

Phenomenologies of the trinity: Trends in recent philosophy of religion

Joseph Rivera 

Dublin City University

Correspondence

Joseph Rivera, Dublin City University.

Email: joseph.rivera@dcu.ie

Abstract

This article discusses the theoretical issues and findings of a recent trend in phenomenology of religion: the manifestation of the Trinity. Section one highlights the classical model of the Trinity as mystery. The Trinity is as an elusive phenomenon that can be grasped only as an article of faith. Section two outlines important features of manifestation and experience in Husserl's phenomenology, which lays the conceptual groundwork for the phenomenology of religion. Section three discusses two proposals of a phenomenology of the Trinity, in which faith can be understood as an intentional stance may make possible the Trinity's manifestation as a subjective phenomenon. The conclusion locates the principal weakness of the phenomenology of the Trinity in the proponents' tendency to ignore doctrinal development and theological debate, especially of the fourth and fifth-centuries, which gave shape to the Trinity as a doctrine as such.

1 | INTRODUCTION

At least since the 1990 release of Dominique Janicaud's widely-read *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn: The French Debate*, the theoretical and conceptual landscape of phenomenology of religion has grown more complicated, especially as the literature on the topic accumulates annually. In France and in North America certain phenomenological techniques of analysis have been developed to account for theological phenomena, and divine revelation in particular. Such a turn has been seen as a welcome opportunity by many (though not all). Its proponents are convinced that the trend has served the purpose of the expansion of the boundaries of experience as such. From Michel Henry to Jean-Luc Marion and Emmanuel Falque in France to Kevin Hart and Robert Sokolowski in North America, phenomenology as a sub-discipline within philosophy of religion has maintained that it has enlarged the scope of

what counts as a phenomenon. For some time, prayer or liturgy have been obvious theological candidates for phenomenological analysis in this respect.¹ Recently, however, God *in se* has generated interest on this phenomenological front. The doctrine of the Trinity, to be more specific, is now a principal object of investigation: how is God, whose single essence that consists of three persons, made manifest to me as a phenomenon?

In what follows, I make three moves that, taken together, may occasion greater understanding of phenomenology of God as Trinity. First I introduce the fundamental mystery of the claim that God consists of three distinct persons who share a single essence. Theologically speaking, how is such a profound mystery to be considered an eligible phenomenon I can experience? Next, I highlight the ambiguous and fraught category of “experience” in some of Husserl's works, in order to shed light on the territory that becomes reworked by theologically-inclined phenomenologists in the wake of Husserl. Third, several figures whose work is indicative of what I call “confessional” phenomenology will be discussed, specifically in light of the fundamental complexities they raise about the manifestation of the Trinity. While their work may constitute a trend, it enriches but does not exhaust the possibilities of phenomenology of religion.²

2 | MYSTERIOUS TRINITY: EXPERIENCEABLE?

The failure to apprehend the fullness of the Trinity is of two kinds, cognitive and experiential. First, the Trinity remains out of reach for philosophy *stricto sensu* because the noetic powers of the mind fail in the face of such divine mystery. The mind in its native condition cannot “reason its way up to” the Trinity. Only revelation can give to the mind proper grounds to affirm there is such a thing as a Trinitarian God. Why is this so? In St. Augustine we understand the economy of Father, Son and Spirit to constitute an economy of mystery accessible only in faith, and only in part. A puzzle like this can be perceived after a “laborious search,” the discovery of which is “advantageous” to faith (1991, book 1, sec. 15). In Aquinas we acknowledge that the mind may know “that” God exists, but not “who” God is. Nothing about the character of God can be illumined by the mind's natural powers of apprehension. Without recourse to revelation, the mind only may invoke God as an argument, as a principle of causality, a Cartesian *causa sui*. Hence it follows from these limitations, for Aquinas, that “it is impossible to attain to the knowledge of the Trinity by natural reason” (1948, Part I, Q.32, A. 1). In withholding himself from the natural endowments of the mind, God reveals his Triune majesty in scripture and in history (i.e., revelation) only in part, offering a glimpse of what is the dynamic and perfect exchange of the Spirit between Father and Son.

