Jnanadeepa

Pune Journal of Religious Studies
ISSN 2249-1503
www.punejournal.in

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo. 4264819

Stable URL: http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo. 4264819

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Abstract: The second half of twentieth century has generally been referred to as 'postmodern.' The term 'postmodern' and its derivatives like postmodernism and postmodernity refer to a movement "at once fashionable and elusive". They reflect a shared sense of an end or at least the decline of some structure called 'modernism' that had been reigning supreme in the West for several centuries (Smith 1996: 3). They envelop many a discipline of knowledge, pattern of culture, expression of art, media of communication, etc. Beyond these vague characterizations when scholars and writers try to define the nature of postmodernism, they begin by first expressing their inability to carry out the task adequately.

Keywords: Postmodernity, God-Talk, Heidegger, Metaphysics.

Cited as:

Perumalil, Augustine. (2002). God-Talk Beyond Metaphysics (Version 1.0). Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies, January 2002 (5/1), 81-96. http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo. 4264819

2002-01-05 | Updated on Nov 10, 2020

JPJRS 5/1 (2002) 81-96

God-Talk Beyond Metaphysics

The Dawn of Postmodernism and the Decline of Metaphysics

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The second half of twentieth century has generally been referred to as 'postmodern.' The term 'postmodern' and its derivatives like postmodernism and postmodernity refer to a movement "at once fashionable and elusive" (Sarup 1993: 153). They reflect a shared sense of an end or at least the decline of some structure called 'modernism' that had been reigning supreme in the West for several centuries (Smith 1996: 3). They envelop many a discipline of knowledge, pattern of culture, expression of art, media of communication, etc. Beyond these vague characterizations when scholars and writers try to define the nature of postmodernism, they begin by first expressing their inability to carry out the task adequately (Featherstone 1988: 195; Zukin 1988: 431).

A promising way of attempting a definition of postmodernism is by stating that it is a critique of or reaction to modernism. Modernity attracts strong criticism because in it the subject becomes the arbiter of truth and the world becomes the 'object.' Scott succinctly summarizes the logic of modernism when he writes, "Modernism stood for the logic of domination and planetary imperialism that lead to the subjugation not only of nature but of people as well. Even God is not spared by the power-hungry and domineering reason and its subject-centered conceptual enterprise" (see Scott 1999). Many in the later part of the twentieth century found the assumptions of modernism unacceptably alien to human nature. Nietzsche condemns this situation with two phrases, namely, "the death of God," and "the decadence of reason." He pleads for a time when intuition and art will reign supreme and the rule of nonsense, chance, fate, the contingent, the unpredictable, instinct, appearance, the hegemony of the surface and faithfulness to the earth will be restored, thus initiating with Heidegger the move towards postmodernism. Heidegger goes to the extent of saying that, "Thinking begins only when we have come to know that reason, glorified for centuries, is the most stiff-necked adversary of thought." (cited in Puthenpurackal 2000:104). In postmodernism, reason, glorified for centuries, is thus exposed as the most bigoted adversary of thought.

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Inspired by Nietzsche, Heidegger and other critics of modernism, postmodern thinkers are convinced that the continental philosophy has irrefutably demonstrated the end of metaphysics. It is claimed that with the advent of postmodernism "metaphysics and metaphysical thinking get exposed for what they are," and that "grand narratives and system building ...have lost their value" (Scott) This seems to be what Merold Westphal had in mind when he claimed that "postmodernism replaces Nietzsche's announcement of the death of God with an announcement of the end of philosophy" (Westphal 1998: 583).

The theological import of postmodernity

Traditionally, philosophical theology was the investigation of the being and nature of God without explicitly appealing to the truths of Revelation. The end of metaphysics and of system building is generally believed to have great import for traditional and contemporary theological systems which have historically relied heavily upon metaphysics in forming a view of the nature and necessary attributes of God (Scott). If reason, metaphysical thinking and grand narratives, where God-talk was secure, are discredited, what about God who was supposed to be the ultimate point of reference of all rational thinking? For some, the end of metaphysics signified the end of traditional theological systems as well. That probably is what Nietzsche and others had in mind when they, having claimed to demonstrate the implausibility of the claims of metaphysics, claimed that "God" is dead.

To avoid this consequence, some theologians have questioned posmodernity's claim (a claim having its foundation in Hume, Kant and Nietzsche) of the end of metaphysics. But more sophisticated engagements have acknowledged the problems raised by anti-metaphysicians, but refused to accept their conclusion regarding the end of philosophical theology. Postmodern theologians, while accepting the claims of postmodernity regarding the unreliability of metaphysics, have clarified that what is made untenable by postmodern philosophy is not the discourse about God as such, but certain types of discourse tied to certain metaphysical assumptions. They have, then, sought to find space for God-talk between the extremes of theism and atheism and beyond grand systems (Westphal 1998: 553).

