

Article

The Trinitarian Revelation in Barth and Marion: From Dogmatic Theology to Radical Phenomenology of Revelation

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Abstract

The article analyzes the structure of revelation in the dogmatic theology of Karl Barth, as the source of French phenomenology, specifically in Jean-Luc Marion's latest works on revelation. The investigation aims to determine how the doctrine of the unpaired unity and unpaired distinction of the Revealer, the revelation, and the Revealedness can inform a phenomenology of revelation, suggesting its structure and form. As a direct consequence of this Barthian influence, the classic question regarding the purity of the boundaries of both disciplines arises. Can a phenomenon such as a Trinitarian revelation, a phenomenon that exceeds the finitude of cognitive reason, appear within the realm of *Evidenz*, or is it, instead, a direct inheritance of an article of faith that is then placed into phenomenology? A preliminary answer suggests that Barth's conception of the structure of revelation is not a static concept that cannot be thematized by phenomenology, but rather one that needs to be founded on the ground of experience. In this sense, dogmatic theology and the radical phenomenology of revelation can work together in unveiling the same phenomenon.

Keywords: Revelation; Revealer; Revealedness; phenomenology; theology; Trinity; Evidenz

1. Introduction

To speak about revelation, for both theology and Christian philosophy, is to speak about the ultimate foundation of faith and, therefore, about the source of what we can say about God in relation to our understanding. Consequently, sketching the structure of revelation is the task par excellence of theology—a task that can be simultaneously enriched by phenomenological description. Revelation, therefore, is an act whose origin and initiative lie not in the cognitive intentionality that apprehends the world under categories, but rather in the absolute givenness of the phenomenon of God, within a dynamic in which God has willed to be the God of humanity.¹

In this article, it is argued that the relationship between the dogmatic theology and radical phenomenology of revelation is neither contradictory nor mutually exclusive; rather, when applied to the same object, both illuminate the phenomenon from complementary perspectives. Dogmatic theology, represented in this case by the doctrine of trinitarian revelation maintained by Karl Barth in his work *Church Dogmatics* (Barth 2009a), points out the path through which the phenomenon of revelation gives itself to humanity; that is, a revelation whose structure necessarily implies the Revealer, the revelation, and Revealedness. On the other hand, the radical phenomenology of revelation,² represented by Jean-Luc Marion in his works *Givenness and Revelation* (Marion 2016) and *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere* (Marion [2020] 2024), allows for the anchoring within the ground of lived experience of the structures through which such a phenomenon appears in the life



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of consciousness. Thus, while dogmatics traces the meaning of the mystery by means of the article of faith, phenomenology provides the conditions of possibility that make its manifestation intelligible.

The mutual cooperation between phenomenology and dogmatic theology can be defined by the tension between phenomenal manifestation and divine self-revelation. The central point stated at the end of the article is that, if both disciplines are working on the same object, they are neither mutually exclusive nor contradictory but can cooperate in the unveiling of the same phenomenon. Tóth (2024) deepens this convergence between phenomenology and theology by exploring the Balthasarian roots of Jean-Luc Marion's proposal, demonstrating how Hans Urs von Balthasar's theological aesthetics anticipates Marion's phenomenal trinitarian model, where theology is resized through a phenomenology of givenness and the saturated phenomenon. For its part, Robert Woźniak (2023) provides the methodological key to articulate this dialog, demonstrating that radical phenomenology and dogmatic theology can rigorously cooperate in the disclosure of a shared object—grounding it in human experience through the hyperbolic horizon of charity—without losing their disciplinary specificity. Thus, this conceptual framework demonstrates that phenomenology and theology can work together to unfold the very intelligibility of Christian dogma.

Depending on the tradition in which we place ourselves, revelation can have different meanings. However, as a first approach, we agree with Hart that “something revealed is something disclosed or given to be known to someone which apart from the act of revealing would remain hidden, disguised and unknown.” (Hart 2000, p. 37). That is to say, it is indispensable that this free initiative exists on God's part so that humanity can know Him specifically in the way He has decided to show Himself. It cannot be discovered by the faculties of reason that know nature and the world, nor by imagination, nor by means of aesthetics or any other intentionality coming directly from us; rather, it must come from an *elsewhere* still unknown to those who have not received revelation.³

This is necessarily so because the essence of God and everything we can know about Him exceeds the categories of understanding and human possibilities in such a way that the experience of revelation must be absolutely saturated, thereby challenging the conditions of possibility for the very appearance of the phenomenon. However, the description of the structure of how Christian revelation is given has been portrayed by Barth in a manner so faithful to the unique experience of Christianity that it has served to inform French phenomenology on the path that a rigorous description of said phenomenon must take.

Since the act of revelation is an act that completely saturates the categories of understanding, this act must be understood not only as an event but also as a miracle. What is revealed is that which should remain absolutely hidden and impossible to grasp, unless it has been revealed by the one who possesses the knowledge of what is revealed. From the standpoint of phenomenology, we understand that this is an impossible phenomenon; yet, being impossible according to our intentionality does not mean it cannot occur. Rather, the horizon of givenness exceeds that of the categories of understanding, making it possible for the phenomenon to appear as a miracle.