The second level of mystery lies within the domain of experience: how can the Trinity become “manifest?” In other words, how can it be considered an object of experience? Aquinas suggests, to return to his work as a benchmark, that the manifestation of the Trinity, whose threefold self-disclosure unfolds in a dialectic between the hidden and the revealed, the obscure and the visible, serves not to impair but to protect and nourish the “dignity of faith” (1948, Part I, Q.32, A. 1). The Trinity can cultivate the mystery of God as a mystery to be enjoyed and received, yielding forth hope in the invisible. The Trinity's abdication from both the levels of reason (level one) and experience (level two) is a compliment paid to the believer, not the shadow of ridicule cast by an atheist. But is God, conceived as Trinity, wholly outside of the realm of experience? Even if God abstains from the full view of the phenomenal field of objects in which the mind daily traffics, Christian theology in its Augustinian and Thomistic traditions teaches that God is nevertheless manifest to the mind, if only in a glass darkly. What kind of manifestation is this? Is it invisible? If so, what intellectual resources do we have to articulate such a complicated and obscure manifestation like the Trinity? Modern theologians, from Karl Barth and Karl Rahner to Jürgen Moltman, Colin Gunton and Leonardo Boff, have on occasion described the subjective dimension of the manifestation of the Trinity.³ But what of modern philosophy? Not since Hegel have philosophers consciously employed philosophical tools to make explicit “how” the Trinity may be disclosed as an object of experience.⁴ The “theological turn” in phenomenology addresses this deficit. But first, if phenomenology is the cartography of experience, what constitute some of its basic moves in this regard?

3 | PHENOMENOLOGY AND EXPERIENCE

The disciplines of philosophy and theology remain discrete disciplines in the modern university. No one, except for Michel Henry (2015) and Emmanuel Falque (2016a) occasionally (members of the “theological turn”), contest this. And yet, in spite of this strict distinction between disciplines, phenomenological analysis appears to have been “broken wide open” by theology’s encroachment, as Dominique Janicaud laments (2010). Janicaud, and we may mention also Jocelyn Benoist (2001), both insist on a rigorously non-theological approach to Husserlian phenomenology. But what is phenomenology’s conception of experience? And how may it be responsible for generating a theological turn at all? I highlight selectively some Husserlian-inspired points in order to facilitate apprehension of what the theological turn attempts to achieve in Husserl’s wake.

One may helpfully frame phenomenology as a kind of “hermeneutics of suspicion” in matters of natural science, empiricism and philosophical programmes that trade on the positivism that underlies the natural sciences. Husserl appreciates, to be sure, the rigor and clarity of scientific theories of mind can bring to a philosophical discussion. The mathematical breakthroughs of Geometry are motifs worthy of praise and deep analysis.⁵ What incites Husserl’s animosity toward science, however, is a particular species of metaphysical scientism; as early as the *Logical Investigations* he calls it psychologism or objectivism.⁶ Decades later, in the *Crisis of European Sciences*, he draws out the largescale cultural implications of objectivism, tracing it back to the early-modern pioneer of science Galileo, and in particular, to his mathematization of nature. The crisis of scientific modernity lies in the presumption on which science operates: that its discoveries of mathematical laws reflect the world as we actually experience it. The reality, Husserl argues, is that science functions like a “garb of ideas” thrown over the world of concrete experience. Hence the garb of ideas we take for the true reflection of the surrounding world deludes us into embracing science as if it were the only mode of discovery, as if the true nature of experience is once and for all revealed by empirical science (Husserl, 1970a, p.51).

Phenomenologically, I experience sense data on several levels. In contrast to empiricism, the multi-level approach to experience demonstrates, above all, the active agency or the ego’s meaning-endowing power, or its innate desire to disclose the space needed for an object to be a meaningful experience for the ego. How may this occur?

In *Experience and Judgment* Husserl indicates that I automatically “typify” objects the moment I encounter them. In so doing I attend to and anticipate their shape. My intentional aim may well yearn for an object, waiting for object to be given at all, in part or in full. As I attend to my surroundings, my ego’s ray of attention “saturates” the scene precisely when there is no object there to fulfill my intentional aim. I am saturated with the fullness of my own cognitive attentiveness or anticipation of what the object may be like in its manifestation (Husserl, 1973, pp.122, 209). This happens regularly, upon partial fulfillment of a particular object.

I see a dog, for example. I automatically typify it. Just so, I turn my attention to it, as it attracts my interest. I apprehend it as a dog; in order to be acquainted with it, I reach a conclusion or predicative determination of the object. The ray of intention originating from me saturates the object with meaning, namely “dogness.” I know what its additional modes behaviour will be like in the ensuing moments; I know how it will play, run, jump, wag its tale, and so forth. I have not seen its teeth yet, but I know in advance what they will look like. I bring to bear a host of assumptions on the animal’s manifestation, in which a “horizon of possible experience with corresponding prescriptions of familiarity” aid me in my intentional constitution of the dog, of the python, table, mug, etc (Husserl, 1973, p.331). The general form of dog aids me in my perception and experience of the particular dog, even while I recognize the dog remains a thing exterior to me, independent of my constitution.