One such attempt tries to resurrect the negative theology tradition of Pseudo-Dionysius (also known as Denys), and Meister Eckhart. It attempts to avoid the extremes of unmitigated absolutism of rationalism, on the one side, and rank skepticism on the other, by a vigorous denial of absolute knowledge, but without subscribing to the critical negations of' postmodern philosophy. A second candidate is the a/ theology of Mark C. Tayor, which seeks to take theological discussion beyond the simple opposition of theism and atheism, but without taking the mystical turn. Taylor thinks of theology as "a permeable membrane that forms a border where fixed boundaries disintegrate," where the "traditional polarities between which Western theology has been suspended are inverted and sub-

verted" (Taylor 1984: 95, cited in Scott 1999). Finally, Jean-Luc Marion seeks to free theological discourse from the horizon of all metaphysical discussion, including Heidegger's own postmodern analysis of Being. His significantly titled work, God Without Being is not insinuating that the God 'without being' does not exist, but an attempt to work out an understanding of God through means other than ontological categories such as Being. In God Without Being, acclaimed as a classic work in postmodern theology with a sustained critique of Heidegger's ontology, Marion attempts to bring out the absolute freedom of God with regard to all determinations, including the fact of Being and offer a contemporary perspective on the nature of God.

This paper intends to explore the postmodern evaluation of traditional theistic systems, focusing predominantly on the writings of Jean-Luc Marion, a leading Catholic philosopher and one of the foremost pupils of Jacques Derrida. Our aim here is to arrive at a brief but meaningful overview of postmetaphysical approach to theological reflection using the writings of Jean-Luc Marion for a case study. In his masterful work, God Without Being, an essay written at the border between philosophy and theology, Marion launches a profound offensive against the tradition of metaphysics in general, and more specifically, to the related field of philosophical theology. Marion claims that God must no longer be thought of in terms of the traditional category "Being," or "causa sui," for that reduces God to an all too human concept which he calls "Dieu." When we think of God in these terms, in a sense, a violence is done to God and our understanding of God, for we seriously delimit that which by nature is indeterminable.

Heidegger's rejection of theiology in favor of faith

A work of philosophical postmodernism whose bearing on Marion's theology is most direct is Heidegger's critique of "the onto-theological constitution of metaphysics." To examine whether or not metaphysics is a reliable tool for the theologian, Heidegger found it necessary to distinguish between theology and theiology[1] Theology, he suggested, is a matter of faith, whereas theiology, also called onto-theo-logy, is an attempt to obtain cognitive insight into the divine, into Dasein or Prime Being through philosophical reflection. As a philosophical reflection that seeks explanation and definition, it stands in stark opposition to both faith and theology that relies upon faith.

On the distinction between theiology and faith or theology Heidegger writes:

> If I were yet to write a theology...then the word 'Being' would not occur in it. Faith does not need the thought of Being. When faith has recourse to this thought, it is no longer faith... I believe that Being can never be thought as the ground and essence of God, but that nevertheless the experience of God and of his manifestedness, to the extent that the latter can indeed meet man, flashes in the dimension of Being, which in no way signifies that Being might be regarded as a possible predicate for God. On this point one

would have to establish completely new distinctions and delimitations. (Cited in Marion 1991: 61)

Here we may profitably note Heidegger's unwillingness to conceptually equate God with Being and to employ the term "Being" in discussions of God. According to Scott, this unwillingness clearly derives from what Heidegger sees as a diametrical opposition betwen philosophical reflection and faith. According to Heidegger, somewhere along its history, theology misunderstood the unique nature of its task and rather than pursuing the "interpretation of man's being toward God," it resorted to discussions of the Being of "God" (Scott 1999). As Marion notes, Christian theology does not have to do with "God" as defined by philosophy, but with faith in the Crucified, a fact that only faith receives and conceives (1991: 65) This fact alone is the positum of theology, the "science of faith." The possession of such a positum allows Heidegger to deem theology an ontic science with the same standing as chemistry or mathematics, distinct from the sole ontological science, philosophy, which alone focuses on the analysis of Dasein, Being itself.