This means that everything corresponding to the essence of God is unutterable and impossible for humanity, but through an act of revelation on God's part, it is miraculously deposited within the consciousness and heart of the community of believers. It is from this perspective of revelation as a miracle that an infinite truth can be grasped by a finite understanding, even if our comprehension of said truth remains imperfect and limited in this life, and with the important distinction that this knowledge is not an objectifying knowledge, such as that which we might have of worldly phenomena; rather, it always remains an ineffable experience. It is this experience of the ineffable that, in the first and

last instance, grounds the faith of the believer. God has revealed Himself in Christ through the Holy Spirit, not only to humanity as a whole, but also to the believer individually, in an experience that likewise passes through the subjective. Revelation is the light that illuminates the soul of the believer, reversing the process of darkening it had suffered due to its fallen condition. The epistemological deficiency that humanity possesses due to the Fall is reversed by the revealing action of God in an act that is both event and miracle.

2. The Trinitarian Revelation According to Barth: Revealer, Revelation and Revealedness

The doctrine of the Trinity is, for Barth, the head and the center of his entire dogmatic doctrine. Asking ‘who reveals Himself’ in the act of revelation implies going directly to Trinitarian doctrine. The rest of his theological doctrine depends on the answer that arises from this question. It is not merely one more aspect to be dealt with in his theology, but the cornerstone of his thought. Furthermore, this choice is neither arbitrary, involuntary, nor uncritical; rather, it stems from the desire to establish God Himself as the point of departure, thereby enabling any subsequent discourse on Scripture and tradition. Before beginning to speak about any aspect of theology, one must begin by first providing a clear conception of what Christianity understands by God in His revelation to humanity. The Trinity is the foundational dogma of all Christian doctrine.

Barth’s conception of Trinitarian revelation can be initially understood through the following statement: “God Himself in unimpaired unity yet also in unimpaired distinction is Revealer, Revelation, and Revealedness.” (CD I/1, §8, p. 295). In this formulation, Barth identifies the Triune God with the very act of revelation: not only as the subject who reveals, but also as the content and the efficacy of that revelation. This is the structure that Barth describes regarding Christian revelation. It is important to emphasize that this is not a construction, nor an approach, nor an abstract idea about revelation, but rather a description of what is strictly given to humanity and the Church by God. This is meant to reaffirm that we are not dealing with an interpretation of what revelation might be for Christianity; instead, it is the necessary structure that underlies the phenomenon of Christian revelation—that is to say, its essence. This is recognizable by anyone to whom God has been given, or who has received Him, or to whom God has been revealed through Christ. Furthermore, it is with Christ that Barth begins his description of this structure in his work *Church Dogmatics*. The Word of God is Christ, who is the self-revelation of God the Father among men; it was Christ, moreover, who promised the Holy Spirit. It is clear, therefore, that when we speak of the structure of revelation in Christianity, we are speaking of a Trinitarian revelation.

The first problem that Barth introduces regarding revelation is that it cannot be understood as one revelation among many others, whether existing or possible, but rather as the true and only one. Sacred Scripture challenges us through this character of uniqueness of revelation to call God by His name: “Yahweh in the Old Testament and Theos (θεός), or, concretely Kyrios (κύριος) in the New Testament.” (Ibid.). At this point, we consider that only the God who is true can be revealed, since revelation is an act of access to the truth; conversely, if the possibility existed for other gods to manifest themselves to human beings, we would be facing not the revelation of truth, but rather the illusion of something that attempts to pass itself off as the truth without being so. In one of his short postwar writings titled *The Christian Understanding of Revelation* (Barth 1954), Barth asserts that revelation in the Christian sense is not a contingent revelation. That is to say, it is not the kind of revelation that we might well have or might well not have without our salvation being affected; rather, it is indispensable for us to have it in order to attain salvation. It cannot be for a select few, as if it were the type of revelation addressed solely

to certain individuals with specific knowledge or who belong to a certain race, culture, or nation; instead, it is a revelation addressed to the entire human race. Christian revelation is universal and necessary for human salvation. At this point, it is evident that if any other form of revelation opposes what is true, universal, and necessary, it must absolutely be rejected as being contrary to the truth. Furthermore, as a direct consequence of this truth, it is evident that its structure conforms to what occurs in temporal human reality, which is why a phenomenological description that follows the Trinitarian structure is entirely coherent with what Barth proposes from theology.