Phenomenology suggests that the ego is the formative “stage” on which objects appear. The ego pole is form-giving; it is itself a form in whom objects receive meaning. The ego so conceived is therefore a reflective ego who interprets, shapes and governs the manners of givenness of the object as such. The shift from the world of science to the world of subjective experience, for those who take the natural sciences as paradigmatic of life in the world, is a painful shift in perspective. The epoché is Husserl’s term for the shift in perspective, what he calls the suspension (not elimination) of the scientific-empirical attitude. The empirical attitude is put to the side in favor of the phenomenological

attitude. I abstain from the scientific view of objects not so I can sacrifice them to the altar of subjectivism but so I may put out of play science's hold on my imagination. A phenomenological attitude is therefore a "total change of interest" and is founded "on a particular resolve of the will" (Husserl, 1970a, p.145). The epoché, Husserl admits, can resemble a radical shift in perspective (from object to subject) no less dramatic than a religious conversion (Husserl, 1983, p.137). Some of Husserl's heirs, in recent philosophy of religion, have taken this shift in perspective quite literally as a religious one. To that trend we now turn.

4 | PHENOMENOLOGIES OF THE TRINITY

Analysis of the Trinity from a phenomenological vantage point is illustrative of two distinct trajectories of phenomenology of religion: one trajectory thinks the Trinity is an illegitimate object of analysis while the other makes it a central focus of inquiry. The first trajectory remains attentive to Gerhard van der Leeuw's non-theological legacy, in which a deliberate and meticulous focus on the general structures of religion is prioritized.⁷ Janicaud and Benoist may accept this style of phenomenology of religion. At work here is an aspiration to adopt the standpoint of neutrality in matters of a particular religious tradition. It avoids thereby all signs of partisanship to a single religion, say Christianity. Preferential treatment of one religious tradition over other religions is not admissible, and in this sense, this phenomenological model is secular. One recent example of this formulation of phenomenology of religion is Jacques Derrida's Kantian analysis of religion, in which he attempts to articulate a universal form of faith, a "religion without religion" that underlies any particular expression of religion (Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, etc.). More recent proposals for a phenomenology of *religion* follow in Derrida's wake in Staudigl (2016) and Simmons (2017).

The alternative trajectory (against Derrida and van der Leeuw) assumes a theological stance, and it is the trajectory which shall occupy us for the remainder of the essay. Not without its philosophical problems, the openly confessional or ecclesial model of phenomenology of religion relies on careful reconfigurations of Husserl that challenge phenomenology's purported neutrality with respect to phenomena. Rich in theological content, phenomenology in this trajectory is employed as a technique of disclosure in matters of faith, a way of seeing God manifest in sacraments, language and embodied encounters. What of doctrine? That is: how does phenomenology illuminate the theology of the Trinity?

Phenomenology, for Sokolowski, interprets first-person speech acts according to two types of givenness: the (1) informational and the (2) declarative. In either type, the ego is shown in its linguistic delivery to perform a speech act which moves the speaker toward a particular end. I say something so that I may not only communicate but also so that I disclose to the world the type of manifestation I want to achieve about myself as a particular self among others. In this sense, manifestation as a sphere operates within the public domain. I do not reveal myself only to myself, but also to others, inasmuch as I "typify" (to use Husserl's term) who I am in my speech, whereby a predictable pattern of who I am, as this speaker, emerges over time. There could not be, in Sokolowski's terms, manifestation at all without me there to achieve it and someone else there to receive it. Individuals are both an agents of manifestation (I achieve myself) and datives of manifestation (receptacles), and often both at once (Sokolowski, 2008, p.14). A strict self-revelation, or manifestation within the realm of myself alone, is properly speaking no manifestation at all unless there is another dative (or community of datives) there to receive the manifestation, and make it visible therewith (Sokolowski, 2000, p.121). Experience, as a form of manifestation, transcends the poverty of the natural scientific attitude, in that phenomenology takes seriously the experience of the life of the subject in a community with other subjects, quite independent of its confirmation by the methods of empirical science.

Of the two types of speech, it is the informational domain in which I achieve a modest form of manifestation. For Sokolowski, when I am speaking to you in the informational domain, I attempt to relay information about the surrounding world we occupy together. I may say "it is snowing outside." I make that statement, but that speech act does not reveal much about my personal identity. My revelation of the weather could be equally said in the third person. In contrast, when I perform the declarative, I am achieving a manifestation of a the first-personal kind.

When I say, for example, I am angry or that I am a fireman, or that I love you, I am revealing to you a dynamic accomplishment of myself, that can be accomplished only from within the performative context of the first-person singular. The very achievement of myself is at stake, for my "personhood" (Sokolowski's term) comes to light in that "I engage myself in what I say" (2008, p.10). I perform myself, and thereby bring myself to light. When I declare that I love you or that I distrust you, I am not reporting mere facts about the weather. Rather I am doing more than informing you of me, because the declarative exhibits me in my very agency as "me" and no other. I show myself in my address to you—I do not just tell you about myself.

