

## Research Article

Nikolaas Cassidy-Deketelaere\*

# Towards a Phenomenology of Kenosis: Thinking after the Theological Turn

<https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2022-0201>

received October 31, 2021; accepted February 28, 2022

**Abstract:** What could it mean to think “after the theological turn”? This article proposes one possible answer by reframing the theological turn in light of the way in which Paul’s kenosis serves as a metaphor for deconstruction in a variety of continental philosophers who are all nevertheless hostile to overt theologising. Tracking this notion through the history of theology and philosophy, the article argues that it has been philosophically appropriated so as to indicate the point within the Christian theological complex that constitutes its fatal agent by setting in motion Christianity’s own self-deconstruction or de-theologisation. This dynamic, which implies that every engagement with theology ultimately carries itself outside of theology proper, will then allow the article to reconceive the gesture operated by phenomenology’s theological turn: in their right turn towards theology, the philosopher must be careful not to simply remain stuck there, for it only serves their investigation insofar as this engagement is precisely what allows them to turn away from “the theological,” or for phenomenology de-theologise itself. By drawing out the kenotic motif in contemporary continental philosophy and connecting it to phenomenology’s theological turn, the article thus argues that what is needed now is a deconstruction of the theological turn. This can be accomplished by way of what the article proposes to call a “phenomenology of kenosis”: namely, a phenomenology that starts from theology (Paul’s notion of kenosis), precisely so as to move beyond it (to de-theologise itself).

**Keywords:** phenomenology, theology, kenosis, continental philosophy of religion, theological turn, deconstruction, Jean-Luc Nancy

One day, the gods withdraw. Of their own volition, they withdraw their divinity, which is to say, their presence. They won’t simply leave, they won’t go somewhere else, they’ll withdraw their own presence – they’ll disappear within it.

– Jean-Luc Nancy, *Expectation*, 25.

What could it mean to think “after the theological turn”? As only a single author belonging to the set originally accused by Dominique Janicaud of misdirecting French phenomenology in this way still survives, the question of what the present and future direction of continental philosophy of religion might be is becoming increasingly urgent. Today, there is indeed no other option than to think *after* the theological turn, much like one cannot avoid engaging in post-theological or post-modern thinking in general without sinking into a quaint naiveté: one must look back on these respective projects – in which we are still involved to some degree but of which time has exposed the internal contradictions and inherent dangers – so as to pursue their ambitions by other and hopefully improved means.

The shortcomings of the theological turn have been demonstrated, directly or indirectly, by numerous other approaches in contemporary continental philosophy of religion: Quentin Meillassoux rejects

---

\* **Corresponding author: Nikolaas Cassidy-Deketelaere**, Faculty of Philosophy, Catholic University of Paris/Australian Catholic University, Paris, France, e-mail: [nikolaas.deketelaere@campusicp.fr](mailto:nikolaas.deketelaere@campusicp.fr)

phenomenology and its purported fideism outright, Giorgio Agamben provides a sharp contrast to the theological turn's extraordinary political apathy, and Jean-Luc Nancy – perhaps most significantly – increasingly presses “that in order to speak of God, we have to speak of something other than the Other.”<sup>1</sup> This is not to mention the remarkable institutional irrelevance of the theological turn's expansive phenomenological ambitions: the “purely” phenomenological analyses provided by these authors have remained perhaps surprisingly marginal to academic philosophy in general (even within the continental tradition) and are met with indifference by academic theologians (e.g. it is remarkable that phenomenology is nowadays far less popular a method for formal theologising than it was in the mid-twentieth century). A different vision for what continental philosophy of religion could be, especially according to the phenomenological method and in the wake of the theological turn, is therefore needed.

Here, I propose one such possible vision – though, undoubtedly, by no means the only possible one –<sup>2</sup> by reframing the theological turn in light of the way in which Paul's *kenosis* serves as a metaphor for deconstruction in a variety of other continental philosophers who are all nevertheless hostile to overt theologising (including but not limited to Jean-Luc Nancy, Catherine Malabou, and Jacques Derrida).<sup>3</sup> Tracking this notion through the history of theology and philosophy, I will argue that it has been philosophically appropriated so as to indicate the point within the Christian theological complex that constitutes its fatal agent by setting in motion its own self-deconstruction or de-theologisation. This dynamic, which implies that every engagement with theology ultimately carries itself outside of theology proper, will then allow us to reconceive, or even to complete, the gesture operated by phenomenology's theological turn: in their right *turn towards* theology, the philosopher must be careful not to simply remain stuck there, for it only serves their investigation insofar as this engagement is precisely what allows them to *turn away* from “the theological,” or for phenomenology de-theologise itself – illustrating perfectly what Emmanuel Falque means when he says that “the more we theologise, the better we philosophise.” In other words, by drawing out the kenotic motif in contemporary continental philosophy and connecting it to phenomenology's theological turn, I will argue that what is needed now is a *deconstruction of the theological turn*. This, I suggest, can be accomplished by way of what I would call – if only in a programmatic way – a “phenomenology of kenosis”: namely, a phenomenology that *starts from* theology (Paul's notion of kenosis), precisely so as to *move beyond* it (to de-theologise itself). As my aim in this article is to elucidate what thinking “after the theological turn” might mean, this phenomenology will not actually be developed here; instead, the space is simply cleared for it and its potential significance to the field outlined. Nevertheless, the present investigation, perhaps like the theological turn itself, certainly constitutes a first (theological) step *towards* such a phenomenology of kenosis, even if the (philosophical and phenomenological) destination is thereby not yet reached.