We can pose the following questions: What is revealed? Who is revealed? What is the result of that revelation? We find the answer in one and the same God. For this reason, Barth affirms that “we must begin the doctrine of revelation with the doctrine of the triune God.” (CD I/1, §8, p. 296). If one wishes to understand the structure of revelation, it must be understood that it occurs as a Trinitarian revelation—that is to say, as a revelation that shows three persons in one and the same nature. How is each one shown? In a footnote of the same text, Barth points out that in the statement “God speaks,” we can see this structure in the subject, the predicate, and the object (Ibid., §9, pp. 296–97). Specifically, we are to see the Father in the subject of the sentence. It is He who begins the action, and it is important to clarify that He does so freely. In terms of revelation, He is the Revealer (*Offenbarer*); He is God insofar as He speaks. The Son is the very act of speaking—that is, the voice of God. It must be so because God does not communicate something other than Himself. The Son is God Himself insofar as He is spoken, and in that sense, He is the Revelation (*Offenbarung*). Finally, the object of what is spoken—that is, the content of what God says—is the Holy Spirit, which is to say, the Revealedness (*Offenbarsein*). The Spirit is Revealedness insofar as He makes God’s revelation possible, effective, and real.

It is important to note that God is Himself in His revelation; therefore, the term self-revelation implies that God is His own predicate, and there is no separation between what He is and how He reveals Himself. Indeed, the way He reveals Himself and the *what* is revealed in God are one and the same thing. However, Barth goes further. It is not only what God is regarding the *how* and the *what* of His revelation, but also in what He “creates and achieves in men.” (Ibid., p. 299). Every work of God in His relationship with man is part of His revelation in the form of the effect that transforms humanity in God by virtue of His Word. That is to say, answering the question of revelation implies seeing the footprint of God in humanity—not only in His commandments, but also in how those commandments transform those who obey them and punish those who reject them. Therefore, within one and the same event, we find the act of “revealing God and the event of revelation and its effect on man.” (Ibid.). It must be understood that this mystery represented by Trinitarian revelation emphasizes not only the unity of God Himself, but also His distinction. The Revealer remains identical and non-identical to the revelation and to the Revealedness.

At this point, and given that we have assumed that a distinction exists between the Revealer, revelation, and Revealedness, it is possible to pose the following questions: Is there something in the essence of the Father that is not shown by the Son? Does any essence remain veiled in the Spirit that is not shown by the Father or the Son? According to Barth, the answer is negative. If we compare it with the Kantian phenomenon/noumenon dichotomy, there is no “God-in-Himself” behind the revealed God. There is no structural gap—as in Kant—between what appears and what is, i.e., between God and His revelation; rather, the essence of the Father is shown in the revelation. Revelation does not communicate something about God; instead, God Himself is the content of that revelation. The Son, as the Revealed Word, does not show a part or portion of the Father, but rather shows the Father Himself, exhausting His essence in Him. However, it should be noted that He shows Him under a historical, concrete, and human form. There is no essence of the Father that is

metaphysically distinct from the Son, and He is nothing more than what the Son shows, although His essence is never exhausted by our intentionality. Nevertheless, the concrete form under which He is shown (human, humble, on the cross) implies a veiling—yet not a veiling of content, but a veiling in terms of form—that is to say, regarding the aspect under which He is revealed. Contrary to worldly logic, which would have expected to see the celestial God descend in His glory, He appears under the humble and simple aspect of the lamb, thereby representing a scandal to the religious reason that received Him.

On the other hand, the Spirit does not carry a remaining essence within Himself, but is completely united in essence with the Father and the Son, insofar as He is the event in which revelation occurs within us (Revealedness). The Spirit does not add anything new of His own accord; rather, He makes effective and real the revelation already given in the Son and the Father. The Spirit does not communicate a “beyond” of the Son and the Father; instead, He introduces us into the truth of the Son and the Father. Any claim to a revelation that goes beyond Christ is, in Barth, a rupture with Trinitarian dogma and, therefore, a mistaken way of understanding revelation.

This being said, it is then necessary to explain what the distinction of persons consists of in Trinitarian revelation. It does not consist of an ontological separation between two different registers of reality—as occurs in Kant with the distinction between phenomenon and noumenon—but rather consists of a distinction of aspects of one and the same act of revelation. In the act of revelation, the question “Who is revealed?” is answered by the Father; “What is revealed?” is answered by the Son; and “How is He revealed?” is answered by the Spirit. Distinction does not divide the essence of God; instead, it structures the event. When we say that the Father has made Himself known, it is because the Son has shown Him; when we say that the Son has made Himself present in our midst, it is because the Spirit has made it possible. Revelation under distinct aspects is nothing other than the essence of God expressed in distinct persons.

Anyone who receives Christian revelation receives a Trinitarian revelation, not only in terms of its content but also in terms of its structure. Whosoever sees the Son sees the Father as well and can only see Him in this manner through the openness made possible by the Spirit in the act of revelation. This form of revelation corresponds to God’s mode of existence: just as God Himself in His essence is expressed in three persons, His mode of revelation always expresses these three persons. It is this very expression of one and the same God in three distinct persons that allows God to become present in human history, being truly man and truly God simultaneously, without ceasing to be eternal or incorruptible. This hypostatic distinction of God within the Trinity is eternal and immutable, and, for this reason, revelation necessarily possesses this structure.