In the context of confessional theology, Sokolowski applies this style of declarative phenomenology to the words of Jesus in the New Testament. The manner of givenness of the declarative spoken by the person of Christ reveals to us the Trinity, if we let it, once we read carefully Christ's verbal exchanges with the Father in the New Testament. The "theology of disclosure" (Sokolowski's terminology) utilizes phenomenology as an interpretive lens, as a style of reading, a deliberate uncovering of the manifestation proper to the Son's speech. "The teaching of Christian faith is not the addition of new items of information into the whole which we have by nature, but the introduction of an entirely new presentational or intentional dimension to the whole of things and to our noetic possession of them" (Sokolowski, 2006, p.35). The discipline of phenomenological explication, and its vocabulary of manifestation, can be of help to the theologians who want to understand more fully the subjective experience of the Trinity from the point of view of the Son's speech acts. Faith, as a theological variant of the Husserlian epoché, here interprets what enhances the natural rhythm of speech, because Christ's speech theologically saturates the speech act. Framed in this phenomenological context, Sokolowski interprets the "natural" paradigm of speech acts in terms of Christian faith: reading the New Testament in a phenomenological manner becomes an exercise of faith, conducted ultimately under the aegis of theological assumptions (Sokolowski, 1995, p.139). This is on display in his essay "The Revelation of the Trinity: A Study in Personal Pronouns."⁸ How so?

Jesus, in the New Testament, talks to Father in the declarative "I." Such speech acts necessarily reveal to us a feature of Jesus from his own, first-person point of view. In those exchanges with the Father, Jesus performs what he says and he self-identifies with what he declares himself to be. As an agent in just this first-person manner, Jesus reveals a truth about himself, and makes himself manifest to the public in a way he does not when he delivers a sermon or tells a parable. Jesus focuses on the shape of his personal identity when he speaks in the first-person pronoun, saying of himself "I and the Father are one" (John 10.30).

The Trinity could not have been made manifest in the third person, but only "from within" the Trinity itself. Just as it is only "I" who can reveal myself in my first-person speech act, so also it is only a member of the Trinity who can reveal the Trinity. Henceforth Sokolowski permits us to say the following: Jesus does not report his relationship with the Father but engages himself in that relationship when he declares himself to be the one whom the Father has sent, and so "The Father who sent me commanded me what to say ... so what I say, I say as the Father told me" (John 12.49). By force of his declarative speech act, Jesus indicates differentiation-in-unity within the Trinity. In contrast, a Prophet who spoke about the Trinity "from without" could not in principle reveal the phenomenon of the Trinity, except to say that God is a God of a people, in covenant. Only God can reveal God; only God can reveal the internal life of God as Trinitarian (Sokolowski, 2006, pp.134–40). I am not Jesus, so I do not make the Trinity manifest, but it can become a phenomenon for me in my act of faith in Jesus' speech acts.

Jean-Luc Marion, too, reads off the Trinity as a phenomenon disclosed principally in the New Testament. A trend of phenomenological readings of scripture is evident in Sokolowski and Marion (as well as in Michel Henry, Emmanuel Falque, and Kevin Hart, though we do not have space to engage their work here⁹). Marion devotes considerable space to the logic of manifestation native to the Trinity as it unfolds in scripture. The Trinity's arrival (self-deployment), together with its reception as a phenomenon (reception by me), depends not only on the movement of the Trinitarian persons but also on the subject who receives it, the dative of manifestation: I am the one who reads and interprets scripture, making possible Trinitarian disclosure. And yet, precisely because I participate in the

Trinitarian economy, the interpretive stance itself remains a work of grace, an interpretation prompted by and enjoyed in the Spirit.

No less Christian than Sokolowski, then, the work of Jean-Luc Marion distinguishes itself by a particular emphasis on the work Holy Spirit as it affects the subjective life of the Christian, the one who is gifted by the Spirit (according to Marion). Marion suggests that the ego is the nominative "I" whose agency molds data according to *a priori* conditions or scheme outlined in advance. The ego is conjugated again, this time in the dative case. The "I" becomes a "me," for the ego undergoes or bears witness to the manifestation of a phenomenon. The appearing of a chair in the warehouse is always an appearing of a chair not in a vacuum but to a perceiving subject or a me (dative). For Marion, the ego as witness, is "given over to" a phenomenon's disclosure. What might this mean? How does a phenomenon, given to me, actually become something I receive as a gift?

For Marion, who has written extensively on the idea of the gift, has completely reconfigured the structure of the subject or the ego in light of the dative-structure of the gift. Marion decides to abandon the normal philosophical vocabulary ascribed to the ego, such as the "subject" or the "self." Instead he redescribes it in great detail as the "gifted," or the one who receives an object just as it is given. The implications of Marion's innovation concerning the structure of the subject are enormous. The best way to draw out the main points, in the space below, is to highlight Marion's modification of the Husserlian ego.

Recall that Husserl suggests the ego remains active at every moment, precisely because the ego "constitutes" or shapes the objects given from the surrounding environment. While an object, say a dog, is given to the ego, it is only given within the constraints of the expectations the ego has of the dog. Saturating the object with predetermined expectations of dogness, the ego anticipates the manifestation of the dog. The word "saturation" used by Husserl here foreshadows an important development in the work of Marion.