To make this step, I will first give an overview of the present state of continental philosophy, noting in particular that the “return of religion” – which arguably defines the scope of the field – is actually composed of two distinct movements: the “theological turn” is only one of these, since there is a parallel set of authors who all approach religion through the lens of Paul's kenosis. Subsequently, I will briefly discuss a few examples from this second set of authors, but only after first giving a detailed overview of the role the kenotic motif plays within systematic theology. After all, the very logic of kenosis demands as much: we can only move beyond “the theological” by first starting with theology. Finally, I conclude with a programmatic section that, though it must still remain somewhat abstract and provisional, proposes what “thinking after the theological turn” by way of a “phenomenology of kenosis” might mean and how it is significant to the field of continental philosophy (of religion).

<sup>1</sup> Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 113; Meillassoux, *After Finitude*; and Agamben, *The Time that Remains*.

<sup>2</sup> For examples of alternatives, see Crockett et al., *The Future of Continental Philosophy of Religion* – which rightly pays significant attention to Catherine Malabou's work on plasticity, a category that has received too little attention within the present context.

<sup>3</sup> Though I will stick to simply observing this common interest, a more detailed account is offered by Baird, “Whose *Kenosis*?”

## 1 The ambiguous return of religion

With philosophers from different traditions and religious backgrounds collectively turning to religious themes and language, the “return of religion” is a widely *observed* fact of the recent history of thought that has nevertheless been *described* rather inadequately. This is partly due to “religion” inevitably proving impossible to define,<sup>4</sup> though we may pragmatically understand this “return” here as the use philosophers make of theological texts and language.<sup>5</sup> However, more importantly, scholarship has generally insufficiently recognised that this “return” is made up of two distinct “turns” to religion or – more accurately – two different ways of making philosophical use of theology. If religion then returns to philosophy, it does so in a highly ambiguous way.

First, there is the movement known as the *theological turn*, comprising a set of prominent French religious thinkers of the 1980s and 1990s (Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Marion, Michel Henry, and Jean-Louis Chrétien) who placed those specific experiences that can be considered “religious” – or, again more accurately, “theophanic” (i.e. referring to the transcendence of divinity) – at the centre of the phenomenological investigation into the general structure of experience.<sup>6</sup> This immediately drew accusations of an unwarranted theologisation of philosophy that have not died down since, notably by Dominique Janicaud’s – intentionally polemical and therefore easily but all too often wrongly dismissed – report on the state of French philosophy entitled *The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology*.<sup>7</sup> In the English-speaking world, this movement shares its attempt at grounding all thought in the theological dimension with so-called “radical orthodoxy.”<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, in parallel though ostensibly unconnected, a broader set of apparently atheist thinkers (e.g. Jürgen Habermas, Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy, Slavoj Žižek, etc.) began unearthing the roots of Western modernity in the theological structure of the Christian religion – this development has become known as the *post-secular turn*.<sup>9</sup> These two movements, which together comprise philosophy’s “return to religion,” nevertheless “turn” to “religion” in very different ways: whilst the theological turn grounds philosophical reflection in a theological dimension, the post-secular turn uncovers to what extent modern thought remains innervated by theology in an attempt to articulate a more authentic atheism.<sup>10</sup> In short, one is theological, the other (aspires to be) post-theological: the first *returns* to religion in order to *turn towards* the theological dimension; the second only does so in an attempt to *turn away* from it.

Existing scholarship has neglected this split in the “return of religion,” often focussing exclusively on the post-secular turn insofar as its insights are useful to cultural theory. For example, in *Return Statements: The Return of Religion in Contemporary Philosophy*, Gregg Lambert speaks casually of the “theological and/or post-secular turn,”<sup>11</sup> and focusses – despite the title of his book – on “the ‘post-secular turn’ ..., even though there is a tradition that dates to a much earlier period in French phenomenological circles, namely from the early 1980s.”<sup>12</sup> Hent de Vries, in *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion*, likewise distances his inquiry from Marion or (parts of) Levinas, since they “opt for a purely theological ...

<sup>4</sup> For a relevant account, see Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology*.

<sup>5</sup> The fact that it is here virtually exclusively a case of *Judeo-Christian theological* texts and language, as opposed to anything that has to do with *religion* as such and would therefore extend to other traditions, nevertheless indicates that the “return of religion” is a misnomer insofar as philosophy is concerned. This should prompt some serious reflection by those of us who find no better way of describing our field than “continental philosophy of religion.”

<sup>6</sup> See Courtine, *Phénoménologie et théologie*.

<sup>7</sup> See Janicaud, “The Theological Turn.”

<sup>8</sup> See Milbank et al., *Radical Orthodoxy*.

<sup>9</sup> For examples, see: Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*; Badiou, *Saint Paul*; Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*. For an overview, see: McLennan, “The Postsecular Turn;” Latré et al., *Radical Secularisation?*; and de Vries and Sullivan, *Political Theologies*.

<sup>10</sup> Of course, this leaves undecided whether they are successful in articulating this more authentic atheism, see Watkin, *Difficult Atheism*.