This distinction of persons within the Trinity, far from being a distinction that detracts from God’s perfection, is proof of the ontological richness of His divinity. God, in His glory, is not found in isolation, but rather in a relationship that expresses freedom for the other. This freedom consists of a perfect relationship among His persons, in which the divine essence is fulfilled by virtue of the eternal dynamics of perfect love. For this reason, there can be within Him alterity without separation, since the freedom to be Father, Son, and Spirit is the perfect expression of eternal love. The revelation of God to humanity occurs through the overflowing of this freedom for the other, in which God desires to show Himself in a Trinitarian structure; the Word He speaks to humanity is the very same Word He speaks eternally within the Trinitarian relationship of His glory.

Another important aspect regarding revelation consists in understanding that, in the Christian sense, this structure of revelation constitutes His essence. In *The Christian Understanding of Revelation*, Barth affirms that the Christian can answer the question of who God is in the following manner: “He is the subject who acts in His revelation. This act of

revelation is a token of His Being and the expression of His nature.” (Barth 1954, p. 209). This reinforces the stance that revelation, insofar as it is the expression of God’s essence to the human being, is a Trinitarian revelation. If revelation is the expression of His nature, and His nature is Trinitarian, revelation is necessarily Trinitarian. What lies behind the acts of God’s revelation is the Triune God, because God’s revelation and God Himself coincide, just as has been previously set forth.

3. The Trinitarian Revelation According to Jean-Luc Marion

The phenomenological development of revelation, understood as Trinitarian revelation, carried out by Jean-Luc Marion is found primarily in his works *Givenness and Revelation* and *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, in which he closely follows Barth regarding the structure of revelation. In them, one can see the direct influence of the structure of revelation described by Barth, as Marion clearly understands that Christian revelation is a Trinitarian revelation, and that every phenomenological description must comprehend this structure in order to be faithful to what is experienced in the encounter with God: the Father is revealed through the Son by the Holy Spirit. He directly affirms the following:

Revelation reveals the Trinity and, above all, it reveals it in a trinitarian way; the Trinity’s mode of uncovering remains so perfectly and integrally trinitarian, that the Trinity alone succeeds in revealing the Trinity, and wants only to reveal the Trinity itself. (Marion 2016, p. 99)

That is to say, not only is revelation Trinitarian, but its mode of manifestation is Trinitarian, which is why its structure is necessarily Trinitarian and cannot reveal anything other than the Trinity. In other words, revelation is Trinitarian not only in its content but also in the mode in which it appears: that which is revealed is identified with its mode of revealing itself. The unity of God in this sense does not exclude the multiplicity of persons, provided that unity in this sense is understood as a union among persons by means of communion. The unity of God does not correspond to unity according to arithmetic, which understands it as uniqueness according to number, but rather to unity according to union born out of communion. Unity does not forbid the multiplicity of persons, given that it is precisely this plurality that allows for true unity understood as communion (Ibid., pp. 100–1).

Marion insists that everything given by God as Trinitarian revelation resists objectification. It is evident that if we are dealing with a phenomenon that reveals the mystery, it cannot be given as an object of the world. For this reason, placing revelation within history is paradoxical, for indeed there are moments in history in which God reveals Himself, but they cannot be understood solely as historical moments without a transcendence that preserves the distance between the icon and the idol; rather, they must contain something non-objectifiable that remains forever incomprehensible. If something has been revealed in history in a Trinitarian manner, both the content and the mode remain forever outside the realm of objectivity.

Another relevant point that Marion notes is that we cannot describe the event of Trinitarian revelation from an immanent point of view (Ibid., p. 101); that is to say, as if we could understand it from the perspective of God Himself, for whom the communion of persons is in act. Rather, we must always view it from the only way it presents itself to us: as witnesses. For this reason, we must always look to the Father in Christ through the Spirit, and not attempt to begin directly with the Father, as if we could appropriate a certain hierarchy in the knowledge of revelation.

Therefore, following Barth regarding the structure of revelation, Jean-Luc Marion describes the phenomenon of Trinitarian revelation through the method of placing one’s gaze upon an icon. To do this, we must begin with the Son because, as Marion explains, the revelation of the Father reaches us when we recognize the Father in the Son. However,

whoever looks upon the visible face of the Son does not necessarily look upon the invisible face of the Father, for many looked upon Christ without being capable of seeing in Him the Son of God. In this sense, we can make a distinction between the face of Jesus as a merely worldly phenomenon and the face of Christ as a saturated phenomenon.

We can make a distinction between the common phenomena we encounter in the world and phenomena such as those that occur in revelation. Common phenomena are repeatable and can be captured by our intentionality. In that sense, they constitute possible phenomena, insofar as they occur within the limits that our intentionality and the I permit. Therefore, these phenomena are rich in intentionality and poor in terms of their givenness, for they appear in accordance with the conditions of possibility imposed by the cognizing intentionality and not outside of it. This type of phenomenon is what we capture when we view the Son under His merely human aspect, as a phenomenon of the world.

However, when we contemplate Christ as an icon of the Father, we are facing an impossible phenomenon—one that is not reduced to the conditions of possibility of the common appearing of the phenomenon, but rather exceeds and saturates them. This phenomenon is rich in terms of intuition but poor in terms of intentionality, because what is given far exceeds what can be captured by intentionality. Christ would be the saturated phenomenon par excellence regarding His divinity, and this saturated condition can be either seen or ignored by those who knew Him or heard about Him.

