Contributions to Hermeneutics 7

Jean-Luc Marion
Christiaan Jacobs-Vandegeer *Editors*

The Enigma of Divine Revelation

Between Phenomenology and Comparative Theology

Springer

Contributions to Hermeneutics

Volume 7

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Jean-Luc Marion • Christiaan Jacobs-Vandegeer
Editors

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Between Phenomenology and Comparative Theology

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Chapter 1
Introduction: Intersections of Revelation and Hermeneutics

Christiaan Jacobs-Vandegeer

Abstract This introductory chapter begins by contextualizing the volume with reference both to post-conciliar shifts in understanding divine revelation as God's self-communication in Christ, and to tensions surrounding the Papacy of Francis and his affirmation of creativity in ecclesial renewal. The chapter explains the overarching theme to which the authors respond – namely, the intersection of revelation and hermeneutics – and proposes that, taken as a whole, the essays illustrate a dynamic movement in contemporary discourse on revelation. That movement begins with the problem of historically mediated transcendence and proceeds to reflection on the transformative power of this complex area of speech. The second part of this introductory chapter includes brief descriptions of each of the essays.

Keywords Phenomenology · Hermeneutics · Revelation · Vatican II · Pope Francis

1.1 Setting the Scene

"Catholicism can and must change, Francis forcefully tells Italian church gathering." So the title of the article in the *National Catholic Reporter* read after Pope Francis addressed the participants of the 5th convention of the Italian Church on 10th November 2015. The title captures something important about the time of Francis and the ongoing tensions of the post-Conciliar Church about how to live and teach the Catholic faith. In fact, Francis rarely prevaricates on the question of how the church should understand the practice of its faithfulness, and despite the anxieties of his detractors over the integrity of revealed truth, he consistently encourages

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Catholics to embrace change, not deny or punish it. For Francis, pitting doctrinal faithfulness and pastoral innovation against each other betrays misshapen theological sensibilities. It poses a false problem. Addressing the Italian Church, he said:

> We are not living in an era of change but a change of era…Before the problems of the church it is not useful to search for solutions in conservatism or fundamentalism, in the restoration of obsolete conduct and forms that no longer have the capacity of being significant culturally…Christian doctrine is not a closed system incapable of generating questions, doubts, interrogatives -- but is alive, knows being unsettled, enlivened. It has a face that is not rigid, it has a body that moves and grows, it has a soft flesh: it is called Jesus Christ (McElwee 2015).[1]

Francis's remarks illustrate a deepening shift. The Second Vatican Council broke dramatically with the manual tradition that preceded it by conceiving revelation in terms of the self-communication of God (see the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei verbum*). The Council upheld the permanence of dogma, arguably the main concern of the Council's critics (as well as Francis's), but significantly shifted the frame for understanding it. Rather than focusing on a set of clearly defined propositions, which regulate and inform Christian belief and practice, the Council placed revealed truth in the interpersonal context of faithful relation with Jesus. As Richard Gaillardetz suggests, with reference to *Dei verbum*, "The Church does not so much possess revelation as it is possessed by it; the church is called to live into divine truth" (2016, 75).

More than a conceptual move, this understanding of revelation marks a tremendous shift for Christian life and ecclesial culture. It contributes to what Pope John XXIII wanted the Council to do for the church – "to open the windows and let in the fresh air" – and keeps open the possibilities for renewal, as Francis attests. Where John XXIII, in his opening address of the Council, recognized the obligation of the church to communicate the substance of the faith according to changing circumstances, Francis speaks of doctrine itself as active and alive, "generating questions, doubts, interrogatives." His way of speaking implores Catholics not to adhere to theological postures (i.e., ways of being Catholic) that would stifle their responsiveness to the pressing pastoral needs of their communities. Christian doctrine has a pastoral orientation, he avers. Despite his critics' strong stance on continuity, he urges Catholics to recognize that being faithful entails creative activity.

Such concerns inform the background of this volume. Exactly how faithful creativity reconciles the gift of revelation and the activity of the church poses a significant theological problem in our cultural moment. The way theologians resolve this relation depends at least partly on their basic commitments regarding the nature

[1] The material here is cited from the NCR article. For the text of Francis's speech, see his *Meeting with the Participants in the Fifth Convention of the Italian Catholic Church: Address of the Holy Father*, accessed 18 Feb 2019: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco_20151110_firenze-convegno-chiesa-italiana.html. The material of this address informs his more recent Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate: On the Call to Holiness in Today's World*, see the Vatican website, accessed 18 Feb 2019: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20180319_gaudete-et-exsultate.html

of human understanding and the conditions of knowledge. These issues lie beneath both the endless contestations of the meaning of the Council as well as the controversies surrounding Francis.

1.2 The Volume

The contributors to this volume address the theme of *revelation and hermeneutics* at a foundational level. Rather than resolve cultural polemics, or reframe historical debates, they address the constructive interactions of the terms. Importantly, they explain these interactions according to the different forms of philosophical thinking they practice and the different traditions they engage: phenomenology, hermeneutics, post-phenomenological discourse, semiotics, and Islamic, Jewish, Christian and Hindu exegesis are all represented here. Against this variety of commitments, the authors consider a series of rather broadly constructed questions. How does revelation connect with hermeneutics? How does it inform or constrain hermeneutics and vice versa? What counts as revelation? Is that not already a hermeneutical choice? Though the array of approaches prevents any unifying principle or thesis to emerge in this volume, the essays display, I suggest, a certain movement (however dispersed) on the weight of thinking about revelation in several corners of the academy.