<sup>11</sup> Lambert, *Return Statements*, 6.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

discourse.”<sup>13</sup> Instead, he is interested in authors like Heidegger or Derrida, whose “turn to religion ... does not signal a return to theology or religion *per se*,” since “religion is never conceived of as the hidden meaning of a secular historical or anthropological truth,” and instead “show that citations from religious traditions are more fundamental to the structure of language and experience than the genealogies, critiques, and transcendental reflections of the modern discourse that has deemed such citations obsolete.”<sup>14</sup> Yet, in the theological turn, theology and religion are very much returned to: religious or theophanic experience becomes the touchstone for the phenomenological analysis of experience more generally, and Marion in particular identifies this experience – rightly or wrongly – with the Revelation of Christ.<sup>15</sup>

The scholarship of philosophy’s return to religion has thus been confused on two levels. Firstly, it neglects the difference between authors who (re)turn to theology and those who try to think beyond it.<sup>16</sup> John Caputo is one of the few scholars escaping this charge, recognising the difference as one between phenomenological (e.g. Marion and Henry) and deconstructive (e.g. Derrida and Nancy) approaches in recent philosophy of religion: “if deconstruction has taken a ‘religious’ turn, this is a religion without theology, representing ... a religious but ‘a-theological’ turn ..., while the new phenomenology has taken a decidedly ‘theological turn’.”<sup>17</sup> In short, they (re)turn to religion in different ways: “it comes down to the difference between a *theological* and an *atheological* religion,” and thus two distinct (re)turns, “the one with and the other without attachment to a determinate theological tradition.”<sup>18</sup> Implicit in Caputo’s formulation also lies the second confusion of the existing scholarship, namely that the atheological turn to religion would be but an exposition of the “post-secular” condition: a philosophy of culture, rather than a philosophical style as such.

Yet, these projects – and Nancy’s deconstruction of Christianity suffers especially from this superficial reading as yet another discourse on the post-secular – nevertheless extend far beyond Christianity, modern society, or even metaphysical reason.<sup>19</sup> Here, I therefore suggest reconceiving the “post-secular” turn by way of a theological figure many of its authors draw on: namely, what Paul describes as the kenosis of Christ or God’s self-emptying (*ekenosen*) of divinity by assuming the human condition in the Incarnation (Philippians 2:7). This dynamic, characteristic of the Christian God, becomes characteristic of Christianity as such in the authors of the “post-secular” turn: Christianity is the religion that empties itself out of its religious or theological character into secular modernity. In Marcel Gauchet’s famous phrase, Christianity is “the religion of the egress (*sortie*) from religion.”<sup>20</sup> Yet, as the implications of this philosophical gesture exceed the question of the relationship between Christianity and modern society, I would suggest that philosophy’s return to religion is comprised by the *theological turn*, on the one hand, and the *kenotic turn*, on the other.

The authors of the kenotic turn, unlike their colleagues comprising the theological turn, are not interested in theological notions like kenosis for Christianity’s sake, as a theologian would be; they only explore them to the extent that the “death of God” (Nietzsche), the “de-theologisation” (Heidegger),<sup>21</sup> or “de-Christianisation” (Derrida)<sup>22</sup> characteristic of modern thought is itself a product of Christian theology’s self-effacing (i.e. kenotic) structure: the *turn towards* Christian “theology” (its language and texts), paradoxically, serves the distinctly philosophical purpose of *turning away* from “the theological” (Derrida’s

<sup>13</sup> de Vries, *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion*, 26.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Probably wrongly. I have elaborated this diagnosis in my “Givenness and Existence.”

<sup>16</sup> Other works that fail to make this distinction include: Blond, *Post-Secular Philosophy*; Smith and Whistler, *After the Post-secular and the Postmodern*. A possible exception, insofar as it at least recognises the distinction, is Staudigl and Alvis, *Phenomenology and the Post-Secular Turn*.

<sup>17</sup> Caputo, “The Hyperbolization of Phenomenology,” 69.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 89–90.

<sup>19</sup> For examples of this reading, see: Hutchens, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy*, 85–102; van Rooden et al., *Re-treating Religion*.

<sup>20</sup> See Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World* (translation modified); Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, 142.

<sup>21</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 49/45.

<sup>22</sup> Derrida, *On the Name*, 54.

metaphysics of presence or Heidegger's onto-theo-logy). Nancy's "deconstruction of Christianity," for example, describes how, as theological–metaphysical construct, Christianity equally de-theologises or deconstructs itself as Christianity: due to its characteristic kenotic doctrine of God (divinity's self-effacement), it sets in motion its own de-theologisation or secularisation (Christianity's self-effacement). The divine self-emptying denoted by the theological notion of kenosis thus serves only as the means for elaborating the implications of the death of God, for thinking "atheologically." We might therefore say that these authors do not primarily understand kenosis theologically, but articulate what it might mean once pushed – precisely *according to its proper logic* – towards its own de-theologisation. In other words, kenosis as a piece of Christian theology is what provides the *egress (sortie)* not just *from* theology but precisely *as* theology: it is only by *turning towards* theology (i.e. starting from the theological notion of kenosis) that phenomenology will be able to *turn away* from theology (i.e. to "de-theologise" itself or move beyond theology) – which is what I understand here by thinking *after the theological turn*.<sup>23</sup> Why this is something worth doing, indeed something that is necessary out of a distinctly phenomenological urgency (i.e. as the deconstruction of contemporary phenomenology and philosophy of religion), I will explain in the final section. Before doing so, however, I will give a theological and philosophical overview of the kenotic motif in order to establish its meaning to and significance for contemporary continental philosophy (i.e. how it becomes a metaphor for the very movement of deconstruction).

