

“Pure love”

Jean-Luc Marion and the Mystery of Charity

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1 The phrase “pure love”, frequently used by Léon Dehon in his meditations on the Sacred Heart, is not found as such in the writing of Jean-Luc Marion. Yet, Marion can help in exploring the meaning of “pure love” because in his writings on charity – as found in the Christian scriptures – it is one of the core concepts in his phenomenology as it made its “theological turn”.

2 In this introductory exploration of his work, I will examine first of all, after a brief introduction to the person and work of Jean-Luc Marion, his personal approach to phenomenology in relation to the overwhelming epistemological dominance of objective or empirical knowledge in the exploration of reality. Marion seeks to open up a notion of phenomenology that goes beyond the reality of objects, open to the scientific approach, to a reality or phenomena that are not objectifiable and yet are phenomena. The paper will present how his phenomenology seeks to understand this non-objectifiable reality which he calls “saturated reality”. This “saturated reality” is present, as we will see, in our daily experiences. Marion gives a number of interesting examples of experiences of this saturated reality. He will show how this saturated reality is open to exploration by phenomenology. Marion extends this exploration of saturated reality also to the area of revelation. Within his phenomenology of revelation, J.L. Marion is most interested in what he calls the *mysterion* of charity – the topic that brings us back to Léon Dehon and his notion of pure love.

JEAN-LUC MARION

3 Jean-Luc Marion was born in Meudon, Haut de Seine, in 1946 to a deeply Catholic family aligned with reform and resistance. While a student

at the Condorcet preparatory school in Paris, a friend took him to Montmartre where he met Msgr. Maxime Charles. From him he learned the practice of silent prayer before the blessed sacrament. After his primary education, he attended the prestigious *École normale supérieure*. While at the *École normale* he switched studies from literature to philosophy. Already as a student, he became involved in publishing the theological journal *Résurrection* and, a few years later, he became one of the founding members of the periodical *Communio*. He became an assistant to Prof. Ferdinand Alquié at the Sorbonne where he wrote his doctoral thesis on Descartes¹. He completed his studies there in 1981. At that point, he became professor at the University of Poitiers, where he began his life-long work on phenomenology. He stayed in Poitiers for seven years (1981-1988), and became a professor at Nanterre for another seven years. He then moved to the Sorbonne in 1995 and stayed there until he retired in 2012. In the meantime, he had been invited by the University of Chicago where he was offered the John Nuveen chair (previously held by Paul Ricoeur). In 2011 he switched to the Andrew Greeley and Grace McNichols chair in Chicago where he still teaches. Although deeply involved in his faith, he considers himself a philosopher who happens to be a Catholic. Jean-Luc Marion is one of the main figures in the current revival of phenomenology, many of whose practitioners have revived the question of transcendence in their philosophy².

WHY INCLUDE JEAN-LUC MARION IN OUR DEHONIAN PROJECT?

4 Jean-Luc Marion is one of the foremost philosophers who through phenomenology has sought to break the hold of rationalism and metaphysics upon the Western imagination and to move beyond its subjectivism, that is, its almost exclusive attachment to an epistemology based on the Cartesian “I”, or ego, seeking certainty through objectivity in knowledge. He considers that the almost exclusive interest in scientific or objective knowledge in the West shortchanges the fuller panorama of human knowledge and experience. He proposes in his phenomenology that alongside a knowledge that is

¹ Marion has written several books on Descartes.

² See, for instance, K. HEFTY, *The God of Presence*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2012; J. ALVIS, *The Inconspicuous God. Heidegger, French Phenomenology and the Theological Turn*, Notre Dame: Indiana UP, 2018; Marion and Derrida on the Gift of Desire: Debating the Generosity of Things, Springer 2016; F. MARCHADHA, *Glory and Night. A Phenomenology of Christian Life*, Notre Dame: Indiana UP, 2013. Murchadha maintains that the sensing of the world requires transcendence. His work includes a reinterpretation of creation, incarnation, resurrection, time, love and faith; see also K. HART, *Kingdoms of God*, Notre Dame: Indiana UP, 2014.

controlled by the human subject, there is another knowledge and experience which is not controlled by the human subject, but comes from elsewhere and which is a gift, a donation. As Marion says, “because there exists praise, petition, veneration, repentance, reconciliation, *confiance*, desire of charity, brotherhood, peace, sacrifice as “*vécu de conscience*”, they seek to be understood³. But they are not accessible to objective knowledge since they are not something to be seen or calculated. Yet they are human experiences and actions. In other words, there is a great amount of human experience and phenomena that do not fall under the scrutiny of objects or are able to be captured in a concept. Yet, they are phenomena. It is to these latter phenomena that J.L. Marion points us.