The weight settles at first on a distinctive difficulty. The interaction of revelation and hermeneutics unavoidably generates polemics over the conditions of possibility and impossibility for divine self-disclosure. But the theme also sparks considerations of the relation of theory and practice that move the discourse away from merely epistemic concerns. Bald assertions of truth give way to reflection on what happens in the course of living out what revelation gives and demands. It becomes a discourse as much about the effects of this complex area of speech as about the content. A sacramental logic takes over – bringing about the very thing represented – whereby theology cannot gainsay the participatory and transformational dimensions of its theme. Jean-Luc Marion's incisive discussion of the "delay to interpretation" (a conspicuously tantalizing phrase for this volume) in his earlier work demonstrates this point so very well: "…*the*ological progress," he writes, "would indicate less an undetermined, ambiguous, and sterile groping, than the absolutely infinite unfolding of possibilities already realized in the Word but not yet in us and our words; in short the infinite freedom of the Word in our words, and reciprocally" (1991, 158).

What I gather from these essays resembles this movement of theological reflection starting in one place only to end up in a much richer position. The constructive problem of historically mediated transcendence may focus the theme of revelation and hermeneutics at first glance, but in the end it seems less critical (if not distracting) than grappling with the kind of change in persons and communities that this area of speech addresses. In fact, the resolution of the former seems to unfold best

not by endless theorizing on its own terms, but rather by a multivalent (including the contemplative) reflection on the latter. In what follows, I attempt briefly to elaborate this suggestion and then offer short descriptions of each of the chapters.

First, then, the constructive problem. How can theology account for speech that occurs at a given time and place, addresses specific persons and communities, and yet claims in some way to come from somewhere else and say something far more essential to human destiny than any human achievement? Such language invariably takes shape in specific ways and contexts. It functions dramatically in networks of social relations and often with remarkably predictable results. As a particular way of speaking, it bears the characteristics of a finite, historical, human project, demonstrating human concerns and foibles, and yet at the same time claims something more. The theological language of revelation purports to say something that no human person or community could simply manufacture or impose. By many accounts, it has the character of a gift. Revelation thus poses a problem: invoking a territory beyond the control of earthly powers, it remains thoroughly tied to the linguistic constraints of human understanding. What comes from somewhere else, if recognized as such, comes in language.

That language of revelation confronts theology with this formidable challenge – that is, to negotiate the impact of a transcendent gift with human power and history – suggests perhaps unsurprisingly that theology can miss the mark. It misses by not treating its subject matter in terms that are appropriate to its otherness, and at the same time by emphasizing that otherness in ways that undermine critical reflection. It can domesticate the impact of revelation by relying too heavily on ordinary categories of experience and rationality, but it can also displace those categories in ways that threaten to create insular communities by restricting genuine knowledge to the normativity of a particular culture and language. The attempt to negotiate this tension constructively brings theology to an intersection of sorts: thinking the possibility of revelation and its implications requires us to think also about the nature of human understanding. In other words, a theology of revelation has to take account (an interpretation) of interpretation by virtue of its very subject. Revelation and hermeneutics go together.

Many of the contributions to this volume critique a propositional approach to revelation because it undercuts the practice of interpretation and the role of community in determining both what counts as revelation and what it means and implies. A theology of revelation has to contend with the often ambivalent character of the particularities of human history if it should make a critical claim that neither dismisses nor strong arms objections; these hermeneutical considerations can helpfully limit speech about revelation. On the other hand, the propositional approach attracts criticism in the essays that follow because it also overestimates or wrongly configures the kind of certainty that theology can claim in this territory. It tries to fully control what must otherwise remain uncontrollable material. Attentiveness to the way that revelation gestures in and to a different register of speaking suggests that a theology of revelation may also open spaces of learning about learning. The weight

of the pendulum swings to the other side, the transformative power of revelation. Rather than undermine the hermeneutics of critical history, revelation may very well enrich a theory of interpretation with (for lack of adequate words) something more.[2]

The idea that the language of revelation does something more excessive and complex than simply impart information about God and the world repeats in various ways in these essays. In fact, it seems to me that they push us to go even further: taken together, they suggest that because this language does something other than merely impart information for theology to transmit, it also holds in abeyance the very meaning of revelation in a way that deeply inflects any reflection devoted to it. The authors here do not presuppose a single definition of revelation, or theology for that matter (nor do they need to), and seem content to shape these terms in the process rather than depend on them at the outset. The important question thus focuses not on how the content of revelation enters the world of human (linguistic) affairs, but rather on the risk that theology may betray that content if it attempts simply to trot it out in advance of thinking about what communication of it entails or perhaps initiates. Even beginning with a range of culturally laden ideas about revelation, as a matter of being thrown into a lifeworld, it remains the case that only by stripping away mistaken assumptions about its objectification (or objectness) and its implication (or not) in historical relations of power can we in fact grasp something true of its language, if not speak truly within its register. The force of this stripping away extends beyond a strictly epistemic problem, a question about the conditions of knowledge, and anticipates the existential transformation of the person, the communal environment, or the cosmos.

The intersections at stake in this volume suggest that a nuanced approach to revelation recognizes more promise than peril in analyses of history and interpretation. Such sensibilities certainly are not obvious if only because many voices within modern theology negotiate the relationship with historical study very differently and often in line with narrowly epistemic conceptions. These tensions predate their iterations in contemporary controversies. As Johann Adam Möhler remarked in the early nineteenth century, the terms can seem plainly contradictory. “How is it possible,” he asked, “for the truth given by Christ to have a history? We cannot conceive of a history in any other way than that some object passes through a series of changes. But it has been said that the truth revealed and imparted by Christ is to remain as it was originally given” (1971, xiii). The modern era inherits from sixteenth century scholastic theologians a concept of revelation – whether as a divine deposit of truth (Catholics) or the truth of Scripture (Protestants) – that generates a series of familiar difficulties. It leads rather anxiously to the challenge of resolving historical contingencies with (revelation-understood-as-) the truth of Christian doctrine as well as a host of other equally crucial, related aspects of faith (e.g., the authority of God and the church, the efficacy of the sacraments). It also tends to

[2] For example, see the discussion of saturated phenomena in Marion’s chapter and his reconfiguration of hermeneutics as radically phenomenological.

cover over its own historical particularity and inspire a variety of one-sided attempts: integrating historical study in a way that rustles in and neatly proof-texts commitments to the authority of a specific confession of faith. The essays here are less sanguine about the assumptions that motivate this uneasy relationship with history.