## 2 Kenosis in theology

The very logic of kenosis, which is that of thinking *after* the theological (i.e. in a movement beyond yet starting from it), demands that we first entertain some theological preliminaries, even if they will by no means be exhaustive. Pivotal to the Christian faith is a conception of God as self-emptying or condescending to humanity in Jesus Christ for the sake of its redemption: the world is saved because God voluntarily assumed the limits of finitude, human existence in the world, including its suffering and death. However, in this free act of self-limitation, through which God empties himself of himself in order to become fully human, God nevertheless equally remains fully God: the self-revelation of God takes places precisely *as* the human life of Jesus Christ. Rather than bestowing it on a spiritual elite as a mystical vision of his glory, God makes his saving revelation available to all by giving it in the form of a humble human servant: only by sharing our human condition, does God reveal himself to us. Without ceasing to be God, he therefore emptied himself of his divinity for the sake of humanity, namely so that it might receive his revelation and be saved thereby.<sup>24</sup>

It is this dynamic of divine self-emptying – which ties together revelation, salvation, and incarnation – that Christianity understands with the Greek word *kenosis*. It originates in Paul's recitation of a supposedly early Christian hymn in the Epistle to the Philippians (2:5–11):

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

It is not my intention to provide this passage with a rigorous exegesis or a history of its theological development, but merely to highlight a few relevant theological aspects to render intelligible how

<sup>23</sup> My approach is thus in keeping with the Falque's methodological principle that "the more we theologise, the better we philosophise" as set out in his *Crossing the Rubicon*.

<sup>24</sup> Dawe, *The Form of a Servant*, 13–4.

philosophy's "kenotic turn" makes use of this notion: namely, the fact that kenosis concerns not simply Christology, but rather (1) the doctrine of God, (2) the phenomenology of revelation, and (3) the theology of incarnation.

## 2.1 Kenosis as a statement about God

Though otherwise not averse to high-flying theologising; here, Paul opts for a pre-existing Christian hymn. This immediately serves to indicate that Paul is not providing us with a treatise in systematic Christology or a metaphysics of the Incarnation: i.e. an account of how the divine and human natures of Christ are conjoined, or of the ontological change divinity would supposedly undergo in entering into humanity. Such a highly metaphysical account of kenosis is provided by the so-called "kenotic theology" of mid-nineteenth-century Germany and early twentieth-century Britain.<sup>25</sup> Its most famous exponent is Gottfried Thomasius, who uses the kenotic motif to conceptualise the Incarnation as an ontological change in God: though divine, Christ is not omniscient or omnipotent on his account; because, in becoming human, divinity divests or empties itself of certain attributes.<sup>26</sup> Yet, the genre of the text really pre-empts the idea that we are dealing with such deeply metaphysical concerns: due to its poetic form, the New Testament scholar Michael Gorman suggests, *emptying* "should not be read as a reference to the divestiture of something (whether divinity itself or some divine attribute) ..., but 'figuratively,' as a robust metaphor for total self-abandonment and self-giving."<sup>27</sup> In this section, I will therefore draw on a series of modern theologians who all react against the so-called "kenotic theology" in order to lay the groundwork for a phenomenological rather than metaphysical understanding of kenosis.

Looking at the specific wording of the hymn, T.F. Torrance agrees that it provides "no ground for any theory of *kenosis* or *emptying* as that has been expounded in the 'kenotic theories' of the incarnation," according to which "in becoming man the eternal Son emptied himself of some of his divine properties or attributes in order to come within our human and historical existence."<sup>28</sup> The hymn, Torrance emphasises, speaks of God's self-emptying of the divine *form* (*morphe*) into that of the human servant: in taking-on the servant form of humanity, God humbles himself by taking-leave of the majestic and glorious form of divinity, yet without ceasing to be God. Indeed, paradoxically, God is fully God precisely in emptying himself out in the human.<sup>29</sup> On this account, kenosis serves to indicate precisely that a metaphysical theory of the Incarnation is ill-advised if not impossible, since it does not concern a change in God's way of being but only in his form of manifestation: in emptying himself of divinity, God is God; in assuming humanity, God is God. This paradox is not presented to reason to be accounted for, but only to faith to be believed:

It is God himself, he who was in the form of God and equal to God, who *condescended* to be very man of very man. Nothing at all is said of *how* that takes place. All kenotic theories are attempts to explain the *how* of the incarnation in some measure: *how* God and man are united in one Jesus Christ, *how* the Word has become flesh. All that is said is that this union is a way of incredible humiliation and grace.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> The term *kenotic theology* or *kenoticism* primarily denotes a group of early-twentieth-century Anglican theologians (e.g. A.B. Bruce, Charles Gore, Hugh Mackintosh, P.T. Forsyth, and O.C. Quick), following in the path of mid-nineteenth-century Lutheran ones (e.g. Thomasius, but also Wolfgang Gess, Hans Lassen Martensen, and F.H.R. Frank). On this movement, see: Law, "Kenotic Christology;" Breidert, *Die kenotische Christologie des 19. Jahrhunderts*; Brown, *Divine Humanity*; Thompson, "Nineteenth-Century Kenotic Christology;" McCormack, "Kenoticism in Modern Christology;" McCormack, "Scottish Kenotic Theology;" Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought*, 245–50.

<sup>26</sup> See Thomasius, "The Person of the Mediator," 73.

<sup>27</sup> Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, 21. In this regard, he further refers to: Silva, *Philippians*, 114; Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 86.

<sup>28</sup> Torrance, *Incarnation*, 76.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.



By kenosis (and incarnation generally), we should therefore not understand the *indwelling* of a foreign substance, or the *diminution* of essential attributes, but rather the constitutive movement of the self's *descent* (*katabasis*) – its self-effacement and self-humiliation – that simultaneously forms its coming-into itself.