5 What characterizes these phenomena is that they are not objects that the “I” can determine, or of which the “I” can set the exact parameters. They are simply given, that is, they appear without my having sought them. They happen to me or they are imposed on me, or, as Marion says, they have an “unpredictable landing”, quite often weighing in on me, forcing me to become engaged like a critical patient⁴. It is given to me as an event, not as a thing. It presses on the one to whom it is given⁵. Among these phenomena that are gifted, Marion gives special attention to those he calls “saturated phenomena”. I am interested in exploring further these experiences or phenomena of giftedness or “saturated reality”, because among them I also count Dehon’s experience of faith in God’s love or “*amour pur*”. That is why it would be quite helpful to further explore Marion’s notion of saturated reality.

MARION’S “SATURATED REALITY”

6 In the paper of the North American Theological Commission for the 2017 Dehonian Theological Seminar in Yogyakarta, we (members of the commission) maintained that “*amour pur*” was an aesthetic phenomenon or an aesthetic experience⁶. *Amour pur* was primarily for Dehon a feeling, a sensation. It was part of an aesthetic view of the world, hence it gives expression to the beautiful and the sublime. In Marion’s phenomenology “*amour pur*” falls under phenomena qualified as a gifted or saturated reality.

³ J.-L. MARION, *Le visible et le révélé*, Seuil, Paris 2005, 20.

⁴ J.-L. MARION, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, Sandford UP 2002, 146.

⁵ R. HORNER, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*, Aldershot Hans: Ashcroft 2005, 112.

⁶ J. VAN DEN HENGEL, «The surplus of Charity: North American response», *Seminario Teologico SCJ: Carisma e devozioni. Verso una identità dehoniana inculturata*, STD 63, Centro Studi Dehoniani, Roma 2017, 109-139.

“Amour pur” is not a reality that I constitute but is a reality that is gifted or donated to humans. In Marion’s language it is a reality that constitutes me, a reality he calls “saturated”⁷. For Marion this puts “amour pur” within the perspective of phenomenology. “Amour pur”, he would insist, is a perceived or experienced reality and hence can be studied phenomenologically. So, what does Marion understand by “saturated reality”?

7 Let me start with Marion’s understanding of saturated experiences of the senses. According to Marion one can start with Kant who already insisted that in an aesthetic experience of a painting, “the representation in the imagination gives one too much to think. No thought or concept is adequate”⁸. Marion takes this as his point of departure. He says that there is an excess in an aesthetic experience that no concept can capture. In the language of Marion, the intuition, for instance, of a painting is saturated; it is “over-exposed”. This is not because of a deficiency in my capacity but because of a surplus in what is “donated” to me in the experience. Marion calls it an “excessive givenness”. In a fascinating example, Marion presents the Rothko painting, entitled *Number 212*. The tableau of the painting consists of three horizontal bands of color in a somewhat rectangular form, with irregular contours, and in between the bands, an indeterminate stripe of yellow and orange. Now certain bands of colour have meaning, such as the three bands of red, white and blue constituting a national flag. But in Rothko’s painting, there is nothing that the bands point to. In other words, the painting lacks a concept. The bands resemble nothing. All we have in the painting are colours with a certain interplay. They give no information; they provide no concept. The tableau does not want to say anything that one could understand. It is nothing but an intuition, discouraging all attempts to explain it. For Marion, the painting has a surplus of intuitions. One can only go and see it. The donation is given only in the seeing. This for Marion is a “saturated phenomenon”⁹.

8 Here we have a reality before which our language falls short. It is invisible not by default but because of the excess of its light¹⁰. It means that the aesthetic cannot organize its intuition within the limits of a concept. It

⁷ In *Givenness & Revelation*, Marion gives a detailed analysis of the history of theology where, he maintains, particularly in modern time, theologians sought to make knowledge the heart of Christian faith. He insists that the truth of revelation and of theology is love, not knowledge. Theology deals with the excess, the reality before which «the disciples fall on their faces, unable to bear the intensity of the vision» (J.-L. MARION, *Givenness and Revelation* (Gifford Lectures), tr. Steven E. Lewis, Oxford UP, Oxford 2016, 50) Here «knowing is the same as loving» (J.-L. MARION, *Givenness and Revelation*, 45).