While theology has to do with the fact of faith in the Crucified, theiology or onto-theo-logy discourses upon "God" and formulates divine names without having recourse to faith. The more precisely theiology attempts to define the divine names, such as Prime Mover, Efficient Cause, Necessary Being, "God as morality" (Kant, Fichte, Nietzsche), "God as causa sui" (Descartes, Spinoza), the more such names lend themselves to the death of God. For, on the one hand, these concepts fail to compel their audience to believe in God, and on the other hand, these precise concepts proposed for theoretical explanation invite rigorous criticism and lead ultimately to blasphemy. To use Heidegger's own words:

> A proof for the existence of God can be constructed by means of the most rigorous formal logic and yet prove nothing, since a god who must permit his existence to be proved in the first place is ultimately a very ungodly god. The best such proofs of existence can yield is blasphemy. (cited in Marion 1991: 64)

Having distinguished theology from theiology or onto-theo-logy, Heidegger treats the latter with undisguised disrespect. He remarks that in onto-theo-logy "the deity can come into philosophy only insofar as philosophy, of its own accord and by its own nature, requires and determines that and how the deity enters into it" (Heidegger 1969: 56 cited in Westphal 1998: 584). In other words, a tradition that stretches at least from Aristotle to Hegel uses God as a means to its own ends; as a resource in the service of its project of rendering the whole of being intelligible to human understanding, which is nothing short of blasphemy.

Heidegger, therefore, advocates faith, which must abandon the God of philosophy, God as causa sui. The object of this "God-less thinking" is perhaps closer to the divine God. For Heidegger it is more open to Him than onto-theo-logy would like to admit (see Heidegger 1969: 72 and Marion 1991: 35).

Marion's rejection of theiology and theology in favor of Agape

Marion fully agrees with Heidegger's critique of theiology. Drawing upon an Heideggerian-inspired notion of the phenomenological *Destruktion*, Marion maintains that God must be thought outside the ontological difference and outside the very question of Being itself. In so doing, we free ourselves from an idolatry wherein we reduce God to our own all too narrow conceptual schemes. To avoid idolatry Marion urges us to abandon the terms of theiology and to think of God in the light of St. John's pronouncement that "God is Love" (1 Jn 4,8), which he believes has not been thought through in the metaphysical tradition. Thinking of God as 'Love' will lead the philosopher to a more accurate understanding of God as unlimited giver/gift, and liberate Him from the limitations of theiology.

Marion argues that it is an error to conceive God within the domain of Being. God is comprehended neither as a being nor as Being, nor by any essence. He agrees with Denys and Nietzsche that it is not possible to approach God with concepts (Marion 1991: 106). Among the divine names none exhausts God or offers a grasp or a comprehension of Him. The sole function of the divine names such as Being and causa sui is to manifest this impossibility. Thinking of the being of God in these terms results in a limited conceptual understanding of God. By our concept of God being the source of His own being, as self-caused cause, God becomes an undifferentiated unity and His transcendence becomes severely limited. The thought behind describing God as causa sui was to create a space wherein God transcends finite human reason. However, in making God so reliant upon Himself we are left with a "God who is essentially unrelated to us except for the fact that we know that God is the cause of His own Being. In our concept of God as causa sui, God becomes unthinkable as He really is" (Calcagno 2001). If God is placed in the domain of Being, He becomes thinkable, an idol; "it becomes thinkable to release oneself from it" (Marion 1991:3) This, according to Marion, is vanity.

When we conceive objects, people and God, we determine them by our own conceptual understanding of them. In attempting to conceive God, we categorize or give names to God – names which are essentially restricted to human conceptual understanding. In the Five Ways, wherein Saint Thomas repeatedly refers to God as "id quod omnes nominunt," Marion finds him doing precisely this, i.e., naming God conceptually, idolatrously. Marion insists that things, especially God, are not necessarily and absolutely determined by our conceptual understanding of them. Things are given to us prior to our conceptual understanding of them. "They have an originary being unto themselves distinct but somehow knowable by us," (Calcagno 2001) which is not grasped by concepts. This implies that the metaphysical names imposed on God reflect purely metaphysical functions of "God" and to that extent hide the mystery of God as such. "Under the conceptual names of 'God' only metal 'idols' emerge, imposed on a God who is still to be encountered" (Marion

1991: xxi) For Marion the "death of God" signifies the failure of all the metaphysical concepts of "God."