For Marion, the experience of saturation resides not with the subjective life of the ego, but with the side of the object's manifestation. There have been in the history of phenomenology, according to Marion, two standard models of the "subject - object" relationship: (a) one of poor fulfillment, and (b) one of perfect fulfillment. Both are Husserlian in logic. The two elements (or two sides), the subject and the object, maintain a relationship with each other by the degrees of fulfillment the object gives to the subject. A match between subject and object is accomplished when the object's manifestation provides full validation of the subject's conceptual scheme that is outlined in advance. The dog I see before me, as I see it and hear it over the course of time, as I move from one side to the other, and as I touch it, becomes an object that totally validates the subject's concept of the dog. Perfect fullness of the object's givenness, or a complete match between subject and object, rarely occurs. What happens frequently is that an object, again a dog, gives itself in only partial validation of the subject's concept of the dog. The partial validation of the concept by an object's appearance does not fulfill the concept totally, but the object in question usually gives enough to certify the concept (i.e., I am convinced that the object I behold is really a dog, precisely because it matches enough with my assumption of dogness). I may only see the wagging tale and hear the bark from a distance, but that is enough for me to conclude that I am experiencing a dog (what kind of dog I do not yet know. Is it aggressive or friendly? Is it a terrier or a poodle? Is it brown or black?).

Marion's breakthrough offers a third alternative in the wake of these two: it consists of paying attention to the relation between subject and object in which the givenness of the object would surpass the concept by exceeding the parameters of either partial or complete fulfillment. In other words, the "saturated phenomenon" as Marion nominates it, concerns the situation in which the object's manifestation would not only validate all that "for which the concept assures intelligibility but would also add a given that this concept would no longer be able to constitute as an object or render objectively intelligible" (Marion, 2008, p.120). Such an excess of the object's appearance over and above the concept would invert the common situation (partial or adequate fulfillment) without, however, abandoning the sphere of experience altogether, since the two elements of subject and object are still operative. What examples suggest the experience of excess or saturation?

In an essay named the "Banality of Saturation," Marion helpfully articulates what makes a phenomenon "excessive" or "saturating" in its impact. The meaning of banality in this context communicates that any single phenomenon

can become saturated or excessive in its display before me. In other words, it is common that objects often overwhelm me, not in frequency, but in possibility. Any single phenomenon can evolve into a saturated phenomenon if the conditions make it so. We can analyze any object from the five senses.

For example, take three colors that are lined up in a row. From top to bottom, a traffic light can have green, yellow and red. This example falls under the category of an adequate match between concept and content, insofar as the concept fully apprehends the information communicated by the lighting arrangement. Green means go, and nothing more. Yellow means one must slow down and stop, unless one is in the intersection. Red means stop, and nothing more. That is to say, the colors are reduced immediately to their signification or their meaning, without their visual effect evoking any further information in the subject's lived experience of the traffic light. The concept of the mind grasps the meaning of the manifestation or impact of the light without remainder. There is a perfect match between subject and object.

Yet, if three colors are arranged in a flag, in vertical blocks moving from left to right, as green, white and orange, what may result? I encounter the Irish flag. This appearance should communicate an excessive amount of information, such that the flag exceeds the grasp of the concept in the subjective life of the ego; this of course is the case if I am an Irish patriot who finds the history of Irish independence deeply meaningful and inspirational. The Irish flag represents the hard fought freedom won by those who sacrificed their lives in 1916. The Irish rebelled against English colonialism and won their independence, against great odds. After establishing a constitution in 1922, the Irish citizenry has defined its culture, revived the Irish language and sport, and gained international status as a tourist destination. With the memory of the centenary of 2016 still fresh, the Irish flag makes its "landing" (i.e., when I see it) on the Irish citizen in an excessive manner. Yet, how may this be explained?

The flag's impact overwhelms the comprehension of any single subjective concept. The three colors cannot be grasped for the information they transmit, namely, that Ireland is a sovereign country that is a member of the European Union. Even in "seeing" the flag, in beholding it, one does not have a signification or form or concept that can symmetrically match the profound moment in European history the flag represents. It refers to centuries of struggle, sacrifice, national identity, all wrought in the face of colonialism, and much more. Indeed, the flag as a saturated phenomenon "does not have to be constituted or comprehended as an object; it only has to be confronted and submitted to, as it come upon me" (Marion, 2008 p.128). No scheme or concept can exhaust the flag's meaning, not least fully configure comprehensively the content of the flag. Indeed, the flag itself overwhelms me, if I am an Irish patriot, inasmuch as it discourages all the concepts that I can mobilize to comprehend the green, white and orange stripes. What is Irishness? How can I contain it with a concept(s)? This example may undergo restatement according to the sense in question: an airport announcement versus the excess of a Bach cantata, or touching wax versus the excess of erotic touch, and so forth.