⁸ J.-L. MARION, *Le visible et le révélé*, 56.

⁹ J.-L. MARION, *Le visible et le révélé*, 158.

¹⁰ J.-L. MARION, «Le phénomène saturé», in *Le visible et le révélé*, 56.

cannot show itself as a definite object. There is a “surcroit de l’intuition” or a surplus of giftedness: “It gives us an intuition of a reality without limit: a “grandeur intensive” or a “glory of the visible”¹¹. It is clear that I do not constitute this phenomenon. I have a sense that it constitutes me¹². It comes to me as a gift, a donation. It is like Levinas’ face which breaks into my ego and calls me to hospitality and responsibility. The saturated reality comes not from me but from an other.

RELIGION AND REVELATION AS SATURATED REALITIES

9 What manifests itself as saturated reality in and through our senses – like with the painting – becomes even more dense for Marion in the phenomenon of revelation. In 2014 Marion gave the Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh. They were entitled *Givenness and Revelation*. Here he touched on revelation as the height of saturation. Marion is not afraid to draw on the scriptures in his philosophy to explain the saturation caused by revelation¹³.

10 Religion, which for Marion is the ultimate “saturated phenomenon”, relies on the gift. It starts with God’s gaze – actually Christ’s gaze - toward us rather than from our gaze at God. Religion operates with revelation because religion is at core a “givenness,” a donation. Marion is convinced that philosophers need to accept the possibility of such a phenomenology of revelation as a human experience. Instead of arguing that reason must make a case for revelation, Marion insists that revelation “se met en scène” in human experience as is clear in all religions. But he acknowledges that religion only does so within a horizon that “saturates” it. One does not reason toward it. Religion manifests itself as a phenomenon that “disturbs” reality. As such it is a saturated reality not an objectifiable reality. Marion uses as one of his examples the account of the disciples on the way to Emmaus. The givenness of the resurrection in the account is such that nothing in the lives of the disciples allows them to understand it. They must allow Christ to give them an understanding. The experience is not beyond them: in the end they say “were not our hearts burning within us?” But not until Christ breaks the bread do they understand. Only at this moment does Christ becomes invisible. He becomes visible by becoming invisible. That is why Marion maintains that we “see” the divine invisibility in Christ’s wounds¹⁴ (ID 113,

¹¹ J.-L. MARION, *Le visible et le révélé*, 59-60.

¹² J.-L. MARION, *Le visible et le révélé*, 69.

¹³ J.-L. MARION, *Givenness and Revelation* (Gifford Lectures), tr. Steven E. Lewis, Oxford UP, Oxford 2016.

¹⁴ J.-L. MARION, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, Fordham UP, New York 2001, 113. See also J.-L. MARION, *Prolegomena to Charity*, Fordham UP, New York 2002, 11; 67.

PC 11,67) The invisible becomes visible in Christ's wounds. The account is clearly an account of a saturated reality.

11 Saturation leaves God unthinkable: God is surplus and excess in relation to the human. In this context, J.L. Marion speaks of the iconic dimension of religion. All that humans have in relation to the divine is the logic of the icon. The icon is an expression of the gift that is religion; it is a means of approaching the divine by going through the icon and exposing oneself in its surplus to the divine in prayer or worship. The icon's visibility protects the invisible so that it allows for the "crossing of gazes"¹⁵. The logic of the icon is one of abandonment, of kenotic giving. Here we have a suspension of being, of sameness, of possession. The icon is a "kenosis of the image"¹⁶ which allows a trace of God to emerge via the face of Christ portrayed on the icon. It is a realm of surplus, excess, generosity¹⁷. Before this reality one must maintain a distance. Here Marion often turns to Pseudo-Dionysius who advocated that in religion we cross the distance between God and humans without erasing it, without forgetting it, always maintaining it. It is possible to participate in the divine and, in the process, receive ourselves, by maintaining the proper distance"¹⁸. The distance is actually a relation, linking the human to the inner-trinitarian by way of the icon.