Another condition that determines the apprehension of the phenomenon of Christ as a saturated phenomenon is the horizon within which one situates oneself to contemplate Him. From the common horizon of beings and Being, one can contemplate only natural and common phenomena. Marion explains that the horizon under which we can contemplate Christ as an icon of the Father is the hyperbolic horizon of charity. This condition of possibility for receiving revelation is what could stand in the way of the gaze of those who saw Him as a man but did not recognize Him as God. The common horizon in which the gaze moves is that which recognizes beings within Being, and through which we have an approach toward natural beings. However, the hyperbolic horizon of charity allows the gaze to be elevated in the contemplation of impossible phenomena that saturate intentionality.

However, this contemplation of Christ as a saturated phenomenon would not be possible if it were not for the very action of the Holy Spirit, who transforms the gaze through a process that Marion designates as anamorphosis. The common gaze cannot directly see the divinity of Christ; rather, it must be led by the Spirit, who transforms individual intentionality by reinscribing it within the intentionality of God. The gaze must be placed by the Spirit into a position from which it can view Christ as an icon of the Father through what Marion denotes as anamorphosis:

Anamorphosis, or the arrangement wherein the gaze of man would be placed at the exact site required by the icon itself for it to be recognized in full manifestation; it would be necessary to be placed at the axis of the iconic gaze, which, suddenly and all at once, comes forth from the face of Christ at last apprehended as Son, and thus as the manifestation of the Father. Only the Spirit can place the gaze of a man at this point of anamorphosis: the Spirit “guides” and orients, “leads” the human gaze and places it at the precise point where (like a two-dimensional image that, under a precise angle of view with the light reflected just so, suddenly makes the third dimension spring forth), in depth, its “optic power”, its “illuminating power”, once and for all, “puts into an icon” the visible face and makes “the supreme beauty of the vision of the Archetype” burst forth. The Holy Spirit puts on stage, or in view, or in short uncovers and brings forth the filial glory of the Father. (Ibid., pp. 108–9)

This transformation of the gaze reveals the mystery of the invisible God that is found in the Son, the visible icon of the Father. However, faith is here a condition of openness, for Marion notes: “But ‘there are some of you that do not believe’ (Jn. 6:64), or in other words, who, failing to accomplish the anamorphosis with their own gaze, cannot see the anamorphosis accomplished by Christ.” (Ibid., 87).

This gaze, therefore, reaches us from elsewhere—not from ourselves, but from God. It is a transformation of the gaze that implies a detachment from one’s own intentionality in order to be led by the gaze of God elsewhere: “It is thus necessary to think from elsewhere that which comes to us only in order to make us see and live from elsewhere than our own point of view.” (Marion [2020] 2024, pp. 275–76). This anamorphosis consists of being able to look as God looks at Himself; that is to say, being able to appropriate the gaze of God so that the truths thus revealed can be contemplated by a finite intellect, just as Marion explains:

It is enough to believe it to see it, for the anamorphosis of faith repeats the trinitarian anamorphosis that makes Jesus appear as the Christ, Son to the Father. But “there are some of you that do not believe” (Jn. 6:64), or in other words, who, failing to accomplish the anamorphosis with their own gaze, cannot see the anamorphosis accomplished by Christ. (Marion 2016, p. 87)

One’s own gaze is incapable by itself of seeing Christ in His divinity—that is to say, of apprehending Him as a saturated phenomenon while being the visible icon of the invisible God. This way of seeing Christ as the icon of God means seeing Him as God the Father sees in Him, a movement that would be impossible within us if it were not for the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the concept of revelation in Marion consists of looking—by means of the Holy Spirit—through the gaze of God at Christ, who shows us the Father: “To accomplish Revelation would mean to see the economy in which God is revealed not only from our point of view but through a radically Trinitarian anamorphosis, as God sees it. To see Jesus as the Father sees him—as the Son.” (Marion [2020] 2024, p. 275).

Therefore, returning to the initial thesis according to which the structure of revelation outlined by Barth serves as the foundation for the phenomenology of revelation in Jean-Luc Marion, we can clearly see certain points. In the first place, the idea that all revelation for Christianity is a Trinitarian revelation is a central idea that Jean-Luc Marion inherits from Barth. Within one and the same act of revelation, we see three persons in one and the same God, and the idea that this must be the foundation of all our research on revelation is clearly inherited from Barth that we find in Marion’s work.

In the second place, the structure of revelation expressed by Barth, according to which God presents Himself as the Revealer, Revelation, and Revealedness, is maintained in Marion’s work. According to Marion, Christ is the saturated phenomenon par excellence capable of sustaining the hyperbolic gaze of charity, Him being the revelation. By seeing Christ, the perfect icon of God, we see the Father, the Revealer (Jn. 14:9: ‘Whoever has seen me has seen the Father’). In order to confess the Son of God as God Himself, the action of the Holy Spirit is necessary, who through anamorphosis transforms our gaze so that we can see God as He sees Himself, Him being the Revealedness.

