. Herein lies the very problem with metaphysics insofar as it becomes the system humans rely on to determine the spiritual, religious, moral,

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922 Ibid., 61-2. See also, Vattimo, "Toward a Nonreligious Christianity," in After the Death of God, 43-4.
political, and otherwise. The very fact that metaphysics seeks to declare a form of thought as the way to think is of concern. Nietzsche’s “chemical analysis,” used to refer to his study of metaphysics, deduces that such an approach to the major questions relating to existence are flawed. Vattimo writes that they are “built on ‘errors.’”924 At the center of Vattimo’s deconstruction of metaphysics is this overview of Nietzsche’s understanding of this philosophical method. In short, Vattimo is dismissing the role of metaphysics as a philosophical methodology advantageous to those seeking to understand the world around them.

Nietzsche’s emphasis on a post-metaphysical philosophy emphasizes morality and the way in which a person can be deemed moral. His task was to locate the residence of human morality, one that was shaped by a variety of aspects, including religion and metaphysics. Nietzsche’s understanding of what is ‘moral’ is what aids in his development of this conclusion. Assessing one’s morality is predicated on ‘knowing’ what is right or wrong. Traditionally, one arrives at this conclusion only because one has been told that one’s action is right or wrong.925 Nietzsche’s response dismisses the possibility that anyone can be the impartial judge of any action or outcome. Again, by addressing Nietzsche’s understanding of actions and morality, Vattimo surmises that no system designed to judge via a predetermined set of rules is adequate or just.

[The moral world] encompasses religion and metaphysics in addition, which in their turn represent ‘worlds’ of values opposed or reacting to the world of everyday experience. The moral world also has other wellsprings apart from the self-division of the ‘I’ and the layerings of hypothetical imperatives whose origin in utility was later forgotten. An essential aspect of the principle of preservation and pleasure-seeking is the need for security and reliability, which is a contributory factor in the emergence of the basic tenets of metaphysics. Science develops from these, as the example of causality shows.926

924 Vattimo, Nietzsche: An Introduction, 62.
925 Vattimo demonstrates this by pointing to Nietzsche’s Daybreak; ibid., 62-3. For the English translation of the referenced passage, see, Friedrich Nietzsche, Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality, ed. Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 72.
The reliance on metaphysics in this case is directly related to one’s yearning for protection, especially protection from the unknown. Such a philosophical system provides the ability to remain closed off from anything that threatens one’s existence or livelihood, insofar as it does not introduce something foreign. Vattimo adds that only God in Christian ethics can be the “final arbiter of actions,” forcing an individual to reconsider the possibility of an objective system (metaphysics) that can arbitrarily assign prosecutorial judgment. Theologically, this has provided the basis for a metaphysical understanding of God, one that relies on ‘proofs’ or arguments to define something in a rational way, despite the irrationality of the very topic.

Vattimo’s concern follows Nietzsche’s overall examination of morality, insofar as religion and metaphysics interrupt the ability of one’s consciousness to make decisions independent from an outside authority. “Consciousness is an area where different ‘parts’ of the self do battle—not that one can say which of these different selves is the authentic one.”927 The suggestion here is that metaphysics impedes the individual’s ability to assess the very givenness of what fills the space before me. Still, Vattimo notes Nietzsche’s apprehensions regarding consciousness, explaining that consciousness is equally partisan: “Even consciousness is a ‘construct’ and a product, and hence no final arbiter.”928 Though one might understand consciousness or the self as the focal point of ‘subject’ driven activities focused on one’s pleasure or preservation, they remain flawed. The flaws associated with the self and consciousness forced the creation of systems that guided humanity. This ‘chemistry,’ as Vattimo labels Nietzsche’s pseudo-scientific balance between consciousness and one’s environment, then acknowledges the already existing or “assembled”

927 Ibid., 72.
928 Ibid., 73. See also, Nietzsche, §335, 187-8. This, of course, is in contrast to the phenomenological understanding of consciousness articulated in the previous chapter.
factors of metaphysics, insofar as they help affirm the categories one has made.\textsuperscript{929} This helps one develop a morality, one that often corresponds to the religious or metaphysical systems developed through this process. Ultimately, Vattimo reasons, this is what leads Nietzsche to ‘God is dead.’ Nietzsche’s \textit{The Gay Science} frames for us the very instance in which one may question the validity, the truth, of God, insofar as God belongs within the religious and metaphysical categories humanity has developed. According to Vattimo’s reading of Nietzsche, this has resulted in a systematized version of what eternally remains untenable, intangible, and foreign. Vattimo then clarifies this statement: “the pronouncement…is not, in Nietzsche’s case, simply a metaphysical denial of His existence. For it is not a statement concerning the ‘true structure’ of reality, in which God does not exist while people believe that He does.”\textsuperscript{930} A question then emerges: does God need to fit within the confines of a systematized language structure and, as a result, fit within a pre-determined set of theological declarations? The ‘fable of God’—or God’s existence within the metaphysical stories we adhere to—is subsequently deemed superfluous. Those stories that history has come to rely on are more damaging than they are affirming. Vattimo insists that God’s ‘existence’ does not rely on our acceptance of a fable and a pseudo-science.

Vattimo’s Nietzschean exploration of nature, artwork, and language helps frame a discussion of postmodern philosophy and theology that is not grounded in metaphysics. Nietzsche invites a consideration of philosophy in which the dissolution of metaphysics opens theology to God unrestrained by human authority. Vattimo suggests that this ‘death of God’ permits

\textsuperscript{929} ‘Nietzsche’s ‘chemistry’ does not lead to original elements; instead these are revealed time and again as already ‘assembled.’ But the assembly and transformation process, the richness of colours and nuances which go to make up the spiritual life of humanity—from the errors of morality, metaphysics and religion to the productions of a religious asceticism—can only be understood if one applies the method of a ‘chemical’ analysis, and returns to its perennially problematic roots—admittedly, this brings with it a particular form of production, in which one lifts oneself above the entire proceeding,” in Vattimo, \textit{Nietzsche: An Introduction}, 74.

\textsuperscript{930} Ibid., 76.
Heidegger’s *Ereignis* and an emphasis on the virtue of *caritas* to come to the forefront of a post-metaphysical Christianity.

5. Heidegger, Being as Event, and Pensiero Debole

The philosophy of Martin Heidegger also emerges as a central part of Vattimo’s thinking. Vattimo’s interest in Heidegger lies principally with elements similar to those presented in his analysis of Nietzsche; namely, the critique of metaphysics stems from the notion that it has become a system difficult to escape or replace. Metaphysics makes it impossible for someone to be objective when considering something within or outside the confines of philosophy. Vattimo explains,

Those familiar with the hermeneutical tradition know that this is the point where Heidegger’s objection to metaphysics begins—namely, in the decision to be objective, we cannot help but assume a definite position, de-fined, in other words, a point of view that limits, but also helps in a decisive way, our encounter with the world. While Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics begins here in the critique of the metaphysical definition of truth as an objective datum, his critique also moves beyond this point in its eventual focus on the ethical-political nature of metaphysics, the ‘rationalization’ of modern society against which the vanguards during the first part of the twentieth century were fighting.  

There is a crystallization of metaphysics, so to speak, in which society has come to rely on the philosophy for all aspects of thought, language, structure, institutions, etc. Heidegger’s critique emerges from this acknowledgement, insofar as it negates any form of phenomenological or philosophical approach that seeks alternative modes of inquiry, discovery, and explanation—a premise outlined in greater detail in the previous chapter. Interpretation is central to Vattimo’s

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932 The term “crystallization” is in reference to its use by Michel Foucault. Referenced by J. Kameron Carter in *Race: A Theological Account* (2008), the term highlights the unyielding power and control systems of governance often have over a group of people. The term is relevant insofar as metaphysics has become an institutional norm. Metaphysics is the *de facto* system used to describe not only the mysterious or theological, seen especially in the dogmatic references noted in this project’s chapter two, but also the science-oriented information addressed by Nietzsche and Vattimo in this chapter. Whereas Michel Foucault use this term in *The History of Sexuality* (1980) to address the systems of government/authority which have consolidated their power to an almost unbreakable form—i.e., they are crystallized—I think its use can correlate to the use of metaphysics found in institutions like the Roman Catholic Church. See, for example, Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage, 1980), 92-3.
understanding of Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics. In this sense, I become the interpreter of the world around me and I respond to that world accordingly. I can only identify and process that which I experience using terms already available to me. Vattimo explains, “I cannot say precisely how things are, but only how they are from this point of view, how they seem to me and how I think they are.”

The creation of language-based systems helps govern these points of view, these interpretations, and the situations in which we are immersed. Vattimo works through an example of a scientist who operates within this context: her experiment is grounded within principles she is already familiar with (something found in a textbook or lab report). From here, she administers her own variables. Each variable is independently recognized and understood in terms of how it generally works. Mixed together, they present an outcome she was not entirely expecting or familiar with, forcing an interpretation of the experiment/data. Despite the foreknowledge of the elements, conditions, etc., the outcome, whose properties are familiar as independents, remain a surprise. Nevertheless, the language-system she employs maintains words easily accessible to and understood by her.