REVELATION IS THE REALM OF THE SATURATED

12 From the above it is clear that Marion does not want us to approach revelation as an object to be known. He is quite determined to avoid any approach to revelation as a science. For Marion, theology is not a science. Any attempt to reach the divine from human subjectivity or metaphysics, such as in the proofs for the existence of God, all metaphysical attempts to understand God under the auspices of "being", is no more than idolatry. All such attempts can lead one only to the limits of the subject, the ego, but no further. They do not give access to God. They give us only an idol. With this, Marion disqualifies the philosophical attempts of Kant, Nietzsche and Heidegger in modern philosophy in their approaches to God. Their philosophy remains too limited. In that sense, they only lead to atheism. The God at the end of their reasoning is an idol, not God.

13 For this reason, Marion explores the language of theology to find another approach. That is how he came to explore revelation. Revelation has as its starting point God in the power of the Spirit. This is not a knowledge

¹⁵ C.M. GSCHWANDTNER, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion: Exceeding Metaphysics*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2007, 45.

¹⁶ J.-L. MARION, *The Crossing of the Visible*, Stanford UP, 2004, 63.

¹⁷ C.M. GSCHWANDTNER, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, 37-38.

¹⁸ C.M. GSCHWANDTNER, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, 41.

of a something or an object but an *apokalypsis*, an uncovering of the *mysterion* of God. Revelation is about the uncovering of a secret. To delve into this, Marion turns to the scriptures and particularly the letters of Paul. In the letters, Paul ascertains that it pertains to God to uncover this *mysterion*. This *mysterion*, according to Paul, God uncovers to whomever he wishes, and to whosoever can receive it, in order that it can be made known not just to individuals but ultimately to all nations (Rom 16,26). For Marion, what is uncovered in the *apokalypsis* overdetermines what can be opened by rational knowing¹⁹. Rational truth has no access here: it only ends in paradox. In this context, Marion identifies three questions:

- 1) What of the *mysterion* is made to appear?
- 2) How is the *mysterion* uncovered?
- 3) Who shows himself or gives himself?

1. What of the *mysterion* is made to appear?

14 In the First Letter to the Corinthians the *mysterion*, the unseen, is identified as a wisdom that until now has remained secret (1Co 2,7) and only shows itself in contrast to the wisdom of the world (1Co 2,6). Only the Spirit can uncover it because only the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God (1Co 2,9-10). To allow this to happen to an individual, it requires, what Marion calls, an *anamorphosis*, an overturning of our usual intentionality, because this *mysterion* is God's constitution of Godself. It cannot be grasped by the wisdom of the world. In fact, it is an overturning of the wisdom of the world: "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise" (1Co 1,27).

15 In the Letter to the Ephesians the *mysterion* – the unseen - is identified not only as a wisdom but as a *mysterion* of charity. In Ephesians, the mystery of charity is identified as being of "Christ and the Church" that is, the "unsearchable riches of Christ". The *mysterion* invites one to enter into the "unlimited horizon of charity" which is by definition hyperbolic and excessive²⁰. Why? So that "you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the hyperbolic greatness of his power in us who believe..." (Eph 1,17-20). So, the reason is that you may be saturated with all the saturation of God (Eph 3,18-19). Here we recognize, with Marion, the excess which saturates the gaze and submerges it in its immeasurable hyperbole²¹. This is the charity that surpasses knowledge. In Ephesians, this charity that saturates everything

¹⁹ J.-L. MARION, *Givenness and Revelation*, 63.

²⁰ J.-L. MARION, *Givenness and Revelation*, 70.

²¹ J.-L. MARION, *Givenness and Revelation*, 71.

shows itself in all its hyperbole in Christ, in whom God recapitulated all things (Eph 1,9-10).

16 How does Christ accomplish this hyperbole of charity? That is *given* in the Letter to the Colossians. If charity so overbounds, is so excessive, is there anywhere that it will show itself as a phenomenon? If it is so full, so “pure”, that there is no point from which I can see it, how can the *mysterion* be made manifest. Marion says, it cannot to a finite human gaze. But it can in the only human gaze that is not merely finite, and that is the gaze of Christ. Hence, the *mysterion* of charity in the final analysis is Christ²². Here is where the fullness of charity, the *mysterion*, reveals itself. In other words, the *mysterion* of charity operates only in the gaze of Christ. Here we have the hyperbole of charity, which surpasses all knowledge (Col 2,3). In Christ is recapitulated all things (Eph 1,9) for in him we find what is “saturated with the saturation of all in all” (Col 1,23). Here the infinite hyperbole of charity is to be found and made manifest. The mystery of charity is in the final analysis the mystery of Christ (Eph 3,4; Col 2,3). The Letter to the Colossians expands this to say, according to Marion, that “the hyperbole of charity opens the way to God for all Jews and Greeks to be restored as a saturated body under the head of Christ²³ (p. 73). It is a charity for all humanity.