Both Kevin Hart and Frederick Lawrence chart historical trajectories in discourse on revelation that arrive at the remarkably fresh horizon of Vatican II (as mentioned above). Not that this horizon jettisons belief, or parts ways with earlier ecumenical councils, but rather that it moves away from the propositional notion of revelation and focuses on the person of Jesus: again, revelation as God's self-communication in Christ. The shift here places the truth of Christian doctrine in the far richer, more expansive and participatory context of God's redeeming love for all of creation. Beyond narrow propositional structures, the language of revelation now invites the variegated and complex forms of critical theological exploration that the subject matter of Jesus' personal presence in history, sacrament, and prayer requires. Exactly how theology should move forward in this space remains significantly unwritten, but the shift in focus marks a generative horizon. "Although those framing *Dei Verbum* do not use this language," writes Hart, "we have quietly slipped from theological epistemology to phenomenology." In fact, as our authors recognize, this shift exemplified by the Council harmonizes at some level theological styles as disparate and unlikely as G.W.F. Hegel, Karl Barth, and Karl Rahner (Hart) and Hans Urs von Balthasar and again Karl Barth (Lawrence).

The movement to phenomenology, as Hart recognizes it, illustrates a specific point of interest of this volume. What forms of phenomenology – or of philosophical thinking in general – are most appropriate to negotiating the otherness of revelation and the structure of human understanding? As an example, where Hart's essay considers the task of "thinking the manifestation of Christ in its own terms," drawing on the resources of phenomenality, Werner Jeanrond begins his essay underscoring the impossibility of bypassing our hermeneutical predicament and asks about the "measure of subjective involvement" in linguistic processes that condition theological hermeneutics. Of course, these essays negotiate both sides of this demanding tension – givenness and interpretation – together, but the volume's theme suggests the possibility of reading the essays in critical conversation. Indeed, the different essays address a wide range of concerns around language, power, authority, the body, the banal, the excessive, the catastrophic, time and hope (to name only a few), and despite the grievances of many authors over propositional styles, Peter Ochs gives a more appreciative, constructive reading of propositions. The variations are generative, I suggest, and at times explicitly engaged with each other. Where several essays contend that Marion's innovative use of "saturated phenomena" opens constructive possibilities, for example, Shane MacKinlay's chapter echoes opponents who argue that Marion's approach renders the subject too passive. Our volume, in fact, begins here.

1.3 The Chapters

Titled "The Hermeneutics of Givenness," Marion's essay offers a thoroughgoing response to critics who suspect that his phenomenology of givenness insufficiently attends to (if not undermines) hermeneutics.[3] More than an isolated or marginal argument within Marion's extensive oeuvre, the criticisms take exception with the very heart of his constructive project. A phenomenology that focuses on pure givenness imposes a certain form of quietism, they say. It cloisters the given by shutting out critical interpretation and undercutting discursivity. These criticisms tie into central intersections at stake in our volume; they echo concerns that certain discourses on revelation effectively overload the authority of belief by neglecting to account for underlying interpretive decisions. Where the essay here focuses strictly on the notion of the given as such and its relation to hermeneutics, readers familiar with Marion's work will make connections with his Gifford lectures (published also in 2016) and his thesis that Christ appears as the saturated phenomenon par excellence. His essay in this volume addresses the crucial issues at stake in any speech about revelation that would draw constructively on phenomenality's resources.

Returning to the notion of givenness, what Heidegger called the "magic word" of phenomenology, Marion challenges his critics to re-evaluate their assumptions. The given as such seems to them pitted against hermeneutics because they conceive givenness problematically, as furnishing, writes Marion, "an objectifiable phenomenon, one therefore constituted by a univocal sense, which would neither tolerate nor require any interpretation." Recasting the notion of the given against mistaken assumptions, Marion makes two key, clarifying moves. (1) He distinguishes givenness from intuition and (echoing Husserl and Heidegger) warns against conflating it with anything in the "horizon of objectness or thingness." (2) He also rejects the assumption of its immediacy (as in sense data), and thus repositions both givenness and hermeneutics as "enigmas" that trouble ordinary dichotomies (immediate and mediate). In short, Marion exposes the fraught attachment to a Lockean paradigm of representation that underwrites familiar critiques of the purported "myth of the given." He reverses his critics' accusations: the unconditioned universality of givenness demands rather than forbids hermeneutics, and in a way that problematizes common assumptions on both sides. In the essay's latter half, he goes a step further, drawing favourably on Gadamer. Rather than clarify the hermeneutical status of phenomenology, which may yet concede too much to his critics, Marion argues that a proper understanding of givenness allows us to appreciate the radically phenomenological status of hermeneutics. "Far from hermeneutics exceeding givenness or substituting itself for it," he writes, "it is unfurled in it."

As noted above, Mackinlay's essay offers a critic's perspective on these same issues. He foregrounds concerns over authority and the capacity of phenomenology for self-criticism. He begins with the conceptual difficulty of the theme: If Jesus

[3] Translated by Sarah Horton for this volume, the essay was originally published in *Reprise du Donné* (Paris: PUF, 2016) 59–97.

reveals the Father's will to his disciples, giving to them "something of the beyond," still the disciples understand the phenomena according to what they bring to the experience and how they interpret it. The word that claims divine authority displays their claim, too. How then can we account for the possibility of revelation without also negating it by reducing its transcendent character to the plane of immanence? Mackinlay notes that Marion addresses this problem in "The Possible and Revelation" (2008), and suggests that his notion of "counter-experience" – or what Hart (following Blanchot) calls "experience of nonexperience" (2003) – goes a long way towards resolving this difficulty. He also recognizes a nest of persistent problems, however. The phenomenality of counter-experience seems insufficient for discerning divine revelation against the possibilities of deceit and harm. How do we know the difference between God's voice and a monstrosity (à la Richard Kearney's objection)? Echoing concerns mentioned above, Mackinlay suggests that Marion's phenomenology leads to an impasse: either counter-experience undermines interpretation and lacks resources for self-criticism, *or* it allows assessment, which entails objectification, and no longer constitutes the same experience. Strikingly, as with Marion's essay, Mackinlay draws constructively on Gadamer's hermeneutics. Though readers will judge the extent to which they agree or not, Mackinlay's proposal in a sense favours this result. Emphasizing the importance of multiple readings, he recommends "a critical and modest hermeneutics of the phenomenon in its actual appearing, undertaken in dialogue with others who propose interpretations of it."