The "death of God," however, is not the absolute end of all God-talk. In "the death of God" Marion sees only the death of the moral God of theiology. It is only the moral God who is hit with nihilism when "the highest values are devalued" (Marion 1991:30). Marion notices that religions do not think of God starting from the cause or within the theoretical space defined by metaphysics, or even starting from the concept but indeed starting from God alone, grasped to the extent that he inaugurates by himself the knowledge in which he yields himself – reveals himself. The divine God is infinitely above that First Cause and Prime Mover known to philosophers. Nihilism, therefore would have no hold on "God," since God is not exhausted in the moral domain. "The death of God" leaves intact, even more opens and provokes, the coming of the "new gods." Thus the death of God is valid only as the death of the idol of the moral God, since beyond this there is the dawn of the divine (Marion 1991: 37)

The "death of God," therefore, marks the end of theiology and allows the emergence of a God who is free from onto-theo-logy (Marion 1991: xxi). Marion pleads for this liberation of God from the sway of onto-theo-logy. To liberate God from onto-theo-logy, Heidegger had distinguished theology, the ontic science which dealt with our experience of the divine, from theiology, an ontological science, the science of Being. Marion thinks that even this track of Heidegger would not help us in liberating God; for, due to "an irreducible ontological dependence," Heidegger's theology fails to escape the critique aimed at theiology (cf. Scott 1999). Marion recognizes that even when we release God from the constraints of onto-theo-logy, Being (i.e., thought as such, without its metaphysical figure) is still being imposed on Him (Marion 1991: xxi). Marion, therefore, argues that in Heidegger's liberated theology "the question of 'God' suffered as radical a reduction to the first question of Being as in the phenomenological enterprise of Heidegger" (Marion 1991: 69). This, according to Marion, is second idolatry, which "appears once one has unmasked the first—"God" according to onto-theo-logy" (Marion 1991: xxi).

Marion's project

Since both theology and theiology are inadequate in our approach to God, Marion believes that He has to be liberated through another route, a third way, i.e., by developing a discourse without reference to Being. This can be achieved by opting for God's most theological name—"charity the Agape properly revealed in and as the Christ" (Marion 1991: xxi). This new discourse is not concerned with Being or Dasein , but purely and simply with the faith of a man in the event of Christ's being put to death (Marion 1991: 67).

Marion's philosophical task is to inaugurate the dawn of the divine by presenting God in a manner that is free from all categories of Being so that the charges of postmodernism regarding the

status of God-talk will be rendered invalid. Theiological concepts such as "Being," can only act as idols revealing only a small portion of God. Since every thought of God becomes an idol, the unthinkable God enters into our thought only by rendering Himself unthinkable, that is, by manifesting Himself outside the question of Being. Therefore, to reach a non-idolatrous thought of God, one would have to search for Him outside the question of Being, think of God outside of metaphysics.

In God Without Being, Marion's task is to develop a non-conceptual thought of God outside of the doctrine of Being. Outside the realm of ontology, the best way to conceive God is as charity, as one who invested Being on us when we were not, as the one who loved us first. Therefore, Marion seeks to understand God in the radical horizon of the gift – God gives Himself to be known insofar as He gives Himself. Since the gift is God's own self, it gives absolutely everything, as a pure gift.

Marion conceives God as 'Love,' because "charity belongs neither to pre-, nor to post-, nor to modernity; but rather, at once abandoned to and removed from historical destiny" (1991: xxii). Thus this term "remains unthought enough to free the thought of God from idolatry" (1991: 47). Marion argues that only by giving Himself to be thought of as love, hence as gift, a gift which gives itself for ever, can God give himself to be thought of without idolatry (1991: 49). He chooses to conceive God as love because this term goes beyond the limit of a concept even that of metaphysics and Heideggerian onto-theo-logy.

The idol and the icon

In order to situate his argument that God, as interpreted by the metaphysical tradition, has been reduced to a conceptual idol and to develop the concept of God as Love, Agape, Marion dexterously develops the difference between an icon and an idol. Both idols and icons are not beings, but they indicate a "manner of being of beings" (Calcagno 2001); they are two modes of apprehending the divine. Both propose to offer knowledge of the invisible referent, though they differ in the degree and the manner in which they make the divine present. Both the idol and the icon are related by being respectively the low and high water marks of an all-encompassing divine.

An idol, as the Greek root (eidô = I see) suggests, has to do with vision and the visible. Idols, like the great statue of Athena in ancient Athens, were designed to be looked at, they are objects upon which we fix our gaze. The idol results from humanity's gaze aimed at the divine. The gaze "strains itself to see the divine," but, unable to reach the ungazable divine, it comes to rest on the idol." The idol is, therefore, "the landing place of the gaze that aims at the divine." (Marion 1991: 11). But when the idol is encountered, its splendor and brilliance command our attention and dazzles the gaze, so that the gaze proceeds no further. Thus the idol stifles any pursuit of the divine beyond itself; it consigns the divine to the measure of human gaze.