This same idea is expressed more vividly, more paradoxically, by Sergei Bulgakov: the Incarnation, he says, expresses “an unfathomable mystery,” namely that “God ‘was made (*egeneto*)’ a creature, ‘flesh’,” meaning “that God became *not* God without ceasing to be God.” In short, “flesh is *not* God,” and consequently, “the Word-God (without ceasing to be Word and God) became not-God; *the Creator became a creature.*”<sup>31</sup> Like Torrance, Bulgakov understands this not as a change in God's being, but as a descent to the historical and worldly *form* of humanity:

God left the supramundane absoluteness of His being and became the Creator; but the Creator, the Word ..., Himself became a creature. From His absoluteness He descended into creatureliness. ... Here, God the Word *leaves* heaven with its unperturbed tranquillity of blessed divine being and enters *inside* creaturely cosmic being, “becomes” a creature.<sup>32</sup>

Note here that insofar as Bulgakov speaks of different kinds of being, these do not concern a change in God himself, but rather his movement between ontological realms: God *leaves-behind* divine being (kenosis of absoluteness) and *enters-into* creaturely being (incarnation into creatureliness), without ceasing to *be* God. As he puts it: “In becoming man, God does not stop being God; even after descending from heaven, He remains in heaven.”<sup>33</sup> Bulgakov therefore places a robust “kenotic principle” at the centre of his theology: though noting his appreciation of the kenotic theologians, who have “done a great deal to advance this principle (first in Germany, then in England),” they only did so “in a one-sided manner.”<sup>34</sup> First of all, they limit the question of kenosis to Christology, and the Incarnation specifically, instead of understanding it as comprising the whole relation of God to the world (e.g. creation): “The kenosis of the Absolute in the world and for the world is a basic, unifying idea for theology.”<sup>35</sup> Kenosis is therefore at the core of how we conceive of God, and not just Christ. Secondly, their metaphysical account insufficiently appreciates the paradox and mystery of the Incarnation: “Without ceasing to be God, God ceases to be God (even though that is inconceivable and impossible), and He becomes man; that is, He enters human life in the most real sense, and He makes this life His own.”<sup>36</sup>

These two criticisms can be combined by saying that kenosis does not primarily concern Christ, in his human and divine natures, but God, who voluntarily descends towards man and humbles himself. This is crystallised in Hans Urs von Balthasar's criticism of the kenotic theologians: identifying kenosis precisely “with the divine *freedom*, over against every way of thinking that would posit here a process of a natural (Gnostic) or logical (Hegelian) character,” he sees “in the powerlessness of the Incarnate and Crucified One the shining forth of God's *omnipotence*.”<sup>37</sup> This means that kenosis does not concern what happens to God's freedom and omnipotence in the Incarnation, but rather how these “attributes” are understood in the first place: kenosis concerns the doctrine of God, rather than Christology narrowly conceived. For example, the fact that God is God in his self-abasement shows that “the divine ‘power’ is so ordered that it can make room for a possible self-exteriorisation, like that found in the Incarnation and the Cross, and can maintain this exteriorisation even to the utmost point.”<sup>38</sup> So, God's self-humiliation *in* Jesus Christ (incarnation) and *as* Jesus Christ (passion and crucifixion) does not indicate a diminution of his omnipotence and thus a change, but rather serves as the model for understanding it: “the whole affair proceeds in the sovereign freedom (and so in the power and majesty) of the God who has the power to ‘empty himself,’ in obedience, for the

<sup>31</sup> Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 213.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 220–1. For a comparison between Bulgakov and the kenoticists, see Gavriluk, “The Kenotic Theology of Sergius Bulgakov.”

<sup>35</sup> Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 230.

<sup>36</sup> Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 221.

<sup>37</sup> von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 34.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

(eventual) taking of the form of a servant, and from out of the divine form itself. And so God, whilst abiding in himself (for everything happens in his sovereign power) can yet leave himself (in his form of glory).<sup>39</sup> What marks out God's omnipotence, his divinity, is that he did not consider it as "a thing to be grasped," something to cling or hold on to; but, instead, "emptied himself" of it (Philippians 2:6–7). Whereas man, if he found himself equal to or in the form of God, would eagerly exploit this for his own advantage; God *voluntarily* takes leave of his divinity in the human being, Christ *freely* humbles himself on the cross: precisely this free action is incomprehensible to man and thereby marks out God as divine, paradoxically constituting his divinity as its effacement.<sup>40</sup> God is God in his incredible choice for the human, the world and the finite as the site for divinity's self-manifestation through self-effacement. This understanding of kenosis is eloquently summed up by Bonaventure: "The depth of God made man, that is, the humility of God, is so great that reason fails before it."<sup>41</sup> In short, the kenosis hymn describes God's glory metaphorically as humiliation.

These theological arguments for reading the kenosis hymn as concerning God's divinity metaphorically rather than Christ's divinity metaphysically are supported by Gorman's exegesis: in the hymn, Gorman says, "Christ's divinity, and thus divinity itself, is being narratively defined as kenotic and cruciform in character."<sup>42</sup> He continues: "God ... is essentially kenotic, and indeed essentially cruciform. Kenosis, therefore, does not mean Christ's emptying himself of his divinity (or of anything else), but rather Christ's *exercising* his divinity, his equality with God."<sup>43</sup> So, when Paul speaks of God's self-emptying of divinity, he is not describing what actually happens to God's divinity in the Incarnation (it being left behind), but rather offering a metaphoric illustration of how it should be understood (as a profound and incredible humiliation).