In the third place, it is important to note that Marion not only takes the Barthian structure of revelation but introduces it into the horizon of phenomenology. There are conditions of possibility that allow a revelation such as the Trinitarian one to appear. First, let us take the conditions of possibility of the phenomenon of Christ as the icon of the Father. For Christ to appear as the visible figure of the invisible God, He must appear within the hyperbolic horizon of charity, which allows one to see beyond His humanity. This hyperbolic horizon of charity is nothing other than the affective disposition of the heart which, open to charity, allows the revealed truth to be given to the one acting as a

witness—thereby showing that he who does not have charity cannot see the Father in the Son. Second, the structure of a phenomenon such as that of Christ as the icon of the Father is that of an absolutely saturated phenomenon. This phenomenon is rich in terms of its givenness and poor in terms of intentionality. Since there is an excess of givenness in the intuition, intentionality is left absolutely empty, this being an impossible phenomenon. Third, there must be an accommodation of the gaze, a transformation of our intentionality by the intentionality of God in which the Holy Spirit allows us to look at the Son just as the Father looks at Him, in what Marion designates as anamorphosis.

Therefore, Jean-Luc Marion does not merely take Barth's structure and reproduce it exactly as he receives it from dogmatic theology; rather, he interprets it in the light of phenomenology, offering a description of the invariable structures that allow for its appearing. Describing the necessary structures of a phenomenon is nothing other than situating that phenomenon within the life of consciousness, showing its deep meaning and its effectiveness in the world. However, it is important to note that Marion does not take this structure directly from purely rational criteria—such as the criteria of the natural sciences or other common phenomena of the world—but rather does so from dogmatic theology, which necessarily involves faith. This raises the question of whether we are dealing with a merely phenomenological description or whether a leap exists between one discipline and the other. To what extent can we remain strictly within the phenomenological realm when describing a phenomenon such as Trinitarian revelation?

4. The Boundaries and Intersections of Dogmatic Theology and Phenomenology of Revelation

The primary question we ask from the perspective of phenomenology is whether or not a description of a phenomenon such as the Trinity fits within the realm of Evidenz. To begin with, Jean-Luc Marion will call this phenomenon an impossible phenomenon, a paradox, in which is shown “the visible icon of the invisible God.” (Marion 2016, p. 90). This question arises because, undoubtedly, that which is revealed must be given in some way to intuition, for otherwise there would be nothing. Insofar as it is given, a phenomenological description of what is the case is possible. Therefore, phenomenology must show the conditions through which a phenomenon such as Trinitarian revelation is given. It is worth clarifying that the movement Marion makes from Trinitarian dogma to the phenomenon that is given to consciousness implies passing from the mere contemplation of a content of faith to the description of a phenomenon that, although it does not belong completely to the world—hence Marion's recourse to the concept “elsewhere”—it must be given to people who inhabit the world; that is to say, it participates to a certain extent in the worldly.

What is commonly adduced as a critique of the phenomenology of religion is that it intrusively takes elements from dogmatic theology, dogmatically introducing elements that do not belong directly to phenomenology and thereby distorting both disciplines. By proposing that Christian revelation must be understood as Trinitarian revelation, it might appear that Marion is making this leap between disciplines, confusing their respective spheres of competence. However, it is important to delve deeper into this critique to determine whether this is the case, for it is possible to conceive of another alternative according to which both disciplines can deal with one and the same phenomenon from different methodologies, enriching one another.

While theology provides us with a profound explanation of the contents of faith that we have inherited from tradition, Scripture, and the Magisterium of the Church, phenomenology describes the invariable structures through which the very appearing of the experiences that ground such dogmas is made possible. How it is possible for a phenomenon such as Trinitarian revelation to appear as possible—a phenomenon that

is, in fact, impossible for the life of consciousness—constitutes the primary task of the phenomenology of revelation.

However, the task of phenomenology does not end there, given that the description of these invariable structures of appearing not only establishes that appearing is possible—that is to say, that we can think of a phenomenon such as the Trinity—but also that making them visible is to make the phenomenon itself appear. That is to say, it is not entirely correct to accuse phenomenology of simply borrowing a dogma from theology in order to thematize it with phenomenological concepts; rather, its labor goes further. To the one who reflects upon the phenomenon, the phenomenon itself presents itself as necessary, and they can see it clearly. Making the phenomenon visible is to unveil the necessary structures that allow for its appearing within consciousness, and by doing this, the phenomenon is laid bare, showing its deep essence. By doing this, others can see more clearly what the phenomenon gives of itself and can know its essence more precisely. They can see aspects that were not necessarily present prior to the description.

From a theological standpoint, a critique can also be raised against the phenomenology of religion that attempts to describe a phenomenon such as Trinitarian revelation, according to which any attempt to theorize or rationally explain the mystery is an idolatrous way of exhibiting God—for the true God cannot be thematized, captured, or reduced to the conceptual. Phenomenological philosophy, being a rational method that searches for the invariable structures of phenomenon, is a rational discipline grounded in conceptual evidence. A phenomenon such as the Trinity is a phenomenon that, by its very nature, resists all human comprehension, escaping any rational theorization that seeks to comprehend it. Rational explanation never reaches the true God, but rather returns an idol of reason itself, which, far from showing the essence of the icon, veils it beneath the appearance of the rational.