2. How is the *mysterion* uncovered?

17 How is this mystery of charity uncovered, how does it become visible? Only in the one “who loved his own until the end (John 13,1) and who could say in the end “it is finished” (John 19,30). Only Christ is put into evidence as the absolutely unseen of the mystery of God. Here Marion goes to the Synoptic Gospels and to the Gospel of John where Christ puts the mystery of God into evidence exactly at the point where he shows himself in his self-gift, that is, “in terms of the Father who gives him”²⁴ (p. 85).

3. Who shows himself or gives himself?

18 Jesus tells us that he does not speak for himself, that he never says anything but the very words of the manifestation of the Father (John 14,10). “To see me is to see the Father”. What Marion insists is that all the gospels and writings of Paul must be understood not as a revelation of Jesus, the Son, but ultimately as the revelation, the self-gift, of the Father. The *anamorphosis* that occurs in us is none other than that we are transformed to see Christ from

²² J.-L. MARION, *Givenness and Revelation*, 73.

²³ J.-L. MARION, *Givenness and Revelation*, 73.

²⁴ J.-L. MARION, *Givenness and Revelation*, 85.

the point of view which the Father gives him and sees him²⁵. Christ is the icon of the invisible Father. “Thus men find themselves provoked to see that which shows itself by the excess of that which gives itself” as that which gives itself between the Father and the Son²⁶.

THE LOGIC OF “AGAPIC LOVE”

19 What Marion insists upon is that the saturation of revelation implies an incapacity on our part to understand it adequately. It bears all the traces of a “too much,” of an excess. The saturated phenomenon of revelation such as the resurrection is so excessive that we can be quite certain that we can never grasp it fully or give a conceptual account of it. Marion calls this a “negative certainty”. We will not be able to see it clearly, we will not be able to describe it in terms of quantity, quality, relation or modality. It will transcend and overturn all those categories. We can be quite certain of this. Hence a negative knowledge. For Marion, knowledge of God is for us impossible. The same applies to the mystery of love.

1. The mystery of love in God

20 In the previous section it became clear that Marion places the mystery of love within the trinitarian circle. I summarize this in the following points.

21 A) For us, Dehonians, that is how we “see” the pierced side of Christ. The “Sacred Heart” is found in the logic of the gift which is one of abandonment, self-giving, suffering. For Marion this is the logic of *agapic* love. Here, the phenomena “se brouillent lui-même”²⁷. This *brouillage* is not a confusion internal to revelation but it manifests the incommensurability of a revelation in a phenomenological horizon. It shows that this reality is paradoxical: “Revelation does not enter into phenomenality except under the figure of a paradox”²⁸.

22 B) In a good summary of what he proposes regarding Christ in *Givenness and Revelation* (p. 103) we read: “Christ appears as the visible icon of the Father, who remains invisible, because the believer, in looking at his face *as it should be* looked at, only sees Jesus, the son of the carpenter of Nazareth, as the Christ, but also the Christ *as the* Son, and thus, finally, the Son of the Father”²⁹. The Father and the Son share the same face.

²⁵ J.-L. MARION, *Givenness and Revelation*, 87.

²⁶ J.-L. MARION, *Givenness and Revelation*, 87.

²⁷ J.-L. MARION, *Le visible et le révélé*, 33.

²⁸ J.-L. MARION, *Le visible et le révélé*, 33.

²⁹ J.-L. MARION, *Givenness and Revelation*, 103.

23 C) In the same *Givenness and Revelation* there is summary of what Marion said in his chapter on *Christ as saturated phenomenon*. I will give this summary to help grasp what is at stake in the mystery of charity. «The phenomenal approach to the “good news of Jesus Christ, Son of God” (Mk 1,1) has enabled us to unfold the moments of its uncovering. And it is indeed an uncovering that is at issue, which we have allowed to open itself out according to its proper logic, in several stages:

- a) what at first and necessarily remained covered, reserved, and inaccessible (the *mysterion* of the Father), namely the hyperbole of charity surpassing all knowledge can be understood as a pre-eminent *saturated phenomenon*;
- b) it goes into operation as a saturated phenomenon according to the principle that everything, no matter how secret, must be uncovered in the evidence of Christ and in view of the recognition of Christ as the Son of the Father; nevertheless this uncovering of Christ’s depths is not accomplished without requiring of one who wishes to see it that s/he be transformed into a *witness*, judged by what s/he For in fact,
- c) the reports. question is not only that of seeing Jesus, but that of looking upon his face as that of the Christ, of recognizing in that face the depths of the Son – that is to say, of knowing in it, by viewing it through a certain angle, the icon of the invisible Father, in a phenomenon that is at once visible and invisible, a *paradox*. As a consequence, then, no witness can approach this putting into phenomenality of the face of Christ if s/he does not travel its depths – depths that allow the seeing of the invisible Father in his visible icon»³⁰.