I stress this non-metaphysical character of kenosis, along with its centrality to the Christian doctrine of God, to pre-empt the criticism that an emphasis on kenosis in conceiving of Christianity would somehow be inappropriate. For example, accusing Nancy of placing "the apparently marginal doctrine of kenosis at the heart of Christology,"<sup>44</sup> Ian James writes:

This doctrine has a rather marginal and disputed status within Christology and Christian theology more generally. Far more orthodox is the doctrine of hypostatic union, according to which divine spirit and mortal flesh are conjoined in the body of Christ in a manner that affirms their shared essence (*homoousia*), or consubstantiality.<sup>45</sup>

Yet, in understanding the doctrine of kenosis as in competition with that of the hypostatic union (i.e. the union of human and divine natures in Christ's individual existence), James understands kenosis in an inappropriately metaphysical way (i.e. leaving behind the divine nature). Since kenosis concerns form (*morphe*) and not nature (*ousia*), it is not in competition with the hypostatic union. In short, the two doctrines concern different things: hypostatic union describes what *constitutes* God as paradox (the union of human and divine natures), whilst kenosis describes how God *appears in* the paradox (the exercise of divinity thus unified with humanity). In other words, if hypostatic union belongs to metaphysics (with its talk of "natures" and "existence"), kenosis belongs to phenomenology (the "form" of manifestation). Kenosis, as primarily a statement about God, should consequently be understood as a *phenomenological*

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 26–7; Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 216–7.

<sup>40</sup> See Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, 25–7.

<sup>41</sup> Bonaventure, *Collations on the Six Days*, 124 (translation modified). This passage was pointed out to me by Falque, *The Metamorphosis of Finitude*, 20; Falque, *The Loving Struggle*, 102.

<sup>42</sup> Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, 25.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 28. Gorman indicates that other major commentators come to the same conclusion. For example, in *The Climax of the Covenant*, N.T. Wright writes that the "real theological emphasis of the hymn ... is not simply a new view of Jesus," but "a new understanding of God" (84). Bauckham, in *God Crucified*, furthermore argues that this text suggests that "humiliation belongs to the identity of God as truly as his exaltation does" (61). Finally, in their *In Search of Paul*, John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan Reed ask rhetorically "Is kenosis not just about Christ, but about God ..., not a passing exercise in ultimate obedience, but a permanent revelation about the nature of God?" (290). In the context of a broader systematic theology, this means conceiving of Jesus' death and humiliation on the cross as enacting what Moltmann calls a "revolution in the concept of God," as for example in: Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 201–6; Rahner, "On the Theology of the Incarnation."

<sup>44</sup> James, "Incarnation and Infinity," 255.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 254; James, *The New French Philosophy*, 57–60.



statement about God, articulating both: (1) his mode of phenomenality (i.e. his revelation *as* God) and (2) the phenomena he is to be found in (i.e. his incarnation *in* the human servant).

## 2.2 Kenosis as a statement about revelation

Starting with kenosis as it relates to revelation, Torrance suggests that the “whole movement of humiliation and incarnation is related to revelation as much as to reconciliation.” He explains:

Jesus veils his glory under the form of a servant, in order to get near man for revelation and reconciliation, but in this, the veiling of the Son is a necessary part of his future unveiling for it is a means to its fulfilment, and so to achieving a reconciliation that is not only from the side of God to man but from the side of man to God.<sup>46</sup>

Two things should be noted here. First of all, Torrance echoes Heidegger’s description of the dynamics of phenomenalisation (*Offenbarung*), in which a being-veiled (*Verdecktheit*), understood as “the counterconcept to ‘phenomenon’” or the concealment of what is about to appear (*phanein*), precedes the appearing.<sup>47</sup> However, rather than the veiling preceding the unveiling, I would suggest that kenosis shows how one is only realised in and as the other: God reveals himself *as* himself only by emptying himself *of* himself, and thereby veiling himself, in the human being that is Jesus Christ. Søren Kierkegaard was perhaps the first Christian thinker to conceive of kenosis in this way – i.e. phenomenologically, in terms of appearing – through his emphasis on the fact that “it was Christ’s free will and determination from all eternity to be incognito,”<sup>48</sup> to appear in such a way as to not be directly recognisable as God. Kierkegaard explains:

The God has thus made his appearance as Teacher ..., and has assumed the form of a servant. ... The God’s servant-form however is not a mere disguise, but is actual ... . He cannot then betray himself. There exists for him no such possibility as that which is open to the noble king, suddenly to show that he is after all the king.<sup>49</sup>

The servant form is not a disguise, in which case the revelation would consist in God dropping the veil of the servant form; rather, veiling is the mode of God’s self-revelation (paradoxically): as and in the human servant. Here, Kierkegaard’s emphasis is on appearing rather than being: the incognito means “not to appear in one’s proper role,”<sup>50</sup> in the form of the human servant rather than the divine lord.<sup>51</sup> In short,

---

<sup>46</sup> Torrance, *Incarnation*, 76.

<sup>47</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 36/34.

<sup>48</sup> Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity*, 128.

<sup>49</sup> Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 68.

<sup>50</sup> Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity*, 127.

<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, though it strikes me as bizarre based on the textual material, Kierkegaard is often associated with the Lutheran kenoticists, see: Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought*, 241–5; Westphal, “Kenosis and Offense;” Law, *Kierkegaard’s Kenotic Christology*. Yet, such a metaphysical kenoticism is precisely associated with Kierkegaard’s nemesis (Martensen), and indeed an example of the very style of thinking he reacts against (making paradoxes intelligible), as pointed out by Rose’s *Kierkegaard’s Christocentric Theology*, 111–4. An exception to this trend is Dawe, *The Form of a Servant*, 160: “Kierkegaard’s position on kenosis had wrought a revolution. For as the kenotic motif entered the contemporary theological scene through his writings, its whole function and meaning were changed. It is no longer a principle of intelligibility. It is the paradox of grace. Its importance derives from its central place in revelation rather than its value in solving intellectual problems. There is in Kierkegaard no pondering about the loss or change of divine attributes. He does not speculate about the divine–human consciousness of Christ. Instead, he makes of kenosis the bold paradoxical assertion of God’s sovereignty, which brings all speculation to an end. He had taken the kenotic motif from the hands of his opponents to use it against them.” Contemporaneously with the Lutheran kenoticists, Kierkegaard rejects their metaphysical interpretation of kenosis focussed on Christ in favour of a phenomenological one focussed on God. For a more fruitful understanding of Kierkegaard’s Christology as “kenotic,” see: Vos, *De Troost Van Het Ogenblik*; Vos, “Working Against Oneself.”

the revelation takes place in the veiling, the appearing (of God) in the disappearing (of divinity), the self-emptying of appearing as the disappearing of what appears (divinity) in its appearing (as humanity).