With respect to this critique, it is important to emphasize that Jean-Luc Marion insists that the incomprehensibility of God must be maintained at all times in the process of theorizing about His appearance. Indeed, the essence of God must always remain uncomprehended by a finite intellect, and our effort should not be directed toward comprehension but rather toward understanding “how we must enter and remain within a proper incomprehensibility—since if it were to become comprehensible, it would no longer be about God.” (Marion [2020] 2024, p. 256). That is to say, whenever we deal with God—whether from philosophy or from theology—it must always be done from a position of incomprehension, without attempting to provide ourselves with a conceptualization that replaces the true God with our own reason.

Faced with a statement such as this, one wonders whether his research at this point is phenomenological or if it becomes, rather, theological. What philosophical value can proper incomprehensibility regarding something possibly have? Its primary value lies in achieving a proper description while preserving a non-idolatrous gaze before the mystery of the revealed. It does not attempt to replace revelation with concepts of reason, but rather to describe it faithfully, maintaining the appropriate distance to contemplate the icon.

Therefore, when we speak of Trinitarian revelation, we do not intend to account for a knowledge or model that explains the Trinity or allows for its appearing, but rather for the possibility of apprehending God in His incomprehensibility—that is to say, respecting His incomprehensible essence and remaining in the most correct manner before the mystery, without expecting to provide an explanation that satisfies intentionality or the Ego. Instead, what is expected is for these conditions to be overcome and saturated, so that one maintains a proper phenomenological attitude before the mystery. In this type of experience, intentionality is always left empty. This is the way in which we can contemplate the icon, in contrast to the idolatrous posture, which exposes us to a rational or visible idea in which

we can see God in a positive manner, as if He were an entity that we know and that we can categorize.

Finally, it remains to be discussed what relationship may exist between phenomenology and theology in a scenario in which dogmatic theology informs phenomenology on the path to follow regarding revelation. Is there some degree of hierarchy between them? Can they contribute to one another in the disclosure of one and the same object without mixing and without losing their specificity? Must one have priority over the other?

First of all, it is important to define the starting point of both disciplines in order to determine what each can contribute to the object of study in question. Philosophy must undoubtedly have the human as its starting point. That which we initially face is clearly a human experience. Even if we think the divine, we must think it from the human, for every experience of God is a human experience. The phenomenological description concerns the structures that make possible the appearing of the phenomenon of revelation. While it is true that the phenomenon of revelation points toward something that is completely Other, this phenomenon must appear to consciousness. In this sense, the phenomenology of revelation always remains within human limits, even when its object transcends what is properly human.

Although faith must be the condition of possibility for the appearing of the revealed phenomenon, the horizon within which such appearing can take place is the hyperbolic one of charity; the phenomenon that appears is completely saturated according to intentionality; the primordial emphasis of said phenomenon is on givenness and not on the Ego; and the gaze capable of capturing it must be transformed by anamorphosis. Even so, all these conditions are conceived from the human perspective. Each of the persons of the Trinity appears under the conditions that Marion has determined, even though his notion of Trinitarian revelation is inherited from Barth's dogmatic theology. The experience of the revealed phenomenon is always a human experience and, in that sense, an experience describable in phenomenological terms, rather than thinking that the divine comes in some way detached from the human. An explanation of the divine that leaves aside the human is a dubious explanation, as Falque asserts:

Nothing is more to be feared, in fact, than the kinds of angelism that tend to confuse the human with the divine in an excess of divinization and any verbalism (a derivation of conceptualism) that is generally satisfied with abstract notions that never redirect us to some lived experience. (Falque [2013] 2016, p. 122)

Revelation, therefore, necessarily passes through the human, being a phenomenon that can be explained in philosophical terms without necessarily abandoning the realm of *Evidenz*; thus, an overly divinizing explanation of the revealed phenomenon, in which the realm of the experiential is cast aside, distorts the explanation of what is actually the case.

The starting point of dogmatics, on the other hand, is the viewpoint of the divine—that which comes from above—and which is grounded in the authority of Scripture and tradition. Since the truths expressed from this starting point exceed rational comprehension, the method by which one proceeds in the grounding of truths must go from the dogmatic toward the demonstrative. The articles of faith are taken as the foundation of all argumentation, and one subsequently proceeds to deduce the truths derived from them.