Robyn Horner's essay applies the resources of phenomenology to the complex challenge of speaking about revelation in the context of Western secularity, as in her title: "Revelation as a Problem for Our Age." She recognizes that language of revelation often falls flat in three different registers. (1) Culturally, it has little purchase in secular milieux that carve commonsense out of immanence and scarcely invest in the linguistic resources needed for making good sense of it. Quite literally, revelation can seem out of place – that is, anachronistic, irrelevant or simply bizarre. (2) The discipline of philosophy often stunts conversation on revelation too, because of various commitments or biases (e.g., empiricism, positivism, or any notion of reason allergic to the particularity of religious belief) that disqualify it. Arguing for more critical, expansive consideration of the theme, and in a way that crosses traditional boundaries of philosophy and theology, Horner proposes that phenomenology's attentiveness to interruptions of ordinary conceptions of experience and belief (à la Marion's "saturated phenomenon" and Jean-Yves Lacoste's "paradoxical phenomenon") can revitalize speech about God's engagement with the world. (3) Likewise, she argues that theology on its own has not fared much better as a home for revelation because of its history of focusing too narrowly on propositional content and neglecting lived experience. But if we rethink revelation in terms of a phenomenology of experience rather than mere belief, suggests Horner, we can develop ways of speaking that embrace Vatican II's legacy of a relational notion of revelation, and that connect as meaningful possibilities within our fragmented, secular environments.

Kevin Hart elegantly illuminates the way that language of revelation draws us into a confrontation that does more than challenge ordinary ways of thinking (and praying, in fact). He notes key historical transitions in conceptualizing and speaking about revelation, tracking the entrance of "reuelacion" in English to the late fourteenth century, and suggests that since Vatican II "revelation" invites us to phenomenological reflection on how Christ manifests himself. "I want to suggest," writes Hart, "that Jesus stands out only when we view him within the horizon of the Kingdom that he preached, which itself can be understood only within the horizon of his Judaism, which includes the enthronement psalms, the Targum of Isaiah, and the title 'King of the Jews' [βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων]." Where critics often accuse phenomenology of neglecting hermeneutical concerns with textuality and historicity, Hart's thesis displays incisive sensitivity to the importance of texts, the centrality of interpretation, and the history of concepts. But he also avoids reducing the Kingdom to a natural phenomenon, merely an idea introduced into positive history, as many versions of liberal Christianity propose. The dynamics of Jesus revealing the Kingdom are more complex because they involve the intimate relations of divine and human persons in the life of grace; they open the way for phenomenology because they demand something more than what ordinary categories of knowledge can furnish. By hearing Jesus' parables and meditating on his acts, Hart argues, a conversion of intentionality and horizon take place: rather than bringing Jesus into our gaze, we find ourselves constituted and made manifest in his.

Where Hart and Horner explore the resources of phenomenality in thinking about the possibility and pressure of revelation on language, W. C. Hackett focuses on the pressure. He describes the creative intelligence that marks a distinctively Christian mode of interpretation. He notes first that speech about God confronts the peculiar problem of negotiating its participatory, experiential dynamics in a way that forestalls the overwhelming of that dynamism by theoretical objectification. He then suggests that Cyril of Alexandria's "sacrifice Christology" offers a way forward, and proposes four theses that effectively connect the salvific logic of the Christ event with the patterns of theological reason. The Incarnation of the divine Word (*kenosis*) makes possible the divinizing union (*henosis*) of all members of Christ's body in the Eucharist, and this ordering (*kenosis-henosis*) makes life-giving flesh central to salvation as well as to theology's task of understanding the mysteries of faith. Cyril's refutations of Nestorius attest to the primacy he attributes to Eucharistic experience over theoretical abstraction in orthodox thinking. Hackett writes: "The acknowledgement of the diversity of natures, if made the starting point in Christology, veils the Eucharistic (kenotic-henotic) truth of the Incarnation. In other words, it is a *step away* from the living, present and saving Christ…" For Hackett, Cyril offers theology a powerful reminder that revelation opens a new intellectual horizon. Where theology begins with experience of the Word made flesh in Eucharist and Scripture, Christ's body transforms reason from within, displaying both antinomy and irony: suffering of the unsuffering, flesh that gives life, and images that elevate the mind where concepts falter.

Werner Jeanrond addresses a range of concerns shared with many of the authors in this volume (e.g., the truth of interpretation, the uniqueness and relationality of revelation, the amenability of theology to scrutiny in diverse environments). His essay offers a kind of hinge point for the volume as a whole. As with Marion and Mackinlay, he draws positively on Gadamerian hermeneutics for negotiating the notion of truth with the involvement of historically embedded subjects in the practice of interpretation. Recognizing limits in Gadamer's anti-methodological attitude, he also adopts Paul Ricoeur's sensitivity to textuality and ideology critique. The specific character of the truth of revelation manifest in the text remains impossible to possess or administratively control. It may not rightly dissolve into ordinary rationality and yet cannot escape the interrogation of subsequent interpreters for whom that truth may become a live possibility. Sharply contrasting postliberal (Yale) and correlational (Chicago) theological sensibilities, Jeanrond argues for a hermeneutics of signification (Chicago) that refuses to restrict the horizon of theology to a specific group's authoritative commitments. He underscores the need to balance the exigencies of the notion of truth with unmitigated openness to otherness in the practice of (self-) critical interpretation. Recognizing theology's need for an interpretive awareness informed by responsiveness to the demands of relationality with God and neighbour, he recommends a hermeneutics of love that Christians cannot monopolize. "Such a hermeneutics," writes Jeanrond, "could encourage us no longer to consider the necessary pluralism of interpretation as a threat to faith, truth and church in our increasingly globalising context."