This leads us into the main point of Vattimo’s examination of Heidegger as it relates to Christian theology. Like science, Christianity has built a system of language in order for those exploring the tradition to adequately create theory or even doctrine affirming what has been offered in previous interpretations. Dating back to the lived-experience of Christ’s disciples, the oral and written traditions that would follow, the Patristics, the Scholastics, Councils, and so on, theology today has a library of interpretations addressing the Incarnation, the Resurrection, Ecclesiology, etc. In short, theology has itself built a language system grounded in metaphysics and intended to present dense philosophical ideas to its faithful (and presumably those not exposed to the tradition

933 Vattimo, ”Toward a Nonreligious Christianity,” in After the Death of God, 28.
in the first place). This is our concern. Theology, administered according to this type of thinking and based on established doctrine, offers little room for new, diverse interpretations.

Various attempts to think through the complexity of Being and metaphysics have been tried. Whereas Jean-Luc Marion works to develop a phenomenologically grounded theology, focusing on saturation and givenness, Vattimo works to overcome the metaphysical understanding, proposing Heidegger’s Ereignis or Being as Event in order to explore theology. This consideration of Being, Vattimo articulates, is explored outside the confines of metaphysics.

Let me turn now to discussing Heidegger’s interpretation of the overcoming of metaphysics, since he is the philosopher who has theorized it more radically. The effort to think of Being…not as an objective structure projected by the mind to conform itself to in all its practical choices led Heidegger to practice philosophy as the recollection of the history of Being…for Heidegger, only the thought that conceives of Being as event or as occurrence rather than objective structure is a nonmetaphysical and nonobjectifying way of recollecting Being.934 This proposal is a departure from metaphysical theology, to the extent that it does not rely on one interpretation, one institution’s description, or one culturally-assigned analysis void of socio-historical truth.935 Some have done so using the language of science—a point Vattimo makes of Heidegger’s own work—only to be met with an inability to think beyond a series of facts derived from a posteriori knowledge. In other words, Heidegger and Vattimo’s concerns regarding metaphysics lie with the philosophy’s tendency to reduce the essence of something to mere absence, “The reduction of Anwesen [property; essence] to objectness excludes from the dimension of Abwesen, absence.”936 The philosophical notions of difference and distance addressed by Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Vattimo require a reconsideration of Being as being. Metaphysics, on the other hand, attempts to interpret Being analogously to being, thereby using its own tools to

934 Vattimo, After Christianity, 21. See also, Vattimo, The Adventure of Difference: Philosophy after Nietzsche and Heidegger, 123.
935 Specifically, there is a tendency to assign European characteristics, descriptions, etc. or Greco-Roman attributes to the Incarnation, disregarding the Palestinian attributes of Jesus of Nazareth.
define the construct and limit Being. The aim to present Being as event is deemed more suitable. Heidegger’s Being as event (*Ereignis*) proposes a format in which historical considerations of being (*ousia, esse*, etc.) are reconsidered as mere temporal constructs, intended to express Being for a culture or moment in history.\(^9\) If compared to other expressions that are time-bound or culturally linked, Heidegger’s concerns are legitimate.\(^8\) Addressing God using the language of event allows for a theology not grounded in or assigned to a particular culture. *Ereignis* makes it impossible to rely on language that is equated with language surrounding human beings (i.e., maintaining features similar to a woman or man, having kinetic motion, or an intelligence equivalent to a human).

Instead of relying on the *causa sui* or Heideggerian λόγος referred to in chapter two, Vattimo’s proposal is one that returns to the self-abasement, the *kenosis*, the event of Being addressed in scripture. Being as event thereby challenges three existing narratives. First, it challenges the absolutes and the transcendental ideas addressed in the interpretations of revelation and salvation. Second, Vattimo intends to entangle humanity with that of the Incarnation rather than bolster the transcendental stories metaphysics has created. Lastly, he grants special emphasis to the secular interpretation of the Christian message, focusing on the significance of the Event as a charitable act. Relatedly, Vattimo’s presentation of Being as Event is carried out in two ways: first, through material aesthetics found in postmodernity (similar to the allegorical language of

\(^9\) Vattimo explains this point further in his review of *Being and Time*. In this regard, he writes, “When considering *Being and Time* we may still have the doubt that it is a matter of defining the essence of man, in the most traditional meaning of the term ‘essence’; the successive works—above all the *Letter on Humanism*—make clear that what in *Being and Time* might have construed as characteristics of man’s nature are actually events, facts, occurrences of Being, that is, the mode in which Being is, occurs, and gives itself” in Vattimo, *Art’s Claim to Truth*, 63.

\(^8\) The Christmas traditions surrounding the mythical figure who grants gifts to good children is a weak example of these temporally bound notions referred to by Heidegger. The stories centered on ‘Santa Claus,’ ‘Sinterklaas,’ ‘St. Nicholas,’ ‘Père Noël,’ etc., are bound historically and culturally. Likewise, the antithesis, the anthropomorphic character of Krampus, is uniquely bound to cultures in Eastern Europe.
saturated phenomenon Marion relies on in his philosophy) and second, through an understanding of the transcendental, which traverses past and present time. The Incarnation and its connection to humanity (both past and present) weaves its way through Vattimo’s philosophy with this adaptation. His audience is left considering the kenotic relationship to the theological and the material, or human, encounter with the Divine. The consideration of Being as an Event in history is of utmost importance to a philosophy that seeks to overcome authoritarian and metaphysical structures. This method and explanation also finds itself positioned in Vattimo’s description of secularization and the secular. To achieve this, Vattimo employs pensiero debole, a deconstruction of the classical and metaphysical arguments of Being in which God is first rationalized and later decreed as such by an authority (e.g., the Roman Catholic Church). Pensiero debole challenges the a priori Christian understanding of Being and God.

This is a critique of Western metaphysical dogma that has driven theology and philosophy. Again, and worth reiterating, metaphysical language systems help frame the discourse of God, restricting God to one historical epoch and understanding for an audience. This view of God is described by Vattimo as pensiero forte, limiting one’s ability to see beyond the language forced on us in discussions about God. Metaphysics and the related authority limits the interpretive ability to engage the Divine. This is a certain literalism derived from this type of scriptural interpretation, adherence to doctrine, and submission to an authority. We become victims of such literalism,

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939 To explain this second point, McCaffery writes, “The centrality of the Christian message of salvation and redemption remains intact for Vattimo. His innovation is that it is configured in a way that eschews the structured channels of transcendence as alterity, and reinterprets this message through a phenomenology of the material world. As such, concepts of eternal time, absolute knowledge, the sacred and divine are open to renegotiation in the form of chronological time, interpretation, waiting, historicity, and becoming,” in McCaffery, 97. Emphasis original.

negating our ability to interpret what scripture or an encounter with the Divine offers. Vattimo addresses this point, “If we do not welcome the appeal of aesthetic emancipation offered to us by the new condition of existence, it is because we are still oppressed by the letter – the literalism of the sacred texts.”

_Pensiero debole_ guides much of Vattimo’s philosophy. Following the post-metaphysical tradition of French and Italian philosophers, Vattimo places his understanding of ‘weak thought’ as a byproduct of the demise of metanarratives—outlined in this project’s first two chapters. Weakness, accordingly, is identified by way of the weakness of reason and its inability to otherwise speak in terms beyond metaphor—to speak in mundane and subjective terms. Once the issue of language is recognized, and weak thought employed as a challenge to metanarratives and metaphysics, Vattimo argues that the myths and corresponding ideologies begin to be foiled, insofar as they are governed by an authority overseeing said myth (e.g., Roman Catholicism). He adds that such foils are occurring not just within spiritual or religious institutions, but throughout “contemporary culture.” By contrast, myths emerge free from an authoritarian structure. “When, for instance, post-metaphysical philosophy limits itself to the defense of pluralism for its own sake or to the legitimization of proliferating metanarratives without hierarchy or center, it ends up preaching a pure and simple return to myth and ideology without setting up any critical principle, apart from the important principle of tolerance.” This philosophy introduced by Vattimo invites the individual to think beyond the limitations of a governed or authorized system. It encourages

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941 Vattimo, _After Christianity_, 56.
942 Ibid., 20.
943 Ibid. He goes on to suggest that this very pluralism and tolerance in itself might be part of their own myth, ideology, and narratives, a byproduct of “liberal relativism,” in ibid., 20-1.
thought that examines the givenness of the thing itself, opting to see the lived experience as more important than the dogmatic claims an authority offers.\textsuperscript{944}

Recognizing the flaws of metaphysics and hermeneutical ontology permits us to reconsider how we address the given appearing before us or encountered in other ways. Where we revert to ontology is when we allow our language systems to address Being as ordinary and similar to beings. Addressing Heidegger’s understanding of Dasein and Being/being, Vattimo attends to the \textit{overcoming} of the metaphysical influence connected to these philosophical topics, inviting one to think of the Divine as other-than being. In this way, Vattimo references Heidegger’s \textit{Dasein}.