The idol acts as a mirror that reflects an image, i.e., what human gaze has experienced of the divine, not as a

portrait that represents. The idol represents nothing, but presents what we have experienced of the invisible divine, leaving the remainder of the divine invisible. The idol is not a false or untrue image of the divine, but a limited and indefinitely variable figure of the divine. Thus, the idol divides the invisible divine into two parts, that part which is brought to visibility through its representation and another part which remains invisible due to the gaze's fixation on the idol.

The idol tries to capture what is unique about the deity. What makes the idol visible, however, is not the idol itself, but our gaze upon it, for it is we who decide what to see as unique to the idol. In other words, in looking at the idol, we create the divinity. God becomes trapped in our gaze. God becomes a concept in that He is seized by and confined to our own understanding. In so far as God is reduced to our own conceptual categories and understandings, God no longer has His own identity; His identity is super-imposed. Our concepts of God become idolatrous in that they limit an essentially indeterminable reality to our own understanding.

Whereas the idol results from the gaze that aims at the divine, the icon does not result from a vision but provokes one. Because it is manufactured 'by the hands of men' and because it functions as an 'intelligible medium', icon is regarded as manifesting materiality. Nevertheless, it differs from the materiality of the idol, since it attains a certain transparency which "summons to infinity" (Marion 1991: 24). The icon makes the sight of the invisible divine possible without attempting to reduce the invisible to the visible. It attempts to make the invisible visible by allowing it to saturate the visible. Strictly speaking, it shows nothing of the invisible. The invisible always remains invisible.

Though icon shows nothing of the invisible, using it as a medium, the invisible makes its presence felt. "In the icon the invisible proceeds up into the visible." (Marion 1991: 17). The icon teaches the gaze to surpass itself by never freezing on a visible so that something new of the invisible is encountered. The iconic gaze never rests or settles on the icon; instead, using the visible as the medium, it gazes at the infinite. "The icon summons the gaze to surpass itself by never freezing on a visible... The gaze can never rest or settle if it looks at an icon." (Marion 1991: 18) The iconic gaze rebounds "upon the visible, in order to go back in it up to the infinite stream of the visible... The icon makes visible only by giving rise to an infinite gaze" (Marion 1991: 18). The iconic gaze makes us privy to that which cannot be seized, to that which lies beyond our conceptual understanding. Through the medium of the icon we are given a presence of the divine.

Metaphysics and the idol

Aquinas's reflection on God in Summa Theologiea conceives God either as Ground (Prime Mover, Efficient Cause, Primary End) or as Prime Being (Necessary/Possible Being). Likewise, St Anselm's ontological argument depends on the assumption of God as

Prime Being or as Necessary Being. Marion deems any such philosophical thought about the invisible divine and the various names we use to refer to it as functioning precisely as an idol. Such concepts in philosophy arise less from God himself than from the metaphysical thought of Being (1991: 34). Therefore, to characterize God as Being or as causa sui is for Marion to gaze upon Being as an idol.

As an idol, Being purports to reveal God, yet only at the expense of limiting the horizon of the gazer's ability to grasp God. The philosophical presentations of God, in other words, do capture the divine, but at the expense of locking the gaze to themselves and hiding a large portion of the divine. In Marion's own words, "In thinking of God as causa sui metaphysics gives itself a concept of God that at once marks the indisputable experience of him and his equally incontestable limitation" (1991: 35). In other words, metaphysics constructs for itself an apprehension of the transcendence of God, but such an apprehension places a limit on the concept. The idol that metaphysics offers of "God" is so limited that it can neither aspire to worship and adoration. "Man can neither pray, nor sacrifice to this god. Before the causa sui, man can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance before this God" (Heidegger 1969, cited in Marion 1991: 35). The causa sui says so little about the "divine God" that to equate it with the latter amounts to speaking crudely, or even in blasphemy. In order for us to allow God to truly break through our conceptual understanding, in order to move from idol to icon, we must begin to focus on God as the unthinkable, the inconceivable, the unseizable.

Christ as the icon of God

The concept of the divine is not exhausted by metaphysical terms or our concepts, but includes the notion of infinite depth, so that the divine is completely indeterminable by any concept. The idols generated by metaphysics will not be able to fathom its depth. Only an iconic glance can hope to overcome this limitation and grasp the essence of God. The iconic glance is not a question of using a concept to grasp the essence of God but of using the iconic concept to contemplate the invisible God who advances into the visible and inscribes himself therein by the very reference of the visible icon (Scott). Searching for an icon in order to overcome the limitations imposed by the idol, Marion chooses the formula set forth in Colossians 1:15 wherein Paul proclaims Christ to be "the icon [eikon] of the invisible God." What is being claimed by Paul when he referred to Christ as the icon of the invisible God, according to Marion, is that God remains invisible, except through the transparency of Christ and that by looking at Christ we see the Father. For Marion Christ is the icon who will bring the full revelation of the Father.