When theology asserts that the structure of revelation is expressed in Trinitarian terms, this truth has dogma as its starting point, and not reason. However, the fact that the notion of Trinitarian revelation is inherited from dogmatic theology does not mean that the phenomenological treatment of this phenomenon is incompatible with the method and sphere of the competence of phenomenology. Phenomenology explains dogma in experiential terms, connecting the expressed content of faith with the direct experience of its appearing within the life of consciousness. In this way, for every object that

theology thematizes from above, there is a phenomenological grounding of the underlying experience that makes it possible, just as Falque expresses:

Finitude thus serves as the beginning of philosophy as well as theology insofar as no theologoumenon has any meaning outside of a lived experience or a philosophical “existential”, which gives it meaning: for example, the body for the Incarnation, anguish for Gethsemane, eros for the Eucharist, birth for the Resurrection, wandering for sin, childhood for the Kingdom. In sum, it should be clear that a phenomenology from below precedes and grounds any theology from above. (Ibid., p. 124)

The task of theology is certainly not foreign to that of phenomenology; on the contrary, they are closely related. As we have seen, both can cooperate in the disclosure of one and the same phenomenon. The difference lies not in the object of study, for both can thematize the same object, but rather in the starting point through which they access said object: one from below, taking the human as its limit and horizon, and the other from above, taking as its starting point the absolutely Other that reveals itself as mystery.

The structure of Trinitarian revelation, therefore, is established by dogmatic theology as the essence of what is revealed in the Christian religion, but it is grounded in terms of its experiential content by the radical phenomenology of revelation, which shows the invariable conditions through which this phenomenon can appear to consciousness. While dogmatic theology illuminates the path for us to understand the structure of revelation, phenomenology grounds the conditions necessary for the appearing of Trinitarian revelation in the soil of experience.

5. Conclusions

Although Marion and Falque represent divergent paths within the phenomenology of revelation, particularly regarding the role of human finitude versus pure givenness, both emphasize lived experience to offer an explanation of theological truths. The divergence between both authors lies primarily in the predominance of finitude and the human in Falque, whereas Marion clearly argues that revelation implies an elsewhere that is not entirely comprehensible to the human.

Even so, it is clear that the task of phenomenology consists of describing the conditions of possibility of a phenomenon that, from the standpoint of dogmatic theology, remains unexplained regarding its human possibility. While it is true that dogmatic theology establishes the point of arrival toward which phenomenological description is directed—deriving its authority from elsewhere (revelation must be understood as a trinitarian revelation because that is how God showed Himself to humanity)—explaining how it is possible for such a phenomenon to appear to the life of consciousness remains the task of phenomenology. In this way, phenomenology brings closer to our human understanding what remains unexplained in dogmatic theology, and in this sense, phenomenology facilitates the understanding of what might otherwise seem concealed and distant.

On the other hand, phenomenology depends on theology to be able to problematize or thematicize what exceeds intentionality; otherwise, it could not know that revelation is a trinitarian revelation. If not for dogma, phenomenology would remain ignorant of this structure; hence, it depends on theology to describe the conditions of possibility of the phenomenon. This does not imply a subordination of one to the other, precisely because both can thematicize the same phenomenon while respecting their respective starting points: in the case of theology, its truth comes from the revelation of Scripture and tradition, whereas phenomenology describes the phenomenon within the limits of the primordial, the life of consciousness, and *Evidenz*.

Therefore, to think that phenomenology must maintain a subordinate relationship to theology under the scholastic formula *philosophia ancilla theologiae* is a common error that restricts the thematicization of the divine to the strictly dogmatic. The revealed phenomenon implies that phenomenological description can thematicize phenomena that previously remained strictly within the realm of dogma, such as the Eucharist, the Triduum, the Flesh, prayer, and other elements inherited from religious tradition.

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Notes

- ¹ In his essay “The Humanity of God”, Barth uses this expression to show that there is a free disposition on God’s part to approach man so that he may know Him. He is a God who turns toward the human being and intercedes for him, not a far-off, distant, and absolutely Other God. On Barth’s broader theological trajectory, see also Barth (1960, 2009b), von Balthasar (1972), Thompson (1991), Torrance (2000), Webster (2000), Williams (1979), and Woodard-Lehman (2017).
- ² The concept “radical” used to refer to Jean-Luc Marion’s phenomenology of revelation has been taken from Adam Graves’ work *The Phenomenology of Revelation in Heidegger, Marion, and Ricoeur* (Graves 2021). Through this concept, Graves distinguishes the type of phenomenology of revelation developed by Marion and Heidegger from hermeneutic phenomenology of revelation. Radical is understood as a phenomenology of revelation that is prior to all objectivity, theoretical reflection, and linguistic or historical mediation, whereas hermeneutics understands revelation in front of the text within the interpretive exercise of theological truth. For Marion’s overall development of givenness, charity, and saturated phenomena, see Marion ([1997] 2002a, 2002b, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2019).
- ³ The concept *elsewhere* is developed by Jean-Luc Marion in his work *D’ailleurs, la révélation: Contribution à une histoire critique et à un concept phénoménal de la révélation*; for this study, the English translation will be used (Marion [2020] 2024). In this text, Marion points out that revelation neither originates from nor is controlled by the subject or reason, but rather takes place from an *elsewhere* that disrupts the customary frameworks of epistemology and phenomenology. For a broader understanding of the concept *elsewhere*, see especially chapters 19 and 20 of the aforementioned work. For further context on theological-phenomenological debates regarding finitude and revelation, see Falque ([2004] 2012), Koci (2020), and Lacoste ([2008] 2018).

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