Mara Brecht connects the hermeneutics of signification to comparative theology in her essay, "Embodied Transactions." The practice of reading revelation in both familiar and "strange texts" – and thus learning from a range of concerns, strategies and resources across religious boundaries – tacitly demonstrates the global orientation that Jeanrond recommends for theological interpretation. In other words, Brecht contends that comparative theologians presuppose this approach, even if they rarely name it, and urges that they should make their hermeneutical commitments explicit. She then argues that any adequate theory of interpretation must account for embodiment in a way that significantly exceeds more narrowly defined accounts of subjectivity in traditional, two-dimensional approaches (e.g., Gadamer, Ricoeur). The socio-economic conditions of embodied, human experience suggest that theoretical frameworks cannot gainsay these factors in explaining the linguistic mediation of meaning. Drawing on several feminist thinkers, Brecht shows how this shift in attention opens up discourse on revelation to questions of power and work that (by the logic of power) ordinarily go unasked. She also presses further, creatively arguing that where interpretation reflects socially constructed ways of inhabiting the world, comparative theology can "shed light on the embodied habits of Christians, not just the theological ones." Where Christians may understand their gendered and racial identities as merely "given," and their religious identity as chosen, Brecht argues that by attending to how habits of bodying intersect and inform interpretation, comparative theology can trouble these assumptions and enhance self-awareness in profoundly transformative ways.

Michele Saracino creatively shifts the terms of discussion. She connects the theme of the volume to the everyday phenomenon of *swimming* and what proper attention to it can teach us. Her essay invites us to explore the embodied dynamics of relationality and warns of becoming dimly preoccupied with authoritative concepts that can overly determine discourse on revelation. More than certain actions and utterances, loving relationships – the kind at the heart of revelation – require specific forms of learning. Saracino reminds us that in relationship with others we find ourselves thrown "in the middle of things," and often unsettled by the experience of not knowing exactly how to move forward. Drawing on an array of thinkers for inspiration, she explains how relationships require intentionality and improvisation (Turkson, Steiner, Bateson); they demonstrate our vulnerability (Vanier); they demand our willingness to surrender familiar ways of being and thinking (Balthasar, Levinas, Lyotard); they invite us to cultivate empathy without consuming one another, and they allow us to mourn our desire for mastering situations where certainty eludes us (Jamison). The different ways we enter deeply into relationship express our aptitude for developing what Saracino calls a "feel for the other." The experience of swimming becomes a powerful metaphor here. Where swimmers negotiate hydrodynamic drag with stroke technique, and cultivate their proprioceptive skills, Christians who learn new ways of relating to the mysterious presence of God in their lives develop a keen awareness of their position in all their relations; they get a *feel for the other* – and all the others – and learn in the darkness of faith how to move forward in the deep waters of revealing love.

The essay by Frederick Lawrence urges us to learn how to hold together in creative tension both God's self-disclosure and God's unknowability. He argues that a proper understanding of revelation has to account for the possibility of sharing in God's self-understanding without "prejudicing the apophatic dimension of human participation in God's redeeming love." He tracks shifts in conceptualization between Vatican I's *Dei filius* and Vatican II's *Dei verbum*, and underscores how the latter challenges theology to hold together several different dimensions in the nexus of cognitive content and participation in historical patterns of redemption. Referring to problems of reductionism, extrinsicism, and ahistorical orthodoxy, Lawrence notes how mistaken approaches thwart this complex area of speech. He also retrieves strategies that many theologians no longer favour, though he recognizes their legitimate worries: the distinction (*not separation*) between natural and supernatural orders, the necessity of critical (*not decadent*) metaphysics for theology, and the value of Aquinas's analogy of light, as correctly interpreted (*not caricatured*). For Aquinas, explains Lawrence, Christian belief has less to do with accepting revealed propositions and more to do with "sharing the truths by which Christians live through love's pressure on intelligence." The post-Vatican II context of theology attends ever more earnestly to this pressure. Discussing Bernard Lonergan's work, Lawrence explains the primacy given to the interpersonal reality of love in the dynamics of faith and belief. Where Augustine recognized Jesus at Calvary overcoming evil with good, theology's new context makes the same historical dynamics of revealing and redemptive love the site for true speech about who this self-communicating, unknowable God *is* (1 John 4:8).

The hermeneutical problem of application confronts any theologian who participates in a religious tradition that recognizes Scriptural revelation.[4] How can the tradition account for the historically embedded meaning of revealed texts on the one hand, and address the power of the text to speak to later generations and in vastly different contexts on the other? Is the unfolding of history a mute platform for the Scriptural dynamics of revelation and interpretation, or does the future itself play a part in the proper sense of the revealed text? The final three essays of the volume appropriate and reply to these questions in creative ways.

Maria Dakake's essay explains how the Qur'an self-referentially addresses its own interpretation and how different reading strategies effectively modify the time of the revelatory text. She notes distinctive tensions. The Qur'an speaks about its own use of metaphor and symbol, suggesting the importance of uncovering its meaning, but the Qur'an also clearly warns against misreading its verses and signs. Its revelatory status seems to forbid rather than invite interpretation. A compelling problem arises: the Qur'an states that it contains ambiguous verses, and this presses theology to reconcile this "purposeful ambiguity" with the text's expressed intention of "bringing clear truth and exposing falsehood." Where predominant strategies appeal to the authority of the original context (including text, the Prophet and his contemporaries, and immediately succeeding generations), effectively locating the revelation of the Qur'an in the past, Dakake points to a shift in the text's revelatory time by closely reading a key verse (3:7) where the Qur'an seems to admonish those who seek to interpret its ambiguities. Rather than forbidding interpretation, Dakake explains how the Qur'an does the opposite. It proscribes the very attempt to close off authoritative interpretation. She recognizes in the multivalent uses of a crucial term (*ta'wil*) a strategy that connects literal, historical meanings with new, spiritually generative readings, the latter neither superseding nor nullifying the former. In short, the interpretation of verses unfolds over time and in light of what the events of human history reveal. On Dakake's reading, the Qur'an recognizes "the fulfilment of the original purpose of revelation not in its immediate context, but *in the future*."