\textit{Dasein} is “the in-between” and that “which does not arise from the subject coming together with the world.”\textsuperscript{945} Vattimo reads Dasein in conjunction with the idea of language-games addressed by Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and others. It becomes situated in a world (or context) with its own language system, thereby defining Dasein in such a way that participants recognize and understand it accordingly. In \textit{After Christianity}, Vattimo writes the following:

Existence (Dasein) constitutes itself, albeit paradoxically, as an authentic totality only with a view to the possible impossibility of all possibility of life, which is constituted by the impending possibility of death. It is only by facing up to the possibility of death that the various, concrete possibilities of life appear in their true meaning as possibilities rather than hardening in their finality, and therefore let existence constitute itself as a dis-cursus endowed with meaning.\textsuperscript{946} Dasein denotes an argument that suggests the historical participation of humanity but one that is not connected theologically to something beyond. There is a clear objection to the authoritative and metaphysical models common in philosophy. This mode of thinking understands the concept of interpretation and the ways in which institutions of authority have shaped the way one thinks philosophically and theologically. The question posed by Vattimo’s \textit{pensiero debole} as it relates to Dasein invites the individual to think beyond metaphysics or concepts of being to address, for

\textsuperscript{944} Ibid., 87.
\textsuperscript{945} Vattimo, \textit{Art’s Claim to Truth}, xiv.
\textsuperscript{946} Vattimo, \textit{After Christianity}, 134. See also, Vattimo, \textit{Of Reality: The Purpose of Philosophy}, 17.
example, theological presentations of the Divine. Addressing Dasein in terms of *pensiero debole* points to the Heideggerian critique and obscurity of metaphysics. As a way of processing information, Vattimo is encouraging his audience to seek an understanding of Dasein or Being freed from metaphysical absolutes. The point is to discover the given without the preconditioned metaphors to which individuals have become so accustomed. Vattimo explains this further:

The argument would that ever since the emergence of metaphysics, thinking has always questioned beings as to their being, ever since Plato identifying *Seiendheit* with the presence of that which is present. In the age of accomplished metaphysics, thinking takes the final step along this way: it thinks Being in terms of being represented, a being represented that depends entirely on the representing subject.\(^{947}\) Adopting Heidegger’s philosophy on metaphysics and Being, Vattimo notes the temporality and certainty simultaneously applied to considerations of Being (and in this case, referring to the Divine understanding). As I have noted throughout this project, metaphysics tends to adopt an all-or-nothing permanence in understanding something. There tends to be the application of universal language, as in the case of natural law, a subject Vattimo addresses elsewhere.\(^{948}\) The postmodern era of technology, Heidegger and Vattimo argue, has permitted humanity to consider philosophy, and theology, outside the confines or limitations of metaphysics. Certainly, science or the like can be inserted in place of technology and philosophical ideas such as phenomenology are suitable substitutes for metaphysics. Heidegger’s concern is the move beyond metaphysics to identify ways in which the Divine can be discussed outside these constrained models to which theology has historically turned. This is not an abolishment of metaphysics. Vattimo will point to Heidegger’s *Ueberwindung der Metaphysik* to argue this point. Metaphysics instead “returns transformed,” informing the difference between being and Beings.\(^ {949}\) Heidegger and Vattimo through these terms argue that metaphysics never completely disappears. The dichotomy introduced between


\(^{948}\) For example, Vattimo, "Nihilism as Emancipation," 23.

Ueberwindung and Verwindung is articulated here. The former insists on an overcoming, one that realizes the limitations of and the setting aside of metaphysics. Ueberwindung, however, does not entail the abolishment of metaphysics, as though it were an option. Metaphysics is acknowledged as an historical form in which philosophers have conveyed certain ideas (religious or otherwise). By contrast, Verwindung seeks to reconcile the pseudo-science in order to justify its place in philosophy. Though not a dismissal of metaphysics, it is a reconciliation of the philosophy, insofar as it is altered for the purposes of presenting Being as Event. Though one seeks to consider Being as something separate from metaphysics, the way “the first thinkers” did, we are met with “the deployment of the entire history of metaphysics.”

Vattimo’s interpretation of metaphysics suggests that any application of this philosophical tool aims to address absolute structures and/or humanity. Guarino emphasizes Vattimo’s point: “Traditional metaphysics is always in search of perduring structures, essences and natures, seeking to exorcise historicity, to discover the final archē and Grund.” Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Kant, etc. are individuals whom Vattimo accuses of appropriating metaphysics to define Being, thereby limiting notions of the Divine to a set of norms that could otherwise be considered subjective. Their statements on Being can be reduced to expressions which fit the given epoch in which they are writing. In turn, these have limited and vandalized concepts of Being that should exist outside the confines of metaphysics. Going beyond the wall of metaphysics, insofar as it is a limitation on human freedom, requires that one acknowledges the use of language as the system in which

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950 Guarino, 37, cf. no. 39.
951 Ibid., 37-8, cf. no. 40.
953 Guarino, 38. Also, Vattimo, Dialogue with Nietzsche, 112.
954 Guarino, 38.
humans communicate and acknowledges the ability to interpret independently (i.e., without an authoritative or absolute system) that which appears before us.

Significant in both the examination of Nietzsche and Heidegger is consideration of the use of language in order to propose philosophical or theological ideas for individuals to understand. Language systems operate within a culturally bound context, acknowledging the way in which individuals connect with one another and the complex ideas that shape their understanding of the world around them. In turn, the tendency has become for one description of Being to take the place of other possibilities. The suggested hazard of associating with one interpretation of Being otherwise implies the likelihood that one would miss the infinite possibilities of exposure Being offers. The reliance on a language system (metaphysics) in order to discuss Being is problematic, insofar as it becomes the norm and operates as the only mode in which one can discuss philosophy pertaining to Being.

A way must be found past, or beyond, metaphysics, or at any rate metaphysics must be rejected, not because it fails to include the subject of the theory and is thus incomplete but because it legitimates, with its objectivism, a social and historical order from which the liberty and originality of human existence have been erased. Understanding that Heidegger and Vattimo’s analysis of Being/beings is historically conditioned, there is a need to develop a hermeneutics that seeks to abandon the reliance on authoritative interpretations of the given. It is worth noting the Heideggerian reading of Being/being in this sense: “Being comes about and is concealed in the effective historical aperture, the paradigm. Think it that way and you open yourself to Being as different from beings, Being that “anarchically” suspends the claim to definitiveness of the aperture.”

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957 Ibid., 32.
Aristotle and Aquinas offer period-specific declarations of Being. The Thomistic conceptualization of God, in which Aquinas wrote that the Divine was the *causa sui*, fitting the monastic and medieval sense of order and structure, is one that Christianity has been saddled with for centuries. The proposal offered by Vattimo is to accept the endless alterations of Being philosophy invites (or should invite). In the case of theology, metaphysical constructs of Being have become philosophical absolutes, making it impossible to see beyond the language to the given possibility that exists before me. Working to overcome the limitations of metaphysics is central to any ‘return’ to religion. Without proposing a phenomenological view, Vattimo invites his readers to consider a discourse that applies *pensiero debole*. In this form, there is no absence or dismissal of thought; rather, there is a reconsideration of the ideas stipulated by those in authority. By overcoming authority, metaphysics, etc., Vattimo suggests hermeneutical nihilism replace *forte debole*. Emphasis is then granted to *kenosis*, the self-abasement or Incarnation of God.

6. Kenosis and Weakening

If Vattimo’s philosophy of *pensiero debole* and nihilism is accepted, the theological discourse of *Ereignis* has the freedom to flourish, insofar as the restraints of foundationalism are lifted. Western philosophy, especially, should be free of the encumbering theology administered by Roman-influenced Christianity. This is a presentation found especially in Vattimo’s *After Christianity* (2002) and his earlier text, *The Adventure of Difference* (1993). The concern in both is the relationship between a philosophical system that relies on absolutes, cause and effect relationships, etc., to dictate the essence of something. Accepting Nietzsche’s philosophy as the culmination of metaphysics permits Vattimo (and Heidegger) the platform from which to introduce
a philosophy that dismisses Being as maintaining substance similar to other beings. This moves beyond the notion of Being as an object to something more, existing “as horizon and as light,” void of the stability metaphysics grants to other objects. This echoes Heidegger’s argument that “Being gives itself, again and again, in its occurrence.” The event allows Vattimo to connect his views on weak thought, and the self-abasing act by the Divine (i.e., becoming a human-being). Ultimately, humanity remains separate from Being.

The weakening of Being offers only “one possible meaning…of the Christian message, through the radical reading of incarnation as kenosis.” The emphasis of kenosis is described as a literal weakening of the Divine: God opts to take on the inferior human form in order to convey a particular message or interpretation of (religious) law. On this point, Frederiek Depoortere writes of Vattimo,

The Incarnation implies the end of an almighty, absolute, eternal God and thus the weakening of God. The God of Christianity is not the violent God of natural religiosity, and just as little the God of metaphysics who, as almighty and omniscient cause of all that is, is still in keeping with the God of the natural religions. Consequently, the end of metaphysics enables us to finally leave that violent God behind. In this way, we can finally discover the true Christian God and realize the goal of Jesus’s teaching, namely the dismantling of the violence of the sacred. The incarnation is God’s self-abasement, a humiliation of the Divine as traditionally understood.

Philippians 2:7 and John 15:15 demonstrate this kenotic weakness. While Philippians articulates the emptying into a powerless human body, John’s passage expresses Jesus’s call for humanity to be friends with—as opposed to servants to—the Divine. If God remains hierarchical, existing in a

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958 “Heidegger, of course, holds that metaphysics is that history at the end of which nothing is left of Being as such, or in which Being is forgotten in favour [sic] of being ordered in a system of causes and effects, of fully unfolded and enunciated reasons. When the forgetting of Being is complete and total, metaphysics is at once finished and totally realized in its deepest tendency,” in Vattimo, The Adventure of Difference: Philosophy after Nietzsche and Heidegger, 85. It must be added that Vattimo suggests that Heidegger often relies too much on ontology in order to make his philosophical arguments. See ibid., 86-8.
959 Vattimo, After Christianity, 21.
960 Vattimo, The Adventure of Difference: Philosophy after Nietzsche and Heidegger, 123.
961 Vattimo, After Christianity, 80.
transcendental state above humanity or as an analogous military commander over humanity, this deconstruction of God’s self-abasement seems pointless. The dissolution of metaphysics takes the place of the absent-transcendental in this (self-)degrading act.

