

Editorial

Introduction of Special Issue “Phenomenology and Systematic Theology”

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For over a century, phenomenology has been a major philosophical movement. It has also been uniquely open to religious questions in general and theology in particular. For the relatively young discipline of religious studies, phenomenology became important from the early to late 20th century. Even if they were not working closely with their philosophical companions, figures such as Rudolf Otto, van der Leeuw and Mircea Eliade held on to phenomenological conviction, such as experience as the source of knowledge, conceived as the holy or *mana*, and applied the eidetic method of phenomenology, leading to typologies and classifications of religious phenomena. As for theology, Martin Heidegger’s phenomenology, with its integration of impulses from Augustine and Kierkegaard, was the first source that inspired influential theologians. Rudolf Bultmann not only collaborated with Heidegger in the 1920s, but he also gradually adapted Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein in his own hermeneutics. Paul Tillich made the notion of Being central to his theology, along with phenomenological approaches to religious experiences.

However, philosophical phenomenology not only inspired other disciplines, but addressed religious problematics from its inception. Although Edmund Husserl, the father figure of modern phenomenology, did not present any sustained analyses of religious phenomena in his published writings, his available working manuscripts show that theological questions were far from absent in his thinking. Toward the end of his career, Husserl produced several analyses of God conceived as a teleological idea. Still, it was not Husserl’s own thoughts of God that stimulated conversation between the theology and phenomenology, rather it was the fruitfulness of the phenomenological approach in general. Husserl once remarked that he seemed to be a catalyst of religious development; among his assistants, a Jewish person became Catholic (Edith Stein) and a Catholic person became Protestant (Heidegger). Stein would later develop deep phenomenological investigations of both Thomist metaphysics and mysticism. In the early 1920s, Heidegger was occupied with Paul, Augustine, Luther, Kierkegaard, and Schleiermacher. Max Scheler, who had early departed from Husserl’s phenomenology, also turned toward studying the holy and eternal in man toward the late 1920s. Thus, within the first wave of phenomenology, religious and theological topics had found a home within this new way of thinking.

In more recent times, French phenomenology most intensively became occupied with the interweaving of phenomenology and religion. Yet, all of the influential French phenomenologists took their predecessors very seriously, especially Husserl and Heidegger, and in this way, organically prolonged and modified their ideas. There is one name that stands out as decisive for the development of the French tradition, namely, Emmanuel Levinas. While he repeatedly claims to distinguish sharply between his theological and philosophical writings, it is hard to read his main philosophical works without noting the constant presence of a religious dimension, or more accurately, a Jewish dimension. By analyzing the sense of the holy in terms of one’s ethical relationship with the Other, and thereby one’s relationship with God, Levinas introduced a different way of conducting phenomenology, no longer in terms of Husserlian intentionality or Heideggerian ontology,



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but as an articulate response to a revelation addressing us from beyond. While Levinas preserved his specific Jewish and ethical rendering of phenomenology, he no doubt paved the way for new phenomenological approaches from within the Christian tradition. Jean-Luc Marion, Jean-Louis Chrétien, Michel Henry, Jean-Yve Lacoste, and later, Emmanuel Falque provide different takes on phenomenology corresponding to different versions of Christianity. Despite their differences, they all testify to phenomenology's openness to theology in a way that inspires a constant flow of new contributions in this field, as this volume attests to.

Such a swift survey of the development of phenomenology and theology draws a picture of an intimate relationship between phenomenology and religion or theology. In a time where secular philosophy is prevailing, we must ask: what is it about phenomenology that has invited extensive reflections on religious ideas? There is no one way to answer this, partly because the thinkers have developed different versions of phenomenology, and partly because they have been drawn to different forms of theological thinking. However, we want to suggest that some deep structures within phenomenology correspond to religion. Most importantly, phenomenology is essentially open in the sense that it takes experience as its ultimate source, starting point, and lodestar. Although theology does not enact lived religion, but a higher-order reflection of religion, such reflection is rooted in and tries to recapture the lived encounters within a religious horizon. In bracketing all pre-conceptions, phenomenology seeks to uncover the religious "things themselves" as they are given before becoming objects of theoretical edifices, such as systematic theology. This openness of phenomenology keeps the tradition alive, constantly invoking new descriptions of the inexhaustible mysteries where also religious phenomena belong.

In many ways, World War One was a collapse of the trust in Western civilization, and along with it, the sense of organic academic traditions was broken. Protestant theology found itself in a state of crisis in the early twentieth century. Theology became a problem. On the one hand, all theology was tied to the past, especially Biblical revelations; on the other hand, the cultural and historical situations required radical new ways of passing it on. Barth and Bultmann are the most famous spokesmen for this renewal of the so-called "dialectical theology." God cannot be spoken of as integral to human culture or as a metaphysical object of thought, they held. Theology must start over again from the basic "thing in itself", that is, from the revelation, as given in terms of its otherness. The emphasis put on alterity is parallel to the way Otto and later Levinas speak of the Wholly Other. Even as dialectical theology passed away and new forms of theologies have seen the light, the former did articulate one challenge to all later theologies within secular modernity: they need to find new ways to articulate the revelation and its impact in a changing world. Phenomenology has proved to provide a fruitful way to reconceive our being in the world and the transcendence that is inscribed in it. But it can also be said that the impulse goes the other way, from theology to philosophical phenomenology. In the more recent French phenomenological movement, we detect a willingness, not only to listen to theology, but also to let it challenge the phenomenological tenets.

One may, however, wonder if there is no limit to what kind of theological issues phenomenology can address within its own compass. It seems reasonable that we still have to retain some sense of a distinction. Theology is not a philosophy, and the phenomenological philosophy is not identical with theology. When Dominique Janicaud wrote his essay on the theological turn in France in 1991, it was precisely the legitimacy of phenomenology's transgression toward theology that was brought up. If phenomenology wants to explore phenomena, Janicaud believed that it must do so in keeping with the intuitive evidence given within an immanent framework. After all, Husserl demanded a secure position based on apodictic evidence and eidetic structures in order to establish phenomenology as a rigorous science. Philosophy cannot become theology and stay within its constitutive constraints. The attempt made by Levinas and the ensuing French tradition to posit a revelation coming from beyond the horizon of immanence. This is, for Janicaud, to go beyond what phenomenology can legitimately account for. Janicaud's essay ended up

stirring a lively discussion, undoubtedly because it addressed the very core of our conception of what phenomenology is and questioned the philosophical projects of many of his contemporary phenomenologists. Of course, counterquestions were soon raised: Should we conceive phenomenology as fixed or living tradition? Must phenomenology stick to Janicaud's rigorous principles? Or must those principles, faced with revelations, givenness, otherness, or verticality, be broadened and modified, precisely to remain true to "the things themselves"? In various versions, such questions have been discussed in the aftermath of Janicaud's contribution, and these questions haunt the discussions of today.

This Special Issue of *Religions* seeks to explore the relationship between theology and phenomenology in the aftermath Janicaud's work and the "theological turn." The articles do not confine themselves to French phenomenology and contemporary phenomenologists. Rather, the articles attempt to reopen both phenomenology and theology to the question of how we can reconceive the intimate relation and fruitful exchange between them that the last hundred years has born witness to. The articles gathered in this Special Issue explore this relationship without sacrificing the rigor and style of phenomenological philosophy, but also without remaining simply bogged down by drawing disciplinary boundaries.

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