The implications of the saturated phenomenon for the understanding of the subject are enormous and cannot be overlooked. The successor to the "subject," for Marion, is called the "gifted." As a subject, I (or anyone else) do not constitute an object when it impacts me with excessive force. Rather, when I encounter a saturated phenomenon, it accomplishes more than the feeling of being overwhelmed. It constitutes me. The phenomenology of saturation, it could be stated, conveys an inversion of Husserl's "constituting I." Thus: in the exchange with the flag, I do not endow it with form, according to Marion, but rather I become a receiver who is given form by the flag. Marion describes the logic of the given in this way, "The receiver is therefore put forward as a filter or prism, which brings about that the first visibility arises, precisely because it does not claim to produce it but submits to it without interfering or causing a disturbance. This filter thus defines a function: manifesting what presents (gives) itself, but which must still be introduced into the presence of the world (show itself)" (Marion, 2002, p.264). The manifestation of an object lay with the object's measure of manifestation, not with the subject.

Like an oil or coffee filter, the "I" submits to the content it holds. As a filter, the self (here the Irish patriot) keeps the content intact all while the content shapes the filter in its own image. I am thus "like a transparent screen is colored by the impact of a ray of light heretofore uncoloured in the translucent ether that suddenly explodes on it" (Marion, 2002, p.265). Hence, the "gifted," or the self, that is, the Irish patriot, is defined wholly in light of

givenness because he is completely achieved “as soon as he surrenders unconditionally to what gives itself—and first of all to the saturated phenomenon that calls him.” By surrendering or “giving oneself over” to the Irish flag, one permits the given to arise, and in so doing, the self arises in tandem. I receive my identity from that which is given, when I am given over to it, and in turn, I become an Irish patriot.

How this may apply to the phenomenology of the Trinity is the topic of Marion's Gifford lectures, published as *Givenness and Revelation* (Marion, 2016). Recall, as the gifted, I am the receiver (i.e., receptacle or screen on which phenomena appear). I am the filter through which a phenomenon gives itself, even the Trinity, if it is to count as a phenomenon. The phenomenological distinction to be reinforced here, at this juncture, is that the intentional ray of the ego does not determine or saturate the object, but rather is overwhelmed by the saturating impact of the phenomenon. Husserl's constituting ray is inverted by a counter-intentionality. Faith in Holy Spirit reconfigures the intentional ray, whereby the subject becomes the gifted, whereby I am given over to God in the Holy Spirit.

In faith, Marion suggests, I give myself over to the experience of the Spirit, yielding to its unrelenting power as the Spirit appropriates me in its manifestation. In this theological sense, as Husserl indicated above, I can perform an epoché on the basis of a great “resolve of the will,” though it is motivated and aided by the power of Spirit of God. Of what does theological epoché consist, as I subjectively experience it? For Marion, I can *in the Spirit* rotate the direction of my vision so that my ray of attention can “line up” properly on the axis of the Trinity's givenness (Marion calls this process anamorphosis, like moving one's line of sight to the proper angle to see a hologram). Once this occurs, I permit the phenomenon to give itself just as it is given (from its own point of view, so to speak). This means that the Trinity is a saturated phenomenon in which the invisible is made manifest in the visible, insofar as the Father illuminates the Son, who is the visible Icon of the invisible Father. The Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, embodies that special power that enables the gifted to receive and recognize the Trinity as such.

The iconic model of this logic of manifestation, for Marion, suggests that God's revelation can only be experienced as a saturated phenomenon. Conceived in this way, the Trinity constitutes me. I do not typify or constitute it. The Spirit's work in the iconic model (Marion's term) consummates in “complete 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” (Marion, 2016, p.108). The iconic model is itself Trinitarian, whereby the worshipper appropriates in faith the person of Jesus as a Son, with whom the Father is one. Acknowledgement of saturation is a recognition made possible by the Spirit. Hence 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 uncovered as the very axis where the gaze of the Father on the Son and that of the Son at the Father pass” (Marion, 2016, p.108). The Spirit, in the context of faith, confers on the gaze an “optical power” to see in the visible face of Jesus the invisible depth of the Father. The Spirit, to be more precise, must serve to “convert” my vision (Marion's phrase), so that I undergo a gestalt shift, again, what may be framed as a theological epoché: I can now see the love of the Father in the visible face of the son on the Cross, whereas before I could not.

My point of view changes, through faith, so that a space is opened in my line of vision where God can be received within “the limits of our finitude and egocentrism” (Marion, 2016, p.117). But the Spirit remains invisible because it makes possible the iconic vision. The Spirit recedes into the background of the stage of visibility, a place where only the Son appears. He, as depicted in the gospels, represents the lone iconic reference point of the Trinity. The Father, who is “one with the Son,” does not properly speaking appear. It is the Son alone who is the sole “phenomenon in and for all the Trinity ... the body of Christ made visible, the only place of manifestation for the entire Trinity.”¹⁰ The iconic model of manifestation reduces the manifestation of the Trinity to the visible manifestation of the Son.