This brings us to the second point, namely that kenosis allows God to get near to man for revelation. Just like Christ voluntarily humbles himself by dying on the cross, not just for any reason, but in atonement for our sins; God voluntarily humbles himself by assuming humanity in order to reveal himself to us, so as to make possible our salvation. In revealing himself, God *descends* towards man. As Athanasius puts it: “He [God] deals with them [men] as a good teacher with his pupils, coming down to their level and using simple means.”<sup>52</sup> As necessitated by the rift between man and God caused by original sin that distracted man from God in favour of the sensible world, God comes down to our level, meets us where we are. Athanasius’ point is therefore that by “stooping to our level in His love and Self-revealing to us,”<sup>53</sup> God not only reveals himself *to us* and *on our terms* in the Incarnation (as a sensible object, a human body), but also *for our sakes* (reconciliation between man and God, salvation): “it was our sorry case that caused the Word to come down, our transgression that called out His love for us, so that He made haste to help us and to appear among us. It is we who were the cause of His taking human form, and for our salvation that in His great love He was both born and manifested in a human body.”<sup>54</sup> Its kenotic doctrine of God makes Christianity – the story of God’s revelation through incarnation – anthropocentric rather than theocentric, or anthropocentric *as* theocentric: focussed primarily on humanity insofar as the Christian God’s divinity exists in its self-emptying in humanity (Jesus Christ). Even though “He could have revealed His divine majesty in some other and better way,” one more befitting that majesty (the divine form), “moved with compassion for our limitation” or “out of sheer love for us,”<sup>55</sup> Athanasius insists, God instead took on a visible and mortal body like our very own (the human form) to ensure that his message would be received: God does not reveal himself in his divine form, of which he has emptied himself, but in human form, which he has taken on. Put phenomenologically, divinity remains transcendent to experience, God therefore only reveals himself insofar as he becomes immanent to the sensible world (incarnation) and thus takes leave of his divinity (kenosis). Does that mean, as for example Marion suggests, that the language of kenosis ultimately resorts to anthropomorphism?<sup>56</sup> Nothing could be further from the truth, precisely because – once again – kenosis does not describe the Incarnation metaphysically but phenomenologically: “The incarnate God,” as Jürgen Moltmann suggests, “is present, and can be experienced, in the humanity of every man, and in full human corporeality.”<sup>57</sup>

### 2.3 Kenosis as a statement about incarnation

Having come down to the level of man to reveal himself, how does God actually reveal himself? How can the invisible enter visibility without ceasing to be invisible? According to Athanasius, in revelation, God not only comes down to our level, but does so “using simple means.”<sup>58</sup> Incarnation is thus not only the mode of Revelation (God’s descent), but also its means (God’s lowliness): *by* assuming the human condition, God reveals himself *in* Christ’s eminently human suffering on the cross; *by* humbling himself, God reveals his divinity *in* that humiliation.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, if “the incarnation of the Logos is completed on the cross,” as

---

<sup>52</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 15/43.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 8/33.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 4/29.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 8/34.

<sup>56</sup> See Marion’s contribution to the television programme “La foi prise au mot,” broadcast by KTO on 5 February 2011, quoted by Vial, “Dieu jusque dans le néant,” 353.

<sup>57</sup> Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 276.

<sup>58</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 15/43.

<sup>59</sup> Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 205.

Moltmann suggests, then “the death of Jesus on the cross is the *centre* of all Christian theology,” i.e. God’s lowly and humble humanity forms “the entry to its problems and answers on earth.”<sup>60</sup>

Gorman therefore concludes that kenosis – first as God’s self-humiliation by assuming humanity and then as Christ’s self-humiliation by suffering and dying on the cross – confirms the “idolatry of ‘normal’ divinity.”<sup>61</sup> God does not reveal himself in a way that we, ordinary humans, would expect him to: not by a spectacular show of divine force, but with the humble means of an ordinary human being. Indeed, if the cross is the primary theophany, his glory is precisely revealed – most counterintuitively – in a profound humiliation. When Paul then speaks of Jesus’ self-emptying of the “form of God,” he means that God revealed himself in a way unbecoming of divinity. As Gorman puts it: “such a form of God (and thus also essential divinity) is *in normal human perception* one that would never condescend to incarnation and crucifixion. Normal human perception of deity is such that the story of Christ is counterintuitive, abnormal, and absurd as a story of God.”<sup>62</sup> It is counterintuitive to us, human beings, that God, the divine majesty for whom nothing is impossible, would reveal himself in a humble servant, a weak human being easily crushed by a worldly empire, rather than displaying his glory for all to see. As limited human beings, we cannot conceive of a God who is so profoundly human (i.e. humble), and this is what constitutes his divinity (i.e. distinction from humanity).