*Kenosis* also represents the model in which doors can be opened for ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. Without religious superiority (or denominational superiority), the conversation between traditions can more easily take place. History has demonstrated the likelihood of religious superiority, led especially by Christian missionaries and others in authority.963 The myth of religion, addressed in Georges De Schrijver’s essay, “Christian Faith in the Postmodern Context,”964 was thought of in two distinct ways. Those myths that fit the Christian narrative have been accepted without hesitation. The myth stories of Moses upon Mt. Sinai within the all-encompassing cloud, Jacob’s ladder, the Transfiguration of Jesus, and Jesus’s passion, death upon the cross, and Resurrection are accepted as absolute truths. There are those Christian-myths that have not been accepted and in fact authorities have rejected (for example, the Gospels of Thomas or the Gospel of Peter). When discussing the history of non-Christian traditions, for example, Hinduism, authorities have long questioned the validity of other sacred texts. For example, the Vedas or the Bhagavad Gita and the stories of the Vedic gods and other Hindu deities, have been historically rejected as irrational. The traditionalist reading (or, more appropriately, the religious superiority reading) presented Christianity as the true faith tradition because its *mythos* surrounding Christ centered on Christ as the universal being portrayed via the particular. The Hindu *mythos*, on the other hand, addresses a polytheistic view of the universal (or Absolute). Vattimo’s description of *kenosis* and the dissolution of foundationalism provides a space in which

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964 Schrijver, in *Naming and Thinking God in Europe Today: Theology in Global Dialogue*. 

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interreligious dialogue is possible. The secularized public square makes such an arena available to the participants, so long as each enters the public square ready to respond charitably and act openly to others, no matter their convictions, sexuality, or race.

The description of *kenosis* introduced by Vattimo acts as a universal event for all, not just Christians. Citing a reference from Paul’s Letter to the Hebrews, “in multifarious and many ways God has spoken to our fathers through the prophets until he recently spoke to us through his son” (Hebrews 1:1-4), Vattimo demonstrates the universal accessibility for all people. This reading of Vattimo suggests that Christ was made available to a wide variety of people, in a wide variety of forms. It is an approach to hermeneutics that serves as a better alternative to the Aristotelean hierarchy (*logos*, or logical reasoning, over the *mythos*) adopted over the centuries by Christian traditions. One should remember that the hierarchical thought process has no room in Vattimo’s ‘weak thought,’ a component of his secularized form of Christianity espoused here. The religious myths of a given culture (i.e., religious tradition), should be accepted without reservation. Nevertheless, history has shown that religious superiority has also been met with violence, a violence that can be connected to metaphysics.

### 7. Violence and Metaphysics

By approaching theology in a such a way as to question its relationship to other cultures and traditions as well as the role of metaphysics as a formative philosophy, Vattimo is able to position the pseudo-science as a harmful practice in Christianity and in the Catholic Church. This harmful presence, he goes on to state, has a direct link to the historical and present violence humanity witnesses, in large part due to the absolutist ideology that accompanies it. Such

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965 Ibid., 324.
violence can be evident in Christianity’s traditional approaches to things of cultural controversy, including one’s sexual identity in light of the Church’s stance on natural law.

Metaphysical violence is, generally, all identification between law and nature, which has dominated the traditional teaching of the Church. The command to love one’s neighbor, above all one’s enemy, appears so barely reasonable as to require metaphysical grounding in the more natural feeling of fraternal love, of love of one’s own—those who are bound to us by virtue of birth. Any such metaphysics which limits or deemphasizes charity towards the other leads to structures of power, including authoritarian systems within the Church itself. As a result, authoritative bodies develop an attitude in which it asserts its function as the interpretative body of theology and more importantly, Revelation.

Metaphysics as a form of violence is a topic Vattimo returns to frequently in his work, including in his conversation with contemporary philosophers like the late René Girard. In Christianity, Truth, and Weakening Faith, Vattimo underscores authoritarianism and violence related to problems with Christian metaphysics. Vattimo acknowledges Girard’s portrayal of Christianity as a tradition that has dispensed with the sacrificial aspects primitive or myth-based traditions relied upon for their religious authority. Vattimo does not, however, dismiss the notion that violence finds a home in a metaphysically-focused Christianity. What is clear in the exchange with Girard is the importance of (1) the Incarnation and (2) the adherence to a form of Christianity that perpetuates an interpretation of Christ’s victimization via theology. Vattimo approaches metaphysics as a system that demands belief in or adherence to a given ideology. In this case, a certain philosophy determined by an institution has maintained, after violence, its place in

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967 Ibid., 114. Vattimo offers an additional critique of Catholicism’s approach to natural law, writing, “Contemporary Catholic teaching is in line with this when it demands that the laws of the state must conform to the laws that the Church claims to be ‘natural,’” in ibid., 115.
968 Ibid., 117. Vattimo does note the inherited political and religious power the Church assumes, given the Roman system it existed within prior to its demise; see, ibid., 115-6.
969 Gianni Vattimo and René Girard, Christianity, Truth, and Weakening Faith: A Dialogue, ed. Pierpaulo Antonello, trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). On several occasions, Vattimo notes his admiration and friendship with Girard, despite the philosophical differences the two have with one another.
society. The institution becomes authoritative and perpetuates metaphysical violence in its declarations, administration, etc. Throughout Christianity’s history, the institutions that govern the religious tradition have been authoritarian. Vattimo writes, “the origin of belief in God, in a substance, or in free will, or indeed in the imperative of truth, generally depends closely on violence and insecurity—this belief is rooted in the need to protect oneself in the struggle for life against the deceptions and self-deceptions emanating from the passions.” Once one recognizes the limitations and short-comings of metaphysics—and the institutions that accompany its role in society, Nietzsche suggests that “a new form of human existence” is possible, one that is equated with ‘the death of God.’ No longer does one succumb to the authority, but is free to discover God beyond such horizons. The death of God, the dissolution of the metaphysical God, opens the possibility to experience the given without becoming a victim of the ascribed metanarratives.

8. Significance of Vattimo’s Philosophical Theology for the Postmodern Faith

The existing metaphysical narratives are fractured. They have been exposed to new technologies, scientific discoveries, and religious practices thanks to globalization, immigration, and syncretism. These developments have prompted Vattimo to consider a theology of secularization accompanied by the end of metaphysics. His reconsideration of the role of metaphysics in contemporary, postmodern philosophy is rooted in the classical Greek concept of meta-, or beyond, meaning that its use in relation to the Church is one where knowledge refers to something that seems “much more valid than the one provided by scientific reason and also feels superior to it.” His philosophy confronts a society that requires a reasoned, logical thought...

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971 Girard, 46.
972 Vattimo, Nietzsche: An Introduction, 77.
973 Ibid., 78.
974 Vattimo, Of Reality: The Purpose of Philosophy.
process to develop a Christianity that fits within an emergent, secularized context; a context that is likewise deemed natural and expected. In turn, pensiero debole dissolves metaphysical dogmatism overcoming “fundamentalist superstitions” and the “disciplinary masks” of the juridical Church.  

Vattimo’s critique is addressed in his attempts to overcome traditional hermeneutics. He focuses on an overcoming that continues with the concerns relating to presence found in Heidegger and Nietzsche, while being mindful of the use of language in theological meta-narratives. As noted earlier, Santiago Zabala analyzes Vattimo’s overarching concerns regarding metaphysics and its theological appropriation. Specifically, Vattimo is concerned with how metaphysics relates to institutions and how such establishments enforce adherence to this philosophy. By emphasizing Christianity’s existence within Western European culture, Vattimo focuses on the secularized shift the faith finds itself within. His hermeneutical reading of the Church is unique, insofar as his idea of secularization is one that does not accept a complete dismissal of the religious, but a change in the way the Christian narrative responds to the world. This turn toward Nietzsche empowers Vattimo to question the given metaphysics as narrative, one that could be objectively viewed as a fable.  

As fable, it contains nothing more than subjective truths strung together in order to maintain a system accessible and coherent for its congregation. This radical critique of

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975 Vattimo, "The Trace of the Trace," in Religion, 82.  
977 As I noted in chapter one, Charles Taylor’s lengthy seminal piece, Taylor, A Secular Age. is worth reviewing on issues of secularism. See also Matthew Scherer’s reflection on Taylor’s Christian narrative critique, in Scherer, 37.  
metaphysics suggests the pseudo-science upon which theology has relied does nothing more than create “conflicts of interpretations,” ultimately resulting in rejection or worse, violence.979

The referred-to violence of metaphysics reaffirms whatever authoritarian body regulates the narrative, granting it the power to execute whatever stands in opposition to this form of traditionalism. Historically, we are aware of the contrast between science and religious authority emerging in Medieval Europe, a divide that highlighted growing secularism and modernity against traditionalism and religion.980 Medieval secularism versus the institutional Church ushered in the divide between traditionalism and modern science, one that addressed the reliance on metaphysics as the guiding philosophy. Objections to the traditionalism of the Church have historically been met with trepidation on the part of the Magisterium. On the one hand, we have seen responses that are extremely violent: the burning at the stake of those who at minimum questioned the narrative (e.g., Giordano Bruno in 1600, an individual who questioned the Virgin Mary and the divinity of Jesus). Modern objections have been met with a more reserved punishment: the institutional examination and sanctioning of theologians who dance along the margins of traditionalism (e.g., Elizabeth Johnson or Roger Haight). In Vattimo’s philosophy, metaphysics is replaced with “epistemology, method, logic, or even just the analysis of language,” in order that one might explore dense ideas.981 The transition away from metaphysics invites one to consider ‘God’ beyond the horizon of a limited pseudo-science that aims to assert only one interpretation decided by an authority.