5 | CONCLUSION

This trend in recent philosophy of religion trades on theological inclinations. Confessional phenomenology approaches such hallowed and complicated doctrines, or mysteries of the faith, such as the Trinity, with phenomenological skill. The

figures above, Sokolowski and Marion, prepare the phenomenologist to read the New Testament canon with not with strict neutrality, but rather with a theological attitude (i.e., faith) that allows the phenomenon of the Trinity to be given just as it gives itself. The results are varied: God may overwhelm us, constituting us as witnesses (Marion). One may respond to Marion: does one experience the divine under the aspect of saturation? Am I overwhelmed with the Trinity? May we not, in contrast, invoke Anselm's statement in the *Proslogion*, that non-experience attends our encounter with God, and an empty cognition of the Trinity shall prompt not frustration but a deeper experience of faith: "You are within me and around me, and yet I do not perceive you" (Anselm, 2007, p.90).

In our reading of Sokolowski, phenomenology may encourage us to see the unique way in which Christ's speech acts declare a truth about Christ's personal identity, which in turn, can shape the personal identity of those who decide to follow Christ. Further research in this area may involve more detailed analyses of parables or Jesus' speech acts (Michel Henry emphasizes this with equal force), but certainly some attention must be given to the tradition of reflection on the Trinity drawn from the fourth and fifth-centuries (in Tertullian, Gregory of Nyssa, Hilary of Poitiers, Augustine, etc.). While the New Testament canon serves the purpose of early witnesses to the actions and speech acts of Jesus, it hardly reveals the true shape of the doctrine of the Trinity, which only emerged in the crucible of debate, in the centuries to come. Such metaphysical ordering of the Father, Son and Spirit, then, does not unfold in the New Testament but must await a few centuries to come to fruition. Phenomenological renderings of the Trinity, if they are to remain faithful to the historical legacy of the patristic evolution of the doctrine, shall therefore attend to those third and fourth-century debates about the person of Christ, and relatedly, the Trinity.¹¹

ENDNOTES

- ¹ See for example, the following works: Benson and Wirzba (2005), Lacoste (2015) and Sokolowski (1994).
- ² Not all "confessional" phenomenologists speak of the divine in the vocabulary of the Trinity. Some prominent authors whose work I would classify in this group, like Jean-Yves Lacoste, will only talk of the "phenomenology of God" or of the "phenomenology of the Absolute." See Lacoste (2008) and (2004).
- ³ For an excellent reference work that reviews the work of these thinkers and more on the doctrine of the Trinity, see Declan Marmion and Rik Van Nieuwenhove (2011). Compare with similar themes taken up in a constructive fashion in the important Moltmann (1993).
- ⁴ Some in contemporary analytic philosophy have shown interest in the Trinity; see Leftow (2009), Van Inwagen (1988) and Swinburne (1988). and Future research would bring the Continental and Analytic streams together.
- ⁵ See "The Origin of Geometry" in (Husserl, 1970b).
- ⁶ While it frames Husserl's early work, the issue of psychologism is explicitly addressed in (2001, §§17–48).
- ⁷ See Van Der Leeuw (1986); it was originally published in German in 1933.
- ⁸ See the essay in Sokolowski (2006, pp.131–50).
- ⁹ See also in the field the important work of Michel Henry (2003). This text should be read in conjunction with remaining books of his trilogy on Christianity, Henry (2012) and (2015). See also Hart, "Notes Toward a Supreme Phenomenology in (2014); also see Falque (2012) and (2016b).
- ¹⁰ Marion also discusses the dichotomy of idol versus icon in an earlier work (2012, chapter 1), in which the icon assumes an invisible point of reference that leads one's gaze to look beyond that point of reference. In continuity with his earlier work, Marion here simply resituates the icon on Christological terrain. For the quotes, see Marion (2016, pp.110 and 111).
- ¹¹ Marion does engage in selective readings of Augustine and Basil of Caesarea, especially concerning the work of the Holy Spirit, in the discussion of the Trinity. See Marion (2016, pp.100–10).

ORCID

Joseph Rivera  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8650-7918>

WORKS CITED

- Anselm (2007). *Proslogion*. In T. Williams (Ed.), *Basic writings*. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Aquinas, T. (1948). *Summa Theologica*. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (trans.). New York: Benziger Brothers.
- Augustine (1991). *The Trinity*. Edmund Hill (trans.). New York: New City Press.