The primacy of the good

Onto-theo-logy in general and Saint Thomas in particular believed that the term 'Being' "specially nominates God." Marion asks whether we can as-

sign 'Being' or any other name as "maxime proprie" to God:

> When God offers himself to be contemplated and gives himself to be prayed to, does he primarily present himself as Being? When he appears as and in Jesus Christ, who dies and rises from the dead is he concerned primarily with Being? No doubt, God can and must in the end also be, but does his relation to Being determine him as radically as the relation to his Being defines all other things? (1991: xx)

Following the mystic Denys Marion insists that the term Being does not describe God's essence. In Denys Marion finds an attempt to replace Being with the beautiful and the good. For Denys the good enjoys primacy over all beings. "All beings come from the beautiful and the good, and all non-beings reside beyond every essence in the beautiful and the good" (cited in Marion 1991: 77). For Denys goodness has primacy over the ipsum esse. Nevertheless, Denys does not pretend that goodness constitutes the proper name of God, but "in the apprehension of goodness the dimension is cleared where the very possibility of a categorical statement concerning God ceases to be valid" (Marion 1991: 76). Since names including "the good" would function as idols placing limitations on us as we approach God, for Denys, praising, which "abolishes every conceptual idol of 'God' in favor of the luminous darkness where God manifests (and not masks) himself, in short, where he gives himself to be envisaged by us" (Marion 1991: 76), is the most appropriate response when we approach God about whom we cannot speak.

God as Agape

While largely agreeing with the arguments of Denys, Marion prefers to characterize God as Agape, instead of goodness. This is not a fundamental difference, because in conceiving God in terms of goodness, Marion finds Denys close to the spirit of Saint John who understood God as love, Agape (1 John 4:8). Marion, then, points out that till Saint Thomas God was understood as Agape; it was in Saint Thomas that "the God who revealed in Jesus Christ under the name of charity finds himself summoned to enter the role of the divine of metaphysics, in assuming esse/ens as his proper name" (Marion 1991: 82). In Saint Thomas the "God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob" came to be identified with the "God of the philosophers and the learned," which eventually resulted in the "death of God." Marion attributes the "death of God" to the "inability of theological understanding,... to envisage a properly Christian name of the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ—a name anterior to the Being of beings..., hence also to every thought of Being as such" (1991: 82).

This shortcoming of theology, in Marion's view, can be overcome by conceiving God as charity, Agape, since Agape can transgress Being. For Marion the first act of God is love, not being. If "'God is love,' then God loves before being," Marion argues (1991: xx). In the act of loving God invests Being. If we conceive God as love, then we do not have to wait for him in the horizon of Being, but respond to Him in love – bare and raw.

Marion prefers "Agape" since it helps us to seek theological discourse outside the paradigm of Being and essence by focusing on the intention of God. God as Agape proves promising because the conceptual content it potentially offers is "unthought enough to free... the thought of God from the idolatry of [God as Being]" (1991: 47). God as unconditional love is not a being to be conceptualized, named or comprehended, but a being that fulfils itself in giving of itself. Agape appears only as a pure given, freed from the bondage of thought. Humanity necessarily responds to this Divine Love, since it is given without limit and condition. Humanity has no alternative but to will to receive or refuse such Love.

Unlike the causa sui, Agape prohibits a limiting or fixing of the gaze of the recipient. "To think God as Agape equally prohibits ever fixing the aim on the first visible object and freezing it on an invisible mirror" (Marion 1991: 48). For Love does not present itself as an object to be admired and contemplated in and for itself, but rather directs the recipient's gaze to the Giver and Subject of that Love. Love gives itself, abandoning itself, "so as to be transplanted outside of itself." It prohibits fixation on a response, a representation, an idol. Love thus subverts the idol, "For love holds nothing back, neither itself nor its representation" (Marion 1991: 48). Love does not pretend to comprehend or embody the invisible but instead gives itself over in order that the intention of the Giver might be encountered by the recipient. When we approach God as Agape, we do not fix God by our gaze, but God fixes us in His iconic gaze upon us.

God encountered as Agape gives Himself as a free gift and in doing so, God makes His invisibility visible. The visible gift which the invisible God gives is Himself, namely, the gift of love, Agape. The nature of a gift, which is being given freely, cannot be determined by the receiver. Hence, God's visibility cannot be idolatrously determined by the receiver of the gift. The gift cannot be idolized, for it springs from a source which is not susceptible to our control. Although we can do what we wish with a gift once we receive it, we cannot change the fact that it is given originally in a particular way with a particular content. We may even refuse a gift, but we cannot change the fact that it is given.