24 D) And where does this leave the Holy Spirit in this mystery of Charity? As Jesus told Peter, that it was not “flesh and blood” that allowed him to confess Jesus as the Christ, but only the Father. To see Jesus as the icon of the Father one needs “grace”, “that is to say, to have the gift, the art, and the knack of taking it into view. It is necessary to know how to see the icon *as such*”³¹. That is the action of the Holy Spirit. God gives it *as* the Holy Spirit, as the one who remains invisible in the icon because he shows it”³². This, as St. Basil showed in his *On the Holy Spirit*, was the power of the Spirit in the divinisation of men and women. As Marion says, “Indeed, the Spirit positions the human gaze at the exact place and point of view where the visible face of Christ (Jesus *as* Son) can at once, with a sudden and perfect precision, be

³⁰ J.-L. MARION, *Givenness and Revelation*, 89.

³¹ J.-L. MARION, *Givenness and Revelation*, 105.

³² J.-L. MARION, *Givenness and Revelation*, 106.

uncovered as the very axis where the gaze of the Father on the Son and that of the Son on the Father pass; and yet, this place and this point of view remain inaccessible to humans, who are always the prisoner of his organization of the visible, which is not only finite, but above all *closed*³³. In other words, the Spirit is not seen because he makes something seen.

2. “Pure love” as a gift

25 However, J.-L. Marion does not speak only in theological terms of the mystery of love. In his earlier writings, he frequently speaks of love and charity, divine and human. In this next section I want to explore this language of love in a more philosophical mode.

26 When Fr. Dehon speaks of “pure love”, he means primarily a love that is totally disinterested. It is a love that does not seek a return. It is fully gratuitous. It is my understanding of this love that it is a human disinterested love, a love given for itself. In the language of Marion such a love pertains to the realm of saturated phenomena or of the gift. The notion of gift is a highly developed concept in modern philosophy³⁴. For this reason, it might help the understanding of “pure love” by examining it through Marion’s understanding of “gift” and “givenness”. “Pure love” is first of all a “being given”³⁵. What is significant for our topic is that for Marion, if “pure love” is a gift, it may not be presented as a reciprocal gift. Gift must be without reciprocity. It must be taken totally out of the context of economy or exchange. Such a love calls for a reversal of the Cartesian ego as the receiver of this love. The “I” is not in control: it is not an “ego”. In contemporary philosophy the ego is transformed into a self. The self is given a new existence through the gift of love. Real selfhood does not come about through an exertion of the “I” but through a donation. Of this donation the self is a witness.

27 For Marion the emphasis with regard to the agapic gift is upon the “self” as recipient of the gift. In his writings he has examined all aspects of the gift: the notion of givenness, the gift itself, the giving itself, being given. What is central for Marion, in order to escape all notions of exchange or reciprocity, is the emphasis in the gift on the self as recipient. In relation to the gift, the self becomes a recipient. There are two examples which clarify this. In this

³³ J.-L. MARION, *Givenness and Revelation*, 108.

³⁴ The discussion on the gift was initiated in France by J. DERRIDA, *Given Time. I. Counterfeit money*, Chicago University Press, Chicago 1992.

³⁵ In the line of thinking of Derrida, according to Horner, the gift of pure love would be «non-such in the present, interruptive of experience, without horizon, the impossible, irresolvable in terms of knowledge but thinkable in terms of the risk of decision in faith» (R. HORNER, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*, 121).

context, Marion gives an exegesis of the sacrifice of Abraham of Isaac. The sacrifice, according to Marion, consists of an acknowledgment by Abraham of the gift of his son Isaac. According to Marion's interpretation, what God required of Abraham was an acknowledgment of Isaac as a gift. Abraham's fault was that he had taken Isaac as his possession, not as a gift of the promise. In the command to offer Isaac to God, Abraham is brought to recognize him again as a gift. In it, God becomes once again visible as the giver of the gift. Marion's second example is that of forgiveness. In forgiveness the gift received is first spurned but then received. Marion uses the example of King Lear who spurns his daughter Cornelia's love as a gift to him and uses his power to reject her love. But in the end, King Lear comes to recognize this gift for what it was or what s/he was. Forgiveness makes visible the prior rejected gift by acknowledging it.