Peter Ochs explains how the multi-valued logic of Scriptural reasoning in rabbinic Judaism's reception of Tanakh allows for affirmation of the reality of revelation without reifying its predicative content as "given." The logic creates space in this realism for the interpretive creativity of historically embedded exegetical traditions. Ochs uses the semiotics of C.S. Peirce to diagram the relation. He distinguishes revelation's indexicality (i.e., knowing *that* God speaks independently of anything humans can manufacture) and its iconicity (i.e., the content of what God says as ventured in human judgment) and identifies the danger of idolatry in uncritically assimilating predications to the otherwise indescribable force of the speech. But Ochs also cautions against reducing the meaning of revelation to a humanly

[4] Describing application as the fundamental hermeneutical problem, Gadamer discusses the problem of application in terms of the orientation of effective historical consciousness to a fusion of horizons, see *Truth and Method*, trans. and rev. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuuum, 2000) 307.

constructed story; these predications are neither "subjective" nor "objectively given," he writes. "They are this third something: the intimate, intricate, dynamic interaction between the God who speaks and the community that hears." For Ochs, the rabbinic logic of revelation suggests that faithfulness refuses to overwhelm indexicality with iconicity. It preserves the apophatic in the communal dynamics of reception. Rather than imply quietist surrender, the mediation of revelation in history demands active commitment: exegesis, debate, conversation, engaged study, unflinching attention to minority opinions, to unresolved questions and competitions among schools, and to textual multivocity. The community's questions and struggles – and especially the catastrophe it endures – stimulate this process. As Ochs remarks, "a pair of images dominates the history of rabbinic Judaism even more than a text: the Burnt Temple (70-71 CE) and Jerusalem razed and salted (135 CE)." Such catastrophes serve as prototypical heuristics in the community's ongoing, historical process of recreating itself under the pressure of revelation.

The final chapter in the volume offers the kind of comparative theological engagement with "strange texts" that Brecht discusses in her essay. Francis Clooney explains how to read "revelation" across the boundaries of Christianity and the West and in the context of ancient Indian hermeneutics known as "Mimamsa." The first part of his essay introduces this elaborate system of interpretation. He describes it as "akin to case law reasoning" and explains how it aims to demonstrate the harmony between words and sacrificial actions in the voluminous corpus of the ancient, Sanskrit Vedas. Attributed to Jamini (c. 300–200 BCE), the core text of Mimamsa includes 2700 short statements spread over 12 books. Clooney effectively illuminates the characteristics of this hermeneutical system by discussing three interpretations of a case in Book IX. He draws out how differently Scriptural revelation functions in this context. It does not give us new information about extra-textual realities, or rely on recourse to transcendent authority for its power. It focuses rather on the details of skilled interpretation. Quite literally, Mimamsa locates revelation *in the text* and suggests that it reshapes its audience both in the sacrificial arena as well as in ordinary living. As Clooney writes, for Mimamsa, "*hermeneutics is revelation*."

The second half of Clooney's essay explores the comparative possibilities. He draws similarities between Mimamsa on the one hand, and rabbinic exegesis and Wittgenstein's philosophy of language on the other. He turns to Christianity and creatively rereads three gospel stories in light of his reading of Mimamsa. He explains how Mimamsa teaches us "to look for the sharp edge of a story where it most powerfully hits the reader and commands decision," and in a way that refuses to go outside the text for the reading. Its interpretive strategy seeks no recourse with social context, history, or authorial intent (either human or divine). In short, Mimamsa urges us to stay with the text and *read carefully*. Clooney writes: "While we may instinctively, inevitably, turn to history, worry about urgent social issues, and measure scripture by its aptness for certain kinds of inner experiences, Mimamsa reminds us that we ought still return to the text, lest we end up engaging in a hermeneutics that is at best only occasionally or selectively submissive to revelation."

Where liberal theology tends to embrace historical study and treat religious pluralism as more opportunity than threat, Clooney's study in many ways resonates more with postliberal sensibilities. It recommends a return to the text. The slight irony here perhaps offers a fitting note with which to end this introduction and begin this volume. As readers will discover, the essays here are less committed to models and genres as they are to the critical edge of the theme, exploring the complex interactions of revelation and hermeneutics.

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Part I
Givenness and Interpretation

Chapter 2
The Hermeneutics of Givenness

Jean-Luc Marion

Abstract Hermeneutics is very often taken for granted: every statement, and by derivation, every fact or phenomenon, would have to be interpreted. This remains obvious, indeed. But, precisely because it looks obvious, we cannot avoid the question asking why it is so. And an answer may remain puzzling, as we could imagine that any correct formulation or description would need no additional commentary to be understood univocally. This could even define the utility of a correct use of language. However, notwithstanding the array of philosophical emendations of daily language (by grammar as well as semantics), we have all experienced that this univocity remains beyond our reach. Here, we suggest that hermeneutics becomes compulsory because the intuition of what gives itself overflows most of the times, if not always, what shows itself and what can be explained or understood by concepts. The excess of the intuition on the concept allows, more than that, asks for a hermeneutics. Therefore, far from a phenomenology of givenness forbidding hermeneutics, it opens its broad and unescapable field.