Silence

Wittgenstein has insisted that "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" (cited in Marion 1991: 53) If this citation is valid, then, silence is the best response with regard to something like God, since God is, by definition, ineffable, inconceivable and unnamable. Marion proposes silence, precisely because it does not explain itself, or expose itself to an infinite equivocation of meaning (1991: 54). What surprises Marion is that we speak too much about God who escapes all speech. By not keeping silent, by covering it with our busy chattering, we silence that which silence alone could have honored.

To avoid idolatry, in Marion's view, it is not sufficient to remain silent,

since the characteristic of idol is to remain silent. "Silence" for Marion is not the absence of every type of discourse. The total absence of every discourse will not suffice, for "in order to keep silent with regard to God, one must, if not hold a discourse on God, at least hold a discourse worthy of God on our silence itself" (1991: 54). The silence that is suitable to God who reveals himself as Agape in Christ consists in remaining silent through and for Agape. To receive and return the gift, this is not said, but done. Love is not spoken, it is made. The silence suitable for God requires knowing how to remain silent, not out of agnosticism, but simply out of respect (1991: 107).

Eucharist as theology

If we cannot speak about God, if respectful silence is the fitting response to the divine, what is the status of theology? In Marion's view, theology can reach its authentically theological status only if it concerns with that God who strikes out and crosses out every divine idol, sensible or conceptual. "The theologian must go beyond the text to the Word, interpreting it from the point of view of the Word "(1991: 149). Theology becomes authentic when it exposes the logic of the self-giving of the "Word given even in the silent immediacy of abandoned flesh" (1991: 139). To Marion the Emmaus story shows how the texts of the prophets and even the chronicle of the things seen at Jerusalem remain unintelligible, so long as the Word does not come in person to interpret, them to the disciples. Without the help of the Word, the disciples comprehend nothing, they do not see what is evident.

Without the intervention of the word, our hermeneutic is bound to remain a rationalist interpretation of Scripture. Since the Word intervenes in person only at the eucharistic moment, Marion argues, the hermeneutic, hence fundamental theology, will take place only in the Eucharist. To open our eyes and render the Word visible in the text, we need the absolute hermeneutic—the eucharistic moment. It is in the breaking of the bread that the disciples "recognize him" and at last "their eyes were opened." But the Eucharist does not render the text and its interpretation redundant, for prior to the revelation in the breaking of the bread, the hermeneutic was sufficient to burn the hearts of the disciples (Lk. 24:32). Yet the Eucharist alone completes the hermeneutic; the hermeneutic culminates in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is thus the test of every theological systematization, because in the Eucharist the Word intervenes directly, posing the greatest challenge to thought.

Since fundamental theology takes place only in the breaking and sharing of the bread, Marion concludes that the primary requirement for the theologian is not to become "scientific," but to become holy. By holiness he means neither pious edification, nor an acceptance of the limits an episcopal delegation imposes on the freedom to think. To be holy, the theologian must be able to speak of the referent. In order to speak of the referent, the theologian must have an understanding of it. The qualification that makes a theologian is that he has encountered the referent in mystical union. The human theologian begins to merit his name only in so far as he

imitates the theologian superior to him, the Saviour. What is emphasised by Marion is not the private virtues of the theologian, but his competence acquired in the matter of charity in the celebration of the Eucharist. The rest, according to Marion, is a question of vision, of intelligence, labor and talent (1991: 156).

Conclusion and critique

It is clear that taking a characteristically postmodern stance, Marion has proposed a solution to the problem of God-talk beyond metaphysics. Postmodernism provides Marion with the post-metaphysical structures whereby God can be thought of beyond onto-theo-logy. Phenomenology opens the dimension of love, "the unthinkable Agape" beyond knowledge and puts at a distance Being as an idol. As regards his dedication to a postmetaphysic system one can only applaud the precision and clarity of his argument.

Because of Marion's commitment to a postmodern stance, a positive natural theology that relied on metaphysics seems unfeasible. Therefore it is a negative theology that Marion develops in terms of Agape. This, indeed, raises the question of God's relation to Being. But since the gift gives Being itself, for Marion, it is prior to Being. This obviates the need of an ontological investigation as such; at least such an investigation can be bypassed. For Marion, a passage through Being is unnecessary, for as Heidegger wrote and Marion quotes: "Faith does not need the thought of Being" (1991: 61). The experience of God, no doubt, implies Being, but revelation and faith are indifferent to Being, and so gradually Marion's discourse moves from ontology to biblical exegesis, philosophical reflection gives way to the testimony in "biblical revelation,"

For Marion the biblical revelation remains beyond interpretation, existing as a meta-critique of metaphysics. It lies outside critique as "a discourse held about faith and on the basis of faith" (1991: 87). The authority of faith is self-affirming. There is no room for self-critique. Faith is this assertion of the will, which is not to be confused with the will-to-power which constitutes idolatry. Marion's faith in the testimony of revelation points to a God beyond Being, a God who comes as a gift, signifying "the purity of givenness without return" (Ward 1998: 235). This pure gift can only be thought of in terms of a logic of love.