28 This being given of the gift is for Marion a manifestation of the emergence of another self rather than the "self" promulgated by Descartes. Descartes uncovered the ego as the source of meaning, as the one who is the originator of meaning. Marion proposes another image of the self. He sees the "I" as a screen upon which phenomena become visible. In the context of the gift, the "I" is a self as a recipient, the self in the dative (not in the nominative, nor in the accusative). Here the self is *the gifted*. In Marion's vocabulary the self is called the *adonné*, the gifted one, or "the devoted one", devoted to the gift or called by the gift. This self is first of all a witness, someone who has been called, surprised, devoted, called to account. Here it becomes clear that revelation gives us a self that we do not control. The self here is a listening self: it listens to the appeal of a phenomenon and responds to it³⁶. In pure love the emphasis too is upon the self as the *adonné*, I am the gifted one of pure love.

3. Divine love and human love

29 From the above it is clear that for Marion the issue of love or charity is not so much our capacity to know but more about letting ourselves enter into saturated reality. This reality is more about love than about knowledge. For Marion, what was most lacking in Descartes' search for certainty was his exclusion of "an erotic disposition" in humans. Marion seeks to make love his primary focus. He introduces three reductions:

³⁶ C.M. GSCHWANDTNER, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, 84. This is the same conclusion drawn by Ricoeur. The self after the demise of the Cartesian ego for Ricoeur is also a witness, a self who is called to be a disciple. It is the end of the ego as master. It is the self that is given in the response to a call. See his *Oneself as an Other*.

- 1) Am I loved by another? Is my focus about certainty in knowing or about the assurance that I am loved? In love will I let the other become the center?
- 2) Can I love first? For Marion love is not primarily reciprocal, he understands love as a loss, as a letting-go. Here he gives as example the experience of erotic love as a giving that needs to be repeated and is best exemplified in the orgasmic climax as the end of that giving. It wants to be infinite but it is ultimately finite. The highest expression of human erotic love must be sought in the oath of fidelity that the lovers give to one another.
- 3) You have loved me first. Before I could love, there must be another who has loved me first.

30 At this juncture Marion brings on an important precision. Although it is clear that for Marion love is the apex of saturated phenomena, he argues vehemently that there is no distinction to be made between *eros* and *agape*, between human and divine love. He thinks that Nygren's famous distinction between *eros* and *agape* is false and wrong-headed³⁷. If we could not love like God, according to Marion, the very core of the Christian vision of redemption would simply evaporate. All love must be seen as completely self-giving, utterly sacrificial, devoted to the other without hesitation or restriction³⁸. For Marion the best word to describe love is *kenosis*: the complete self-surrender to the other. All love is pure, unconditional gift, without any expectation of a response³⁹. All love is without reciprocity.

31 For this reason, Marion undertakes a phenomenology of erotic love to understand all love. He explores this love at length in his *The Erotic Phenomenon*⁴⁰. I have two reservations regarding this position:

- 1) In his description of erotic love, Marion insists that it is a matter of a decision that I make without an expectation of a response. I must decide to love first. It is not initiated through the other or by the other. Marion says, "I become myself definitively each time and for as long as I, as lover, can love first"⁴¹. Hence, for Marion, humans give love instead of receiving it, love without expectation of return

³⁷ J.-L. MARION, *La rigueur des choses. Entretiens avec Dan Arbib*, Flammarion, Paris 2012, 110.

³⁸ C.M. GSCHWANDTNER, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, 94.

³⁹ The texts in which Marion speaks of love are in *Prolegomena to Charity*: see especially his essay on Levinas, «The intentionality of Love», 71-101, his analysis of Augustine's *Confessions*, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, and *Sur la pensée passive de Descartes*.

⁴⁰ J.-L. MARION, *The Erotic Phenomenon: Six Meditations*, University of Chicago Press, London/Chicago 2007.

⁴¹ J.-L. MARION, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, p. 76.