Keywords Phenomenology · Hermeneutics · Givenness · Intuition · Interpretation

2.1 The Objection of an Obstruction

One question is always repeated in phenomenology, from various angles—that of knowing if one can, and if one must, admit an irreducible, whatever it may be. This interrogation first arises, as we have seen,[1] from the reduction itself. But it also arises, as an aftershock, from what the reduction brings forth—perhaps. For the reduction, even by its operation and radicalization, makes evident, be it only by

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[1] See Marion (2016), Ch. I.

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contraposition, the possibility, even the necessity, of an exception, of an irreducible. Whether it is understood as a particular phenomenon that is, in the end, non-reduced,[2] or whether it directly concerns the operation of the reduction itself,[3] this very indecision highlights the sole question: what end results from the reduction, to what does the reduction bring back the things when it transposes them into phenomena? Indeed, the identification of the possible irreducible is not self-evident. A rather long polemical tradition has, at least since Cavaillès, assimilated phenomenology into a philosophy of consciousness, even a philosophy of intuition, in opposition to a supposedly strict, rigorous, and sober philosophy of the concept (but can there be a concept without consciousness, be it only the consciousness of that very concept?); in this case, and consequently, phenomenology's supposed irreducible would consist in the intuition originarily perceived by consciousness.

Thus approximately defined, givenness at once elicits an inevitable double reticence. —The first is due to its factual character, imposed de facto and always already achieved: the given, whatever it may be, indeed admits of no exception; the de facto given is always already there, or rather always already *here,* as close as possible, we are straightaway caught in it, our feet in it, enmeshed unto nausea in the horror of the ground[4] that glues us to it. Even our very experience of nothingness, supposing, besides, that we have ever really had one, already supposes a given, however small one imagines it to be, which in advance retains and contains us. The given therefore opens all experience, but as it opens it in advance and in fact, in that sense it closes it because it decided it before and *without us,* imposes it on us, makes us late from the beginning, orients it for us, conditions it for us and rations it for us without giving us any reason why. The beginning belongs to the given, and that beginning decides the end. With the given, from the beginning, we see the end, we are finished, in every sense of the term.[5] Whence the inevitable, even automatic, reflex of rationality: thinking and understanding will consist in recusing the de facto authority of the given, deconstructing it and suspending it in order to regain the initiative of deduction and reestablish another beginning, that of the a priori, conquered after the fact like an inauguration in reverse: all the less given, all the more thought. The duty of negativity requires undoing that simple de facto authority of the given to substitute for it the de jure authority of an a priori, whatever it may be, provided that it manages to regain the given within the voluntary legitimacy of the concept.

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[2] As with the question of God, as I suggested in Marion (2012), Ch. 10 (reprint of Marion 2006).

[3] Which I have, in a sense, established: see Marion (2016), Ch. I.

[4] Marion here alludes to Mallarmé's sonnet "Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui" ("The virginal, vivacious, and beautiful today"), of which the first tercet reads: "Its whole neck will shake off that white agony/By space inflicted on the bird that denies it,/But not the horror of the ground where the plumage is caught." (My translation.) "Tout son col. secouera cette blanche agonie/Par l'espace infligé à l'oiseau qui le nie,/Mais non l'horreur du sol où le plumage est pris" (Mallarmé 1998). For a less literal but more poetic translation, see "The virginal, vibrant and beautiful dawn" in Mallarmé (1994). [Translator's note.]

[5] Note that "nous sommes finis," translated above as "we are finished," could also mean "we are finite." [Translator's note.]

The second reticence follows and gravely redoubles the first. If in addition givenness in fact proceeds by intuition (and an opaque sensible intuition), then it defies all explanation and all discursive justification. Not only can givenness account for its intuition by its brute fact, but it defends this brute fact by the opacity of the elementary sensible idea: a clear *and obscure* idea; for, as Descartes noted, an idea can be clear ("[…] *menti attendenti praesens et aperta*," [1964, 22] present and open to the attention of the mind), without however becoming clear, that is, precisely distinguishing itself from other sensible ideas to present itself clearly as such ("[…] *ab omnibus aliis ita sejuncta et praecisa, ut nihil plane aliud, quam quod clarum est, in se continat*", "[…] so sharply separated from all other perceptions that it contains within itself only what is clear" [1964, 22/208][6]). The sensible imposes itself (*s'impose*), but it is not posited (*se pose*) as such: a color appears, but without giving the criteria that define it and therefore without distinguishing itself from another; I say that this is red, and others can agree with me about this judgment (barring any eye diseases), and we can even distinguish it from other colors (yellow or blue), but neither they nor I can say what this red shows concerning red, this red as such, in short, what it *signifies* in itself. Summed up in the sensible intuition, the given remains mute regarding itself, it closes access to its brutal fact, refuses itself to identification, to differentiation, and therefore finally to signification. Without signification, the given, henceforth only *sensible,* therefore remains blind [*aveugle*], seeing nothing, but above all giving nothing to be seen, like a windowless room [*pièce aveugle*], *camera obscura,* invisible and without light—finally *insensible.*

The given therefore could not, especially if it doubles itself in a sensible given, ensure phenomenality. As such, mute and blind, a pure, indefinite "this," it becomes insensible, without any *sense.*

Whence, doubtless, the recurring complaint that denounces the fetishism of the given and calls to hermeneutics for aid in order to, according to a critic's smug expression, restore the supposedly violated rights of "a phenomenology deflowered of the purity of givenness" (Sebbah 2001, 307).[7] For the so-called "pure" givenness would impose "[…] a certain form of quietism," for which it would henceforth only be a question of "showing, describing, and no longer [of] arguing, giving reasons" (Thomas-Fogiel 2015, 279, 281 ff.)[8] To the pure but dumb givenness, rational discursivity, the giving (*rendu*) of reasons, therefore hermeneutic endurance, should respond. This objection was introduced as obvious by undisputed specialists in hermeneutics, foremost among whom are counted J. Grondin[9] and J. Greisch.[10] It was therefore also largely taken up by public opinion, to the point of finding an echo

[6] Whenever two page numbers are separated by a slash, the first refers to the original-language edition of a work, and the second to the translation. [Translator's note.]