979 Ibid., 222. Vattimo writes in Of Reality, “Once metaphysical beliefs are weakened, there is no longer anything that limits the conflictual nature of existence, the struggle between weak and strong for a supremacy no longer legitimated by anything (Grund, natural or divine laws, and so on), but by the mere fact of imposing itself; or it could occur in the sense that seems decisive for Nietzsche (and for the problem of metaphysics in general), whereby the weakening of metaphysical beliefs not only uncovers the violence of existence for what it is and makes it no longer possible, but is born already as the result of an outburst of violence,” in Vattimo, Of Reality: The Purpose of Philosophy, 125.
981 Vattimo, Of Reality: The Purpose of Philosophy, 121.
The rejection of absolutes found in metaphysics and their corresponding authoritative bodies yields a Christianity that seeks to re-encounter postmodernity, providing an opening in which a plurality of ideas relating to the divine can be explored. In his specific consideration of Christianity, Vattimo promotes a so-called “transfiguration of religion,” which takes place only when the traditional forms of authority are overcome, especially in light of the various socio-cultural and narrative shifts in the twenty-first century.\textsuperscript{982} This transfiguration of religion is a natural progression of the faith. This resuscitation of religion is only possible when metaphysics is overcome and a connection between culture and a tradition is recognized.\textsuperscript{983} This is, accordingly, a natural progression of religion, one that opens the doors for a post-metaphysical community, which traverses the authority of an institutional Church.

In response to (1) metaphysics and (2) the retrieval of religion Vattimo’s thinking is that there is an opportunity for individuals to reengage a narrative and the possibility of religious experience(s) via conversations grounded in a dialogue situated between culture, language, philosophy, and theology. The kenotic God comes into view once Vattimo’s pensiero debole is employed, providing a basis from which dialogue between these categories takes place. The kenotic God is recognized as limitless, reaching beyond the horizon and limitations of metaphysics, only when and if there is an overcoming of metaphysics. The question of ‘Being’ is therefore freed of the confines of metaphysics as a pre-constituted source for understanding the divine. In this regard, Nietzsche’s idiom and Heidegger’s understanding of Verwindung are progressive attempts meant to explain the move beyond the ontological Being ascribed to in theology. In conjunction

\textsuperscript{982} Vattimo, \textit{After Christianity}, 83ff.
\textsuperscript{983} As noted previously, Vattimo reiterates his process of weakening and the dissolution of metaphysics in \textit{After Christianity}. Again, Vattimo is suggesting that a ‘return to religion’ is predicated on the dissolution of metaphysics, specifically those forms which are dogmatic or serve as various forms of fundamentalism. For example, ibid., 90.
with *kenosis*, Vattimo suggests that the only possibility of understanding ‘Being’ is to recognize it not as presence, but rather through recollection, “for Being cannot be defined as that which is but only as that which is passed on.” The reliance on metaphysics, though it strives to retrieve a tangible being, fails. God remains beyond the metaphysical hermeneutics to which we so easily turn. Vattimo encourages a *noetic* prehension, one that dismantles the authoritarian-truths of an institution that relies on the language-games of ontology. These language-games have become obsolete, insofar as they limit the potentiality and infiniteness of the divine.  

9. Charity

No longer subjects of the authoritarian metaphysics and the correlating violence, Vattimo suggests that an emphasis on charity should be the central tenet of Christianity.

Christianity is marching in a direction that can only be that of lightening and weakening its burden of dogma in favor of its practical and moral teaching. In that sense too, charity takes the place of truth…The future of Christianity, and of the Church, is to become an ever more refined religion of pure charity. Any such metaphysics that limits or deemphasizes charity towards the other leads to structures of power, including authoritarian systems within the Church itself. As a result, authoritative bodies develop an attitude in which they assert their function as the interpretative bodies of theology and more importantly, Revelation. The future of religion is that which precedes the dogmatic institutions, the various theological hermeneutics, and so forth. It is love. To quote Mario Aguilar, “This was an unexpected conclusion to a dialogue with Richard Rorty that has shocked some

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985 Ibid., 50.
987 Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 117. Vattimo does note the inherited political and religious power the Church assumes, given the Roman system it existed within prior to its demise (see, ibid., 115-6.).
European thinkers. Thus, philosophy as the ancillary tool of theology is no longer…a rational enterprise or apologetics, but an act of hermeneutical inscription of God’s love.”

And Vattimo is not alone in this Continental philosophy of Verwindung. As noted previously, we see similar attributes in Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Marion. In the subjective ethics of Levinas, the cardinal virtue of caritas is underscored—and by cardinal, I imply two meanings here. First, as the theological virtue within several religious traditions, notably Judaism and Christianity, and second, as evidence of the divine in the case of Marion’s interpretation of 1 John 4:8, “God is love.” As a central factor of Christianity, one that is derived for Vattimo in kenosis and articulated via Revelation for Marion, caritas is the one true aspect of Christianity that cannot be commandeered by metaphysics. The command to love and the recognition of the icon as love is derived from something beyond the limitations of a metaphysical horizon; indeed, its source can only be identified in the givenness of the thing itself (Marion) or the subjectivity of the individual who recognizes the good in all others (Vattimo).

Reflecting on Vattimo’s suggestions in After Christianity, charity opens the possibility to other religious traditions and what contributions they offer society (specifically, an emerging secular society). Charity is not only found in Christianity. All major religious traditions maintain some form of charity. For many, it is a “requirement,” relating to Vattimo’s understanding of deeds and ethics. Ultimately, Vattimo contends that charity is the only thing that matters: “Christian thought discovers that charity is the only thing that really matters. Indeed, charity is the only limit and criterion of the spiritual interpretation of Scripture.”

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989 Vattimo, After Christianity, 47-8.
991 Vattimo, After Christianity, 51.
10. Conclusion

This chapter echoes much of what I have presented in the previous chapters. Vattimo’s postmodern ideas seek to go beyond the comfort of metaphysics. Much like Marion’s phenomenology, this is a direct challenge to the traditionalism espoused in the Church. It goes without saying that the Church has long preferred a faith grounded in metaphysics, and not a theology that diminishes personal concepts of faith. Like Marion, Vattimo explores concepts of ‘God’ outside the realm of Being and metaphysics. He joins a growing chorus of philosophers who have begun exploring philosophical theology in the aftermath of Nietzsche’s “God is dead,” proclamation. Exploring the concept of ‘God’ in such a way offers an opportunity to engage theology intellectually, without a reliance on a system that introduces limitations from the start.

The sociological shifts that have taken place in the Catholic Church, especially within the last two decades, illustrate the overarching narrative shifts Vattimo and others are concerned with. Those who state a desire to ‘believe without belonging and/or believing in ‘something,’ demonstrate the desire and turn for something religious or spiritual. Exploring the global religious changes allows for the engagement with one of the shift’s causes: a distrust of the metaphysically-driven authority structures. Globally, the Roman Catholic Church faces a world in which its system of leadership and governance is challenged and may no longer be useful as is. The postmodern Church may have forgotten the tradition(s) found in the earlier churches: communities that explored new theological ideas. By turning towards a system that seeks to overcome metaphysics, deemphasizes the language of ‘Being,’ and recollects the importance and practices of charity, the institutional Church of the future may be better suited for the ever-changing reality of the twenty-first century—indeed, one that will require those exploring the revitalization of religion to interact with and share in a more pluralistic, secular society.
CONCLUSION

Preface

One of my first mentors in the field of theology and religious studies used to claim that writing tends to be a bit autobiographical. Perhaps this explains both my pursuit of a degree in theology and the questioning of metaphysics. I continue to question that which exists beyond and doing so requires the consideration of different philosophical arguments. Jean-Luc Marion and Gianni Vattimo have offered such an opportunity to explore theology through a new lens, aiding in my own self-pursuit of the Divine.

1. Introduction

Postmodernity’s encounter with metanarratives and metaphysics has been the subject of this dissertation. Following the focus granted to changes to the religious institutions and practices, as well as the socio-cultural shifts, I set out to define postmodernity and its relationship to both religion and the metanarratives. Noting the countless descriptions of postmodernity, two things were made clear. First, postmodernism maintains a general skepticism of given narratives (established by, for example, religious institutions). Second, there are various modes of questioning narratives, including the philosophical exercises expressed in this text. I have presented two of these, addressing the phenomenology offered by Jean-Luc Marion and the postmodern philosophy of Gianni Vattimo. Relying on their examination of art and the philosophy of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Husserl, Levinas, Gadamer, and others, as well as their personal association with Roman Catholicism, I have sought to present a convincing argument that their work, acknowledged as two separate ‘paths,’ invites a reconsideration of metaphysics and its role as the dominant philosophical tool of Catholic theology. In this way, they have contributed to the larger discussions on postmodern Catholicism.