While we would agree with Marion's challenge to metaphysics to think in terms of Agapeic love and think through its implications for our own lives, critics see Marion making grave errors in his attempt to subvert Being as a viable metaphysical framework within which one can think of God. First, it is pointed out that while strongly objecting to the characterization of God as causa sui, Marion fails to carry out an investigation into the existential implications of conceiving God as causa sui. (see Calcagno) The causa sui is also our efficient cause. Like the sculptor who leaves a trace of himself in his work, so too does God the Creator leave a trace of himself in His creatures. The

implications of this relation must be carried out. Marion thinks that when we conceive God as causa sui, we idolize Him. This prevents him from carrying out an investigation of the full implications of the fact that the causa sui leaves traces of His Being within the effect. Starting from the effects, through a process of analogical thinking, it must be possible for us to have a glimpse of the nature of God as Being, albeit vaguely. Marion does not consider the full implications of analogical thinking as a way of guarding against the idolatrous tendency, while conceiving God as being.

It is again pointed out that Marion does not do justice to the tradition of metaphysical theology in that he does not emphasize the fact that there are different ways to know God. Calcagno draws our attention to how Edith Stein, in her short essay titled ":Ways to Know God," suggests that there are three principal ways to know God: natural knowledge, revelation and personal encounters with God (Stein 1981). Natural knowledge denotes the discourse possible within the limits of human reason. Such a discourse will necessarily be limited and never pretends to be absolute and universal. It is widely acknowledged as only one level of discourse to be situated within other levels of discourse, including that of Revelation. Saint Thomas would readily acknowledge the limits of his viae, the Five Ways. He does admit the limits of natural human reason and turns to revelation in order to illuminate human understanding. The medieval image of the water of philosophy being transformed into the wine of theology is a graphic way of stating St Thomas's conviction that revelation is superior to natural human understanding. But Marion erroneously takes natural metaphysical discourse of causa sui as absolute and universal, and criticizes it for that reason.

Thirdly, Marion is faulted for inviting us to undercut Being as a viable framework within which one can think of God by thinking in terms of Agapeic love. Critics wonder how it is possible to love without first existing. They point out that the notion of a God who comes as a gift includes also the idea of being; for in order for God to give Himself as a gift, he must first exist. Surely, a gift and the giving itself, can only be understood within the economy of Being. Critics argue that the notion of a pure gift is not only inexpressible and inconceivable, but also impossible (Ward 235).

Finally, Marion is accused of not taking seriously the possibility of love becoming a concept, and therefore, an idol. To liberate God from the concept "Being" an appeal is made to conceive Him as the gift of love. But critics argue that God thought of as love may, like Being, become a concept and thus become graspable, an idol (Calcagno 2001). Marion is right when he says that we must move from idol to icon. However, as Calcagno argues, the tendency to idolize is part of human nature and is applicable to anything which falls under human understanding, including love and Being. The solution to the problem of God-talk in post-metaphysic era is not to "abandon the discourse of Being, but move to a more

iconic discourse of Being, namely of Being 'made visible' as person, as well as a more iconic understanding of love" (Calcagno 2001). An iconic gaze, whether of love or Being, would result in a discourse wherein the uniqueness of God would be cultivated.

As Graham Ward has rightly pointed out, Marion's postmodern natural theology, divorced from ontology, is more a commitment to Catholic orthodoxy (Ward 1998: 237) than an uninvolved, impartial investigation. The deeply Catholic background of Marion's work makes it look more like an essay in Christian apologetics than a philosophical investigation and lessens its appeal for those not familiar with the many tenets of or ongoing debates within the Catholic theological tradition. But this need not be conceived as an insurmountable difficulty. The framing of Marion's thesis as a working out of one's own faith allows the reflections to operate perfectly coherently on a logical level, and even more so on an individually emotional level.

Notes

1. Theiology is derived from the Greek "theios" meaning divinity or deity. Paul uses "theios" in Romans 1:20 when speaking of those attributes of God which are manifested to all humanity through the created order. Heidegger employs the term theiology to refer to the human philosophical endeavor to arrive at an understanding of the divine nature. This term may rightly be equated with onto-theology.

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