- or reciprocity; we love entirely without condition⁴². Such a notion of love is too determined by an agent self, not the receiving self.
- 2) If erotic love is the same as agape-love, it should have the quality of infinity or eternity. Yet, for Marion the flesh cannot maintain eros infinitely. Human eros' pleasure comes to an end in the orgasm, even in disappointment and therefore is condemned to repeating the eroticization again and again. It is not marked by infinity⁴³. The only way it can endure is in the word that the lovers give to each other, even though that word can be broken. This love is a promise of endurance in words only. Interestingly, Marion does maintain that God's love is not qualitatively different from ours, but then adds, "it is just better, stronger and more persistent than ours"⁴⁴. Horner thinks that Marion is inconsistent and presents God as the one who enables one to love, that is, that God is the first lover who makes it possible for us to find ourselves always and already loved.

32 Although Marion does not make use of the concept of aesthetic theology, he holds that theology operates with a logic of faith which he identifies as love. Love or charity, he says, has its own logic which is clearly distinct from scientific logic. The logic, as can be imagined, is a logic of saturated phenomena. Thus, it is a logic of the irreducible, irreplaceable and the unconditioned. The aesthetic is an experience which unfolds into understanding. For Marion, charity makes the gift of saturated phenomena present. Charity is not only a passion but also a knowledge. Love allows us to know the other, not as an object, but as a flesh⁴⁵. The task of theology is to unfold the particular rationality of Christian faith so that it will display the logic of charity⁴⁶. "To believe means to love and to have the will to believe in love:" To believe in Love, and that Love loves me in spite of my belief that 'I don't have faith.'" Here Marion and Dehonians are very close. For Marion, as for us, "It is only faith in love... that makes one a believer"⁴⁷. Hence, God's utter self-emptying in love calls forth a corresponding self-abandonment in loving faith from the human recipient.

⁴² C.M. GSCHWANDTNER, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, 90.

⁴³ C.M. GSCHWANDTNER, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, 92.

⁴⁴ R. HORNER, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*, 144.

⁴⁵ C.M. GSCHWANDTNER, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, 100.

⁴⁶ C.M. GSCHWANDTNER, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, 100.

⁴⁷ J.-L. MARION, *Prolegomena to Charity*, 64.

CONCLUSION

33 My reflection on the work of Jean-Luc Marion was begun as an effort to deepen my understanding of Dehon's notion of pure love. There is much to appreciate in the writings of Marion. Marion began with a quest to break the hold of metaphysics and the concept of being upon our thinking. As Joeri Schrijvers has indicated, in the final analysis Marion does not escape from its totalizing grip⁴⁸. It would not be appropriate to conclude that Dehon's pure love bears the same characteristics as Jean-Luc Marion's. This is not Dehon's project. Dehon presented us his understanding of love mainly in meditations. But it is clear that like Marion's notion of charity, Dehon's pure love is not a theoretical issue but a practical and aesthetic one. But like Marion's charity, pure love is a reality which calls me to account. I am its witness.

34 If it may be possible to view pure love as a saturated reality, it is not difficult to explore that pure love also affects the reality of the "I". For Marion, the self is a recipient self. Although Dehon did not delve directly into the situation of the modern ego, his meditations on pure love require a critique of the constitutive ego. Also, for Dehon the self is first of all a recipient⁴⁹. If in the manner of a recipient s/he refracts the pure love, thereby limiting its excessiveness, what does s/he or she reveal of it, what is s/he capable of revealing of love? Can it be pure love? Dehon asks his followers to live pure love. In some of his writings, Marion does not distinguish between *agape* and *eros*. However, when Marion comes to speak of love in marriage, he suggests that such infinite love is beyond the human capacity and is condemned to repetition or refraction in the oath of fidelity that humans make to the other. It captures the excess within the limit of the person. Dehon does not make such a distinction. He asks for pure love. Must not also the excess of pure love be refracted in the limited gestures of the recipient? It requires further study.

⁴⁸ J. SCHRIJVERS, «Review of Jason Alvin's book *The Inconspicuous God*», in https://www.academia.edu/42910027/Critical_Study_of_Jason_Alvis_The_Inconspicuous_God.

⁴⁹ In my paper for the Taubaté conference in 2014, I also urged for a new approach to the self, as a breaking away from the dominant ego of Descartes philosophy. See my «The Self As Witness: An Anthropology of the Heart», in *Anthropologia Cordis. Seminario teologico SCJ*, Taubaté (Brasil), 2-8 Febbraio, 2014, STD 61, Centro Studi Dehoniani, Roma 2015, 107-131.