The question of how one might define postmodernism was addressed in chapter one, noting the contributions of Christina Gschwandtner, Kevin Vanhoozer, and Jean-François Lyotard. Together, they illustrate the difficulty in clearly defining just what this social and historical term
implies. For one, postmodernism’s propensity to dismiss existing metanarratives is replaced by self-discovery and analysis on the part of individuals. Lieven Boeve’s question concerning the Christian metanarratives manifests from this: what is one to do with Christian (meta)narratives? One possibility, as noted previously, is an abandonment of these historical or classical narratives. They are often replaced with personalized approaches to faith. In this case, postmodernism would open the possibility of individuals accepting their own spirituality or own beliefs as valid. God, Yahweh, Allah, the Buddha, etc., would no longer fit within the confines of the provided narratives of institutions—albeit, diverse institutions among many of the aforementioned religious traditions—making a unified message or understanding of a tradition impossible.992 The Catholic Church has remained focused on its traditions of Thomistic theology and metaphysics. Questions of how postmodernism interacts with the institutional Church is of concern to this project and those to follow. Gerard Mannion has, for example, employed Lyotard, Tracy, Boeve, Peter Hodgson, Johann Baptist Metz, and Graham Ward to help identify a postmodernity adequate for the Church.993 Mannion then establishes the impact postmodernity has had on theology, concluding that postmodernism has itself created a niche, “postmodern theology.”

Thus has emerged the genre of ‘postmodern theology’ in its own right, with further subdivisions such as ‘theologies of communal practice,’ postmetaphysical theology, post-philosophical theology, ‘radical orthodoxy,’ deconstructive theology, reconstructive theology, restorationist theology, and various additional recent varieties of feminist theology.994 The difficulty associated with any one of these genres is identifying which is adequate for the conditions postmodernity sets forth; namely, a questioning of metanarratives and governing authorities. For the purposes of this project, I have focused primarily on the genre of postmetaphysical theology, identifying Marion and Vattimo as philosophers who invite their

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992 Imagine several variations of the Resurrection account or the Four Noble Truths and the havoc they would bring to institutions tasked with governing said tradition.
993 Mannion, Ecclesiology and Postmodernity: Questions for the Church in Our Time, esp. 4-12.
994 Ibid., 14.
readers to examine theology outside the confines of dogma and metaphysics. Addressing postmodernity in this regard also necessitates an acknowledgement of Friedrich Nietzsche’s statement, “God is dead.” As noted in previous chapters, this statement has served as a foundational piece in the examinations of postmodern philosophy and is central to postmodern theology.

Karen Armstrong’s, *A History of God*, addresses the shifts in late twentieth century theology, emphasizing the centrality of this phrase in postmodern thought. Armstrong outlines the impact this statement has had on both philosophy and the socio-cultural engagement with the institutional churches of Europe:

> Secularists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw atheism as the irreversible condition of humanity in the scientific age.

> There is much to support this view. In Europe, the churches are emptying; atheism is no longer the painfully acquired ideology of a few intellectual pioneers but a prevailing mood. In the past it was always produced by a particular idea of God, but now it seems to have lost its inbuilt relationship to theism and become an automatic response to the experience of living in a secularized society. Like the crowd of amused people surrounding Nietzsche’s madman, many are unmoved by the prospect of life without God. Others find his absence a positive relief.  

Though almost twenty-five years old, her text addresses many of the same things we see today: the threat of a nuclear winter, natural disasters, the rise of various diseases seemingly without cure, and the inevitable inability of our planet to support life within a generation or two. Likewise, Armstrong goes on to note many of the same trends I outlined in chapter one: people are leaving organized religion, there is a general turn towards an undefined spirituality, and yet there is a general curiosity about the historical traditions of religion and religious institutions. Modernity introduced the fact that many have moved on from a theology preserved by an authoritative body and its unique hermeneutics. Postmodernism has moved beyond the need to rely on the related and well-addressed topic of metaphysics. The looming threats notwithstanding, the concern here has

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been metaphysics. Its role in the Church as the governing philosophy has in fact limited theology. Metaphysics has come to rely on linguistic tools to make sense of the incomprehensible. Postmodern philosophy has also embraced the closely related “end of metaphysics.” The impact of the claim that God has died reverberates through postmodern Christianity and its related pop culture byproducts. 996

Moreover, the focus of this project has been centered on the Christian tradition and the Roman Catholic Church especially. The Church’s attachment to metaphysics, highlighted in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, and affirmed by Leo XIII, Pius X, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI, 997 demonstrates a reliance on Aristotelean ideas. As noted previously, Pascendi Dominini Gregis and Fides et Ratio are examples of the Church maintaining its stronghold on a theology reliant on metaphysics. This affirmation of metaphysics, and the related Thomistic theology, meant that several Church theologians were suppressed for their ‘radical’ thoughts. In contrast, the Church’s proposal of St. Thomas Aquinas and his work as the premiere theology was likewise proposed in Leo XIII’s Aeterni Patris (1879), has placed at the forefront an unwavering affection and adoption of Aquinas’ philosophy. This proposal, though never officially codified by the Church, led to Pius XI and Pius XII condemning alternative forms of theological thought, especially those embracing modernity’s Marxism and nouvelle théologie. Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI echoed the concerns regarding new systems of theological thought. John Paul II objected to those theologians which emphasized ontology, traditionalism, fideism, etc. Benedict XVI rejected those theologians interested in exploring the social sciences, while reasserting the importance of metaphysics as the underlining philosophy of Catholic theology. As prefect of the

996 Nietzsche’s statement has also been the subject of two recent Evangelical backed films addressing the phrase, though I do not claim to know its content or significance.
997 At this point, I argue that it is too early in Pope Francis’ reign to establish his relationship to metaphysics. Further examination of his encyclicals and other writings are required to make this assessment.
Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger’s *Dominus Iesus* reiterated suspicions of political theologies which challenged the *status quo*, maintaining suspicions the Church held against those who have sought to dialogue with other Christian denominations and non-Christian faiths. The favorability granted to metaphysics and Thomistic theology has resulted in the examination of those whom the Church finds suspicious, in large part because of their departure from traditional modes of theological discourse. The role of the Church as an authoritative body was referred to in the examples of George Tyrell, John Henry Newman, Hans Küng, Leonardo Boff, and Elizabeth A. Johnson, to name a few, have encountered the authority of the Magisterium because of their boundary-pushing theological ideas. I argued in chapter two that these teachings, encyclicals, oaths, etc., have contributed to a stymied theology, one that refuses to see beyond the limitations of metaphysics.

The historical place of metaphysics and the mantle upon which Roman Catholicism has placed this philosophy has been reiterated in both these pontificates and the respective Church documents. Related to these official documents the Church has published, I noted the concerns stemming from the Church’s role as an institution of authority. The role of the pontiff, the Magisterium as an institution dedicated to the oversight of the faith, and the apologists who have buttressed these arguments support my claim that metaphysics maintains a preferred seat at the hyperbolic table. My overall concern with metaphysics demonstrates the challenges posed to any progressive thinking of theology—and here I include both Marion’s and Vattimo’s philosophy, respectively. Disagreements with the Church regarding its infusion of metaphysics into its theology, and the relating dogmatism associated with it, dates back to Francis Bacon and René Descartes. Their seventeenth century examination of metaphysics as it relates to theology would
eventually lay the groundwork for those philosophers who choose to respond to the concerns of metaphysics.

Subsequently, concerns regarding language and philosophy were addressed in chapter two. The difficulty Marion and Vattimo have in their attempts to overcome metaphysics, is the necessity to employ language in an effort to dissolve the metaphysical concepts of God addressed previously. Their reliance on language is obvious; it is a necessity to convey theology, no matter if one is using philosophy to do so. Both argue that language lacks the ability to discuss something beyond conceptualization, beyond the very thing metaphysics tries to defend (the existence of God).

Heidegger and Janicaud observe that this metaphysical reliance on language has done harm to postmodernity in its aim to overcome traditional methods of philosophy, story-telling, history, etc. Language, while responsible for uniting peoples culturally and providing a platform for societies to establish their distinctiveness, maintains its own limitations when engaged with dense theological concepts. The tendency of language can lead an audience astray, encouraging a return to an authoritative body to interpret the subject at hand. The repeated reference to the elephant is helpful once again: the encounter with the massive creature is defined by our language systems. Without ever seeing the creature, one would define it based on either (1) terms familiar to the subject or (2) deference to an authoritative body who names it, asserting that this in fact can be the only name. This is not unlike a child’s development: encountering a creature for the first time provides the child an opportunity to process and linguistically define the animal on his/her own. Most likely, however, a child defers to a trusted adult (a parent, grandparent, or teacher) to give them a definition, thereby limiting the experience to a one word answer or short phrase. The language used to describe the Divine is not unlike this analogy. The boundaries language establishes are problematic for philosophy. Even in this analogy there is a demonstration of
metaphysical limitations. Theological language cannot begin to express the infinite and attempts to do so are only done via poor analogies or another linguistic exercise.

In summary, seeking to move beyond the metaphysical narratives that have dominated philosophy and theology in postmodernity, has been the central thesis of this project. Addressing metanarratives, issues of language, the notion of secularism, postmodernity itself, and the role of the institutional Catholic Church were offered as introductory and foundational material for this project in the first two chapters. These chapters help address the challenges to postmodern philosophy, including the Church’s reaction to those philosophical and theological ideas which aim to propose different ways of teaching about the Divine. The historical use of metaphysics and its connections to God have been attributed to Aristotle and his Christian interpreters (e.g., Aquinas, Bonaventure, Suarez, and others). As noted in chapter two, the Catholic Church maintains a certain affection for metaphysics and the related Thomistic philosophy. These theological pieces focus especially on the notion of being and a connection to God. This has limited theology and its task of exploring revelation by subjecting it to the rules of metaphysics. This project, of course, aims to challenge that norm. After considering the influence of Husserl, Heidegger, and Levinas, this project then turned to the phenomenology of Jean-Luc Marion. As I discussed in the chapters on Marion and Vattimo, this “being” language is insufficient. It lacks the ability to adequately convey the infinite, the Divine, or Marion’s crossed-out $\emptyset$. 