- Benoist, J. (2001). *L'idée de phénoménologie*. Paris: Editions Beauchesne.
- Benson, B., & Wirzba, N. (Eds.) (2005). *The Phenomenology of Prayer*. New York: Fordham University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5422/fso/9780823224951.001.0001>
- Falque, E. (2012). *The Metamorphosis of Finitude*. George Hughes (trans.). New York: Fordham University Press.
- Falque, E. (2016a). *Passing the Rubicon: On the Frontier of Philosophy and Theology*, Reuben Shank (trans.). New York: Fordham University Press.
- Falque, E. (2016b). *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb: Eros, the Body, and the Eucharist*. George Hughes (trans.). New York: Fordham University Press.
- Hart, K. (2014). *Kingdoms of God*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Henry, M. (2003). *I am the Truth: A Philosophy of Christianity*, trans. Susan Emanuel. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Henry, M. (2012). *Words of Christ*. Christina Gschwandtner (trans.). Grand Rapids, MI: Eedrmans.
- Henry, M. (2015). *Incarnation: A Philosophy of Flesh*. Karl Hefty (trans.). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Husserl, E. (1970a). *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* David Carr (trans.). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Husserl, E. (1970b). "The Origin of Geometry." In The appendix of Edmund Husserl. In *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (pp. 343, 343–378). David Carr (trans.), 378). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Husserl, E. (1973). *Experience and Judgment: Investigations in the Genealogy of Logic*, James S. Churchill and Karl Ameriks (trans.). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973.
- Husserl, E. (1983). *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Book I*. F. Kersten (trans.). Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic.
- Husserl, E. (2001). *Logical investigations* (ed., Vol. I. J.N. Findlay (trans.)). London and New York: Routledge.
- Janicaud, D. (2010). *Phenomenology "Wide Open:" After the French Debate*. Mark Cabral (trans.). New York: Fordham University Press.
- Lacoste, J.-Y. (2004). *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man*. Mark Raferty Skehan (trans.). New York: Fordham University Press.
- Lacoste, J.-Y. (2008). *Le phéroménalité de dieu*. Paris: Cerf.
- Lacoste, J.-Y. (2015). *L'intuition sacramentelle*. Paris: Ad Solem.
- Leftow, B. (2009). A Latin Trinity. In M. Rea (Ed.), *Oxford Readings in Philosophical Theology* (ed., Vol. I) (pp. 76–106). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Marion, J.-L. (2002). *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*. Jeffrey Kosky (trans.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Marion, J.-L. (2008). *The Visible and the Revealed*. Christina Gschwandtner (trans.). New York: Fordham University Press.
- Marion, J.-L. (2012). *God without Being: Hors-Texte* (Second ed., Thomas Carlson (trans.)). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Marion, J.-L. (2016). *Givenness and Revelation*. Stephen Lewis (trans.). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Marmion, D., & Van Nieuwenhove, R. (2011). *An Introduction to the Trinity*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Moltmann, J. (1993). *The Trinity and the Kingdom*. Margaret Kohl (trans.). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- Simmons, J. A. (2017). Cheaper than a Corvette: The Relevance of Phenomenology for Contemporary Philosophy of Religion. *Sophia*, 56, 33–43. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11841-017-0586-9>
- Sokolowski, R. (1994). *Eucharistic Presence: A Study in the Theology of Disclosure*. Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press.
- Sokolowski, R. (1995). *God of Faith and Reason*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of American Press.
- Sokolowski, R. (2000). *Introduction to Phenomenology*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Sokolowski, R. (2006). *Christian Faith and Human Understanding: Studies on the Eucharist, Trinity and the Human Person*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press.
- Sokolowski, R. (2008). *Phenomenology of the Human Person*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511812804>
- Staudigl, M. (2016). On Seizing the Source: Toward a Phenomenology of Religious Violence. *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 24(5), 744–782. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09672559.2016.1284785>

- Swinburne, R. (1988). Could there Be More than One God? *Faith and Philosophy*, 5(3), 225–241. <https://doi.org/10.5840/faithphil19885332>
- Van Der Leeuw, G. (1986). *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*. John Evan Turner (trans.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Van Inwagen, P. (1988). And Yet They are not Three Gods, but One God. In T. V. Morris (Ed.), *Philosophy and the Christian faith*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Joseph Rivera is a lecturer in Theology at Dublin City University in Ireland. He specializes in Continental philosophy of religion, patristic theology, and political theology. His first monograph explored Michel Henry's unique interpretation of phenomenology and its theological consequences in light of St. Augustine, in *The Contemplative Self after Michel Henry* (Notre Dame University Press, 2015). A second monograph has been released that explores political theology and public dialogue in constructive relation to liberalism, especially as it is conceived by John Rawls in *Political Theology and Pluralism: Renewing Public Dialogue* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2018). His next project intends to bring together Continental and Analytic traditions concerning the question of realism versus anti-realism.

How to cite this article: Rivera J. Phenomenologies of the trinity: Trends in recent philosophy of religion. *Philosophy Compass*. 2019;14:e12561. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12561>