[7] [My translation. —Trans.]

[8] [My translation. —Trans.]

[9] See Grondin (1993a), ch. IV (reprinted from Grondin 1992).

[10] See Greisch (1991) and Greisch (1995).

among theologians.[11] But reading one of its most recent formulations, one sees at once the limit of this objection: "The real touchstone of the phenomenology proposed by *Being Given* is this unconditioned universality of givenness, from which nothing is excepted *and* which renders obsolete, *in particular,* the necessity of any recourse to hermeneutics" (Serban 2012, 88, emphasis added).[12] —And yet the entire question consists precisely in knowing whether, "[…] the unconditioned universality of givenness" being admitted, it does for all that "[…] rende[r] obsolete" the "[…] recourse to hermeneutics": for, finally, no analytic link immediately joins the two terms, and one does not see how givenness *as such* would forbid hermeneutics, nor why it would not rather call for it, even demand it. The objection here supposes exactly what it would first be necessary to prove: the incompatibility of phenomenality's resources with the differentiated assertion of its figures of sense. This incompatibility could be conceived only if givenness straightaway furnished an objectifiable phenomenon, one therefore constituted by a univocal sense, which would neither tolerate nor require any interpretation, being already included in a determinate signification or a closed concept. But does givenness always, even ever, give such an object with a univocal sense? Is givenness conflated with the efficient causality that produces a finished object? Is giving equivalent to placing an object beneath a gaze or to having it at hand? Who does not see that, thus reduced to production and efficiency, givenness would no longer give anything, precisely because it would no longer *give* but would produce, without retreating before that facticity as if it were a matter of violence or impropriety? And yet—and here lies all the difficulty—the very facticity of givenness still remains absolutely to be determined as such. It remains to *interpret* its neutrality.

Henceforth, it remains to understand what Husserl's "breakthrough" towards givenness manifests—unless we leave it aside, as if it were either a marginal thesis of the *venerabilis inceptor* (an implausible hypothesis) or (stranger still) the deviant invention of an epigone. At the very least, Heidegger had, for his part, recognized givenness and, starting in 1919, had clearly designated it as such—neither as an all-purpose slogan nor as a myth for conflating everything, but as a question to decide in terms of phenomenality. And he asked: "What does 'given' mean? *'Givenness'?* This magic word of phenomenology and 'stumbling block' for others" (Heidegger 1992, 5/4).[13] Thus givenness arises less as an answer than as a question, less as a final argument than as a pending indecisiveness; take the rule posited by Kant—all knowledge supposes an intuition because only the intuition enjoys the privilege of "giving"—it remains to define what this givenness signifies. In other words, it remains also and first to define what it does *not* mean, that with which it is not

[11] See Tanner (2007); then Gagey (2010).

[12] [My translation. —Trans.]—Recently, Christina M. Gschwandtner has provided an excellent review of the debates concerning the supposed lack of hermeneutics since *Being Given* (see Gschwandtner 2015, 14–24).

[13] [Translation modified. —Trans.] On the neo-Kantian context of this diagnosis, see my study in Marion 2012, Ch. II–III.

conflated. For givenness does not produce like an efficient cause, nor is it confined to sensible intuition, because it is not conflated even with intuition in general.

2.2 Givenness, Not Intuition

In a reversal of its common understanding, we must not conceive of givenness as a de facto authority but as a de jure authority, or rather conceive that the fact of the given suffices to assure to this given the full status of a phenomenon: everything that shows itself shows itself because it gives itself. In this sense, the fact of givenness should be considered as a law.

Husserl does not let any ambiguity linger about this de facto and, indissolubly, de jure character of such a norm: "Absolute givenness is an ultimate. […] On the other hand, to deny self-givenness in general is to deny every ultimate norm [*alle letzte Norm*], every basic criterion that lends sense to knowledge" (1973, 61/45).[14] Thus the problem of a pure knowledge can be resolved only "[…] in the sphere of givenness, which provides the ultimate norms because it is absolute [*in der Sphäre der letztnormierenden, weil absoluten Gegebenheit*]" (Ibid., 76/53). Why indeed here describe givenness with the label *absolute*? Because givenness cannot be said to be relative or partial, since it constitutes the norm and the criterion of all presence, of all factuality, and of all actuality, which in return are judged only in relation to it. Factuality, actuality, and presence are measured only in relation to givenness, which alone fixes their level and degree. Thus even the difference between the regions of the world and of consciousness, which everything separates (immanence/transcendence, certainty/contingency, absolute/relation, etc.), to the point that one can describe it as "impassable," is nevertheless still unfurled within the sole givenness: "Hence we hold fast to the following: while it is an essential property of givenness [*zum Wesen der Gegebenheit*] through appearances that none gives *(gibt)* its subject matter "absolutely" rather than in a one-sided display, it is an essential property of immanent givenness [*der immanenten Gegebenheit*] to also give an absolute [*ein Absolutes zu geben*]" (Husserl 1976a, 102/79).[15] Whatever "the most cardinal difference that is given [*es gibt*], that between *consciousness* and *reality*," may be, it is nevertheless an "*intrinsic difference in the kind of givenness* [*der Gegebenheitsart*]"(Ibid., 96/74),[16] a difference referred to givenness, measured according to its norm and contained within its horizon. Givenness proves to be absolute because it relies on nothing else for its criterion, but all the rest is measured by reference to it. With each given, it is certainly a matter of a fact, of a fait accompli

[14] "Absolute Gegebenheit ist ein Letztes. […] Anderseits die Selbstgegebenheit überhaupt zu leugnen, das heißt alle letzte Norm, alles der Erkenntnis Sinn gebenden Grundmaß leugnen" (Husserl 1973, 61).

[15] [Translation modified to follow Marion's wording more closely. —Trans.] I will not retrace D. Franck's convincing demonstration (Franck 1981).

[16] [Translation modified to follow Marion's wording more closely. —Trans.]