2. Jean-Luc Marion

Jean-Luc Marion, as noted, remains a devout Roman Catholic, acknowledging the role of the bishops as theologians in God Without Being. His devotion to Catholic theology has been further established in his more recent book, Believing in Order to See. In the latter text, he notes the significance of the clergy as ordained ministers while simultaneously critiquing the laity for
lacking belief; the importance of baptism, its connection between clergy and laity, and the role of the bishop in the administration of the sacrament; and a critique of the French laity who appear historically feeble, despite claims of intellectualism, compared to the bishops and their respective conferences. There is no doubt in my opinion that Marion would side with the Magisterium and her bishops on issues relating to doctrine within the Church including and especially social issues in France. However, his phenomenological texts, addressed in chapter three, point to the possibility of doctrine being reframed to discuss dense theological issues without the need for metaphysics.

As noted in chapter three, such examples can be found in Marion’s understanding of being/Being and the Heideggerian turn from metaphysics. God is not tied to the commonly adhered to being motif. Moving beyond the *causa sui*, *ens*, or being par excellence presentations offered in Aquinas’ theology permits Marion to offer a phenomenological view of the Divine which is not grounded in proofs or subjected to systems of language, but one that is grounded in love (1 John 4:8). Gõd, accordingly, overwhelms one’s intuition, unable to be conceptualized as either an idol or a common phenomenon. Gõd, in Marion’s writing, is the literary figure upon the Cross at Golgotha, prostituting himself in a way that is intended to shock. The beaten man reiterates the need to see beyond the metaphysical definition of a supreme being and witness the event of Gõd as itself. The givenness of the event is intended to saturate our intuition, leaving us bewildered and traumatized by what Revelation asks us to consider. And this final event exposes itself only after encountering Divine saturation at the Baptism of Jesus and the Transfiguration, later repeating Gõd’s saturation in the Resurrection accounts. As noted, these are events in which God

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999 Ibid., 56-65.
1000 Ibid., 68-9, especially.
chose to participate with humanity, events that do not present God as a reticent celestial character, but as a gift intended to convey both an intuition flooding experience of the Divine and a saturated gift that ultimately remains impalpable, outside any method of metaphysics.

Temporarily putting aside Marion’s endearment for the bishops of the Catholic Church, the theological discourse he offers invites the faithful to consider a theology void of the metaphysical absolutes. It is a theology which offers an invitation to consider God-talk, if you will, phenomenologically. The focus is not on the finite definitions Thomism offers but one that grounds itself in (1) the language of the Other, (2) the language of saturation, and (3) the language of caritas. Neither is in and of itself complete or sufficient. Together, however, Marion’s work invites a consideration of God and the self-abasement event articulated in Scripture as a valid alternative to the limited concepts metaphysics offers.

3. Gianni Vattimo

Gianni Vattimo understands the postmodern age to be one that embraces Nietzsche’s belief that truth has diminished. Vattimo reflects on the claim that the world has become nothing more than a fable.\(^{1001}\) He underscores Nietzsche’s ‘death of God’ and Heidegger’s historical end of metaphysics at the outset of After Christianity:

Let me stress that the Nietzschean doctrine has only the character of an announcement: Nietzsche is not putting forward an atheistic metaphysics, which would imply the claim to describe reality correctly as something from which God is excluded. This claim, like the claim advanced by the faith in the truth discussed in The Gay Science, would still entail a form of faith in the moral God as the founder and guarantor of the objective world order. Only if we keep this in mind can we recognize the analogy, or close continuity, between the Nietzschean doctrine of the death of God and the end of metaphysics of which Heidegger speaks...Like the death of God, the end of metaphysics is an event that cannot be ascertained objectively, one to which thought is called to respond.\(^{1002}\)


\(^{1002}\) Vattimo, After Christianity, 13.
This sets the stage for Vattimo’s appropriation of nihilism addressed throughout his work. His depiction of nihilism is relevant in his discussions of metaphysics and being, adopting Heidegger’s dissolution of both in favor of a philosophy grounded in weak thought and Being as Event. Nihilism is a hermeneutics, a philosophy of interpretation, which does not rely on an authority to dictate what is given in the spiritual encounter or the reading of scripture. Christianity’s roots, he will go on to explain, is one where nihilism thrives via the weakening of principles typically considered significant and foundational. The death of God also presents an opportunity, at least philosophically, to view Christianity through a secular lens, no longer grounded in dogma. Witnessing Being as event, overcoming metaphysics, and focusing on kenosis provides a platform for Vattimo’s nihilism and an interpretation of Christianity which is ultimately secular and solidified in its commitment to the virtue of charity.\(^{1003}\)

Again, the emphasis of this project has been centered on the place of metaphysics as the central philosophical system in which theology operates. Vattimo’s non-metaphysical approach emphasizes a transitional faith, introduces a philosophy which seeks a balance between Armstrong’s presentation of a society of atheists and one that at minimum acknowledges the historical development of faith institutions, theological and philosophical thought, and outlines his Euro-centric thoughts on Continental politics. Combined, Vattimo offers a consideration of Christianity, which accentuates the growing influence of secularization in the West.

Of subsequent importance is the relationship between Nietzsche’s ‘death of God’ and Heidegger’s end of metaphysics. The two are drawn together in a philosophy which dismantles the traditional and authoritarian readings of theology.\(^{1004}\) Heidegger’s approach to the end of metaphysics is, accordingly, an understanding of Being as event (Ereignis). Vattimo’s ensuing

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\(^{1003}\) Engel, 472.

\(^{1004}\) For example, Vattimo, “Toward a Nonreligious Christianity,” in After the Death of God, 43.
theological examination of Christ’s *kenosis* is directly linked with the notion of event insofar as the *kenotic* God is presented as the event—God as man in ancient Galilee and Judea. To be clear, these are departures from the Christian metaphysical tradition. Christianity has historically preferred a metaphysical interpretation which demands the faithful adhere to certain attributes grounded in being-language, relating being to human beings while also maintaining a certain portrayal of God incarnate.\footnote{We are accustomed to masculine language of God and, according to Vattimo, have taken this to the leadership of the institutional Church, maintaining a male-only sacristy. The Church “still appeals to the literal interpretation of Scripture. In certain cases, this is so obvious as to appear in all its absurdity: consider the interdiction of women’s ordination, which is justified only by the fact that Jesus chose men as his apostles…literalism is based on specific links with a historically determined culture falsely assumed to be ‘nature,’” in Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 46-7.} Vattimo’s examination of Christianity through the lens of an event—the Incarnation—or through the givenness of what presents itself (via history and Revelation), emphasizes the shift from a construct of Christianity that is dependent upon one interpretation of itself versus the myriad possibilities a postmodern and more-secular version can offer. This too is a shift from the established hermeneutics common to Christian theology. Vattimo challenges the Roman Catholic Church’s authority as an interpretative body of postmodern theology. Lastly, the emphasis given to the principle of *caritas* is presented as an important part of Christianity. He will go on to argue that this is an important aspect of Christian life and it is grounded in the history and culture of Europe.

There is without question an acknowledgment of the Roman Catholic Church as a social and historical institution in Vattimo’s work. Whereas Marion has expressed his admiration and respect for those who govern the Church—most significantly, the aforementioned reverence granted to its bishops—Vattimo is more critical. As noted in the previous chapter, Vattimo is critical of the doctrinal institution and its policies relating to human sexuality, the use of contraceptives, its arguments relating to divorcees in the Church, to name a few.\footnote{See Zabala, in *The Future of Religion*, 16.} The departure
from the Church and its doctrine on certain issues poses questions related to the notion of a ‘return’ to religion as well as the role of the Church in a secular setting. The nihilism associated with Vattimo’s interpretation of Christianity implies a re-examination of the institutional Roman Catholic Church. Vattimo’s proposal is a system which embraces postmodernism, questions the role of authority and absolutism, and replaces it with a theology of ‘weakness.’

4. The Significance of Marion and Vattimo

Marion’s abstruse language, which requires both time and patience to sift through, seeks to offer an alternative to Christian theology, via phenomenology, that encourages a discovery of the given without recourse to the metaphysics of the Church and her philosophers. Marion’s ideas have resulted in many variations and responses to his critics, including Dominique Janicaud and Emmanuel Falque. Marion’s interpreters and contemporaries, including Christina Gschwandtner, Robyn Horner, and Tamsin Jones have provided resources to begin to parse through the complexities of his thought. Marion invites his readers to consider a theology which emphasizes the givenness of the thing itself. Revelation is to be received not through a dogmatic or authoritative lens, but as an intuition-flooding encounter. As a saturated phenomenon, revelation affords the receiver an opportunity to experience the Divine without an interpretative body or institution assigning definition to something that remains infinite and therefore undefinable. This approach is, I suggest, what sets Marion apart from the theologians who remain grounded in metaphysics.

Vattimo’s texts, especially those which focus on the Catholic Church and its theology, remain far more accessible. His congenial approach is a combination of both autobiography and philosophical analysis. What impresses most is Vattimo’s ability to engage theological ideas beyond the metaphysical tradition via a straight forward approach. His appropriation of pensiero
Jean-Luc Marion and Gianni Vattimo’s Contributions for the Postmodern Faith

debole encourages his readers to explore revelation in the postmodern tradition, that is, without the rigidity of metaphysical rules. His work invites the reader to consider the Divine not as something presented by the Magisterium and its doctrine, but as the outcome of an interpretation by the interpreter alone.

These are two pathways which invite a Continental and philosophical way forward for Christianity. Both invite a reexamination of the metaphysical systems the faith has relied on to express its theology. What distinguishes these two pathways is the relationship each holds with the Roman Catholic Church as an institution. What unites both of their thinking is the emphasis granted to charity. The portrayal of God as love as addressed in 1 John 4:8 permits Marion the opportunity to refocus the Christian discourse on the ethical treatment of the other. It is an observation of God as an encounter of the infinite and the intangible. It permits Marion to write, “No exegesis, no philological fact, no objective inquiry could accomplish or justify this step; only a theological decision could do so and retrospectively rely on literary arguments.”

Likewise, the self-abasement of God in Vattimo’s theology encourages Christianity to refocus the tradition on the event of the Divine becoming human; literally, humiliating God as a man from Nazareth. As noted previously, Vattimo emphasizes the kenotic weakness of God found in Philippians 2:7 and John 15:15. The two passages point to the (self-)degrading act of God, the emptying of the Divine into human form, and the invitation for other humans to interact with the Divine. This interaction is a sign of Divine love, expressed in the most extraordinary of ways; God chose to become human. Accordingly, Vattimo argues that the kenotic expression and the

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1007 Marion, God without Being: Hors-Texte, 174.
centrality of charity is what best defines postmodern Christianity, especially as it confronts secularism and its notable status in the West.

Both Marion and Vattimo offer displays of charity, which present a Christianity that seeks to move beyond hermeneutics beholden to an authority. Each ‘pathway,’ so to speak, invites an engagement that is not dependent on the metaphysical, proof-based theologies maintained by the historical figures noted previously. The question of whether charity is enough to sustain the Christian tradition remains to be seen. Furthermore, whether one adopts Marion’s phenomenological view of theology or Vattimo’s nihilism and weakening form, the challenges posed to postmodern theology remain the same. As noted in chapter two, there are strong opinions among contemporary theologians and philosophers as to whether metaphysics can in fact be overcome. These same scholars question why overcoming metaphysics in the first place is a worthwhile endeavor. To both, I answer that Marion and Vattimo invite debate and creativity, a characteristic found among the earliest of theologians (including the patristics and mystics Marion and Vattimo address).

Acknowledging both McCaffery’s idea of a return to religion and the evolving trends of secularism in Europe and the Americas, I suggest Marion and Vattimo are among the many voices available to postmodern theologians. They nevertheless face challenges. There are challenges found in postmodernism and the way individuals interpret theology: challenges by their contemporaries, several of which have been mentioned in this project; challenges by fundamentalist theologians and bishops; and challenges by Roman Catholicism and its Magisterium. We have already acknowledged the main crisis faced by those theologians who may engage their work: namely, the attention given to overcoming metaphysics. Secondly, this project

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1008 For example, Mannion offers six challenges in postmodernity, several of which Marion and Vattimo address in their respective texts. See, Mannion, *Ecclesiology and Postmodernity: Questions for the Church in Our Time*, 17-23.
has noted the tendency of Vattimo, especially, to push the boundaries of social issues, especially those related to human sexuality and natural law. And third, I noted the rejection by other philosophers who have sought to dismiss Marion’s work because of his propensity to engage phenomenology in ways they argue disagree with Edmund Husserl.

I remain convinced, however, that both Marion and Vattimo continue to evoke new conversations in various areas of postmodern theology. Their work has contributed to postmodern faith insofar as they invite us to move beyond the limitations of an authority and metaphysics. They offer their own pathways for a renewed interest in religion, flirting with traditional interpretations of scripture, challenging linguistic analyses of revelation, and scrutinizing the Catholic Church’s affection for metaphysics.

5. Summary Thoughts

I opened this project by noting the redevelopment of an old Roman Catholic Church in the city of Pittsburgh, the reinvention of sacred spaces in Europe, as well as the late secular changes in Ireland. Postmodernity, secularism, and globalization, to name a few, have certainly taken its toll on once proud, thriving Catholic communities in the Western hemisphere. Postmodernity’s suspicion of metanarrative and secularism’s impact on Christian Europe have significantly impacted church attendance, questioned institutional aphorisms on social issues, and introduced religious syncretism in some cases. These have surely reshaped peoples’ opinion of institutional religious traditions. The result has led to various expressions of individual spirituality or religious belief, frequently held without connection to a larger community (e.g., the Catholic Church). Nevertheless, as noted by McCaffery, Davie, and Boeve, the questions relating to religion have resurfaced as expressions of identity for some and as an academic subject or philosophical intrigue
for others. This project has been primarily concerned with religion as an academic subject, aware of the personal connection many profess.

The question becomes, is there a space in which phenomenology and philosophy can find its way into the pews? Doing so would require a dedicated re-education of people, running the risk of establishing Marion’s phenomenology or Vattimo’s nihilism and pensiero debole as its own authority. Establishing either as an authority, as a way of speaking about the Divine, is something both authors reject. Phenomenology, in other words, runs the risk of becoming an authority, an idea Janicaud likewise refutes. Adopting Vattimo’s pensiero debole for theology has Guarino likewise questioning its role as a definitive way of exploring revelation. In short, granting authority to one or the other jeopardizes their projects altogether. Marion and Vattimo set out to question theology’s reliance on metaphysics, not to establish their own systems of thought as valid authoritative bodies. Acknowledging the limitations metaphysics offers theological discourse provides an opportunity for new exploration. Examining their mutual interest in Nietzsche and Heidegger, along with Marion’s analysis of Husserl and Levinas, offers postmodernity a chance to engage theology beyond the limiting language systems metaphysics offers.

Next, I remain interested in Marion and Vattimo’s turn to caritas as a central principle of their work. The focus on charity offers an access point, a way into their thoughts, for philosophical novices (myself included!). This is where the Church can likewise turn her attention. If there is no return to the pews or to the Catholic institutions in parts of the Western hemisphere, emphasizing the role of charity should be the focal point for those who remain. Certainly, we can point to Pope Francis’ young pontificate to see a Church whose mission no longer emphasizes proselytism, but one whose task is to emphasize mercy. This point has been expressed extensively
by Cardinal Kasper. The systematized and authoritative narrations of God—wherein the Church determines the how and what persons should believe—is exactly what this turn toward mercy seeks to avoid. Certainly, as with Marion and Vattimo, there is an acknowledgement of what makes a faith tradition Christian versus something else. What is avoided in the pathways offered in this project, however, is the strict adherence to a description of the Divine grounded in the language of being. Instead, Marion and Vattimo invite us to reconsider the Divine through our own encounter, turning to the givenness of God, and observing the Divine amongst our neighbors.

If the Church is to connect with any Millennial or post-Millennial group in a meaningful way, I suggest it may only be done in two ways. The first is to emphasize the role of charity as a central principle. It is clear to me, based on conversations with students over the past thirteen years of teaching, that students have a genuine concern for those who suffer. They are concerned with those in their hometowns and those thousands of miles away. My students may not always understand the complexities of a suffering community, but their empathy and desire to learn how they might be able to help is encouraging. The Church should build on this and work to support organizations like the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, Augustinian Volunteers, and other local ministries whose mission underscores the core virtues of mercy and charity. Secondly, there must be an emphasis granted to education in this regard, specifically in Catholic colleges and universities. Our students should be challenged to think beyond the horizon of the given metanarratives to those philosophers who push the limits of theology. New conversations of theology have the potential to emerge from exposure to the works of theology on the fringes, including the introduction of phenomenology and post-metaphysical projects such as those offered in this project. I am not foolish enough to think, however, that this is for everyone. Nor am I foolish enough to believe

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that it is an easy subject to teach. Nevertheless, adequate exposure to phenomenology and philosophy, insofar as it relates to theology, should be a project undertaken in an era of unprecedented access to education. Our students should not accept claims of absolutism when it comes to a theology of the Divine. Instead, we should encourage imagination and philosophical exploration on this subject, one that should not refer to proof texts or metaphysics. Acknowledging the problems associated with systems of authority and metanarratives, as Lyotard did, grants permission for exactly this: individuals have an opportunity to return to religion not as a subject of metaphysics, but as fellow explorers. Catholicism especially should work to emphasize its role as a religious community that celebrates the Divine in often beautiful forms, while seeking to express itself as a disciple of God. More specifically, the Church must emphasize itself as an apostle of Love—that is, God (I John 4:8)—and a disciple of the self-abasing, kenotic God of Philippians 2:7.

The title of this project was initially written as a guiding question: how might Jean-Luc Marion and Gianni Vattimo contribute to the postmodern faith? I have sought to explore the complexities of their postmodern masterpieces but much work remains to be done. I find myself among the many individuals in the ‘English speaking world’ eager to add their voice and opinion on Marion’s work in Catholic theology. Robyn Horner, Christina Gschwandtner, Tamsin Jones, Rosa Maria Lupo, and Andrew Staron are among the many voices who have emerged as scholars familiar with Marion’s collective works. Thomas Guarino, Marion Aguilar, Santiago Zabala, and Frederick Depoortere are among the emerging English-speaking scholars who explore Vattimo’s pensiero debole and theology. Each have offered their own contributions to this postmetaphysical dialogue. This project has sought to expand on their work, addressing the interconnected concerns of metaphysics as the guiding philosophy of theological discourse. If there truly is a McCaffery-
style return of religion in France, or elsewhere in the West, an emphasis on the role of metaphysics must be of concern. Future conversations in Marion and Vattimo studies, either independent or joint studies, will likely emphasize the role of metaphysics as a concern of postmodernism and its related philosophical studies.
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