Caputo has developed this idea admirably in his *The Weakness of God*. It likewise starts with Paul, for whom the crucifixion, as culmination of God’s incarnation and kenosis, confirms this idolatry of ordinary divinity:

God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not (*ta me onta*) – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. (1 Corinthians 1:27–29)

God is found in unexpected places – namely, *the things that are not (ta me onta)*: lowly and weak things rather than strong and glorious ones (a humble servant), what appears as foolishness to the world rather than common sense (a God made man). Kenosis is meant to make us second guess how we ordinarily speak about God: rather than divesting himself of his omnipotence, kenosis means that God’s power appears precisely in his weakness on the cross. “God crossed out by the cross,”<sup>63</sup> as Caputo puts it, he “withdraws from the world’s order of presence, prestige, and sovereignty in order to settle into those pockets of protest and contradiction to the world.”<sup>64</sup> Or, as Gorman puts it: “The counterintuitive God revealed in Christ is kenotic and cruciform ..., the God of power-in-weakness.”<sup>65</sup> God’s power is his weakness, his resistance to the world’s logic, his dwelling amongst the nothings of the world.

How does God make his divinity evident in a form unbecoming of him? It is not that the weakness of the human condition itself is identified with divinity (that would be anthropomorphism); but rather, Athanasius suggests that divinity is manifested by the man seen to be doing things that are only befitting of God:

When, then, the minds of men had fallen finally to the level of sensible things, the Word submitted to appear in a body, in order that He, as Man, might centre their senses on Himself, and convince them through His human acts that He Himself is not man only but also God the Word ...; and, invisible and imperceptible as in Himself he is, He became visible through his works and revealed Himself as the Word of the Father.<sup>66</sup>

It is thus not the case that God never becomes visible, but simply that he does not become visible as divine, in his proper form; his divinity can be seen only indirectly in the works of the human being: a man doing

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>61</sup> Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, 34–5.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>63</sup> Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 42.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>65</sup> Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, 32.

<sup>66</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 16/44–5.

things no other man would do (e.g. turning the other cheek). Athanasius therefore concludes that “he who desires to see God Who by nature is invisible and not to be beheld, may yet perceive and know Him through His works.”<sup>67</sup> Precisely this constitutes the paradox and the incomprehensibility: that it is a human being doing these things, that the Word became flesh.

### 3 Kenosis in post-theology

Having now *turned towards* theology by “starting from” the kenotic motif as developed by systematic theology, we are now in a position to *turn away from* theology by exploring how contemporary philosophers have made use of that same notion in order to de-theologise thought in general and “move beyond” the inherently theological structure of phenomenology in particular. That philosophical appropriation of the kenotic motif goes back to Hegel, who gives kenosis its philosophical reach by understanding the whole of reality – not just Christ’s humanity – in terms of Luther’s German translation of the Greek word (*Entäußerung*), namely as the externalisation of Absolute Spirit.<sup>68</sup> It is Hegel’s more general *philosophical* analysis of reality that the nineteenth-century kenoticists will employ in their *theological* analysis of the Incarnation, meaning that “Hegel thereby returned to theology what he had borrowed from it” in a way that perfectly befits the secularising–theologising logic of kenosis (and, indeed, Hegel’s own dialectic).<sup>69</sup> This exercise then extends all the way up to Derrida, who latches onto negative theology as operating a “kenosis of discourse,” like the one performed above (e.g. power-in-weakness).<sup>70</sup> This has resulted in several recent studies applying the kenotic motif to a range of philosophical problems (e.g. subjectivity, experience, language).<sup>71</sup> Moving beyond theology, I will therefore now give a brief overview of the most significant recent philosophical appropriations of the kenotic motif.

#### 3.1 Emmanuel Levinas

Levinas is difficult to categorise in my theological–atheological (or kenotic) schematisation of contemporary philosophy: though his phenomenology of the infinite undeniably makes it possible, Levinas himself refrains from Marion’s (revelation) and Henry’s (incarnation) overt theologising.<sup>72</sup> Obviously, Levinas is not a Christian and is therefore far less eager to model experience generally on the Christian theological model. When it comes to the appropriation of the concepts of Christian theology, such as kenosis, Levinas therefore finds himself in the same position as the authors of the “kenotic turn”: namely, drawing on the language of a tradition he remains outside of in order to think broader philosophical problems.

When invited to speak about the Incarnation, Levinas admits as much: “I do not have the effrontery to enter an area forbidden to those who do not share the faith, and the ultimate dimensions of which no doubt escape me,” instead he merely wants “to reflect” on “the multiple meanings suggested by the notion of Man-God.” This includes kenosis as “the idea of a self-inflicted humiliation on the part of the Supreme

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 54/92.

<sup>68</sup> Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, 755/457. For commentary, see: Dawe, *The Form of a Servant*, 104–26; Dubillet, *The Self-Emptying Subject*, 92–122; Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, 82–127 (including Derrida’s preface, “A Time for Farewells,” xli–xlv).

<sup>69</sup> Brito, “Kenosis,” 855.

<sup>70</sup> Derrida, *On the Name*, 71. For commentary, see: de Vries, *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion*, 305–58; and Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, 1–68.

<sup>71</sup> For examples, see: Dubillet, *The Self-Emptying Subject*; Wells, *The Manifest and the Revealed*; van Riessen, *Man as Place of God*; and Zijlstra, *Letting Go*.

<sup>72</sup> As illustrated, for example, by Levinas’ highly cautious approach when he does address God directly, but precisely only insofar as God gives himself to thought (*vient à l’idée*), in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*.

Being, of a descent of the Creator to the level of the Creature.”<sup>73</sup> Of course, Levinas does not believe that God humbled himself in Christ, his interest in this notion is therefore not that of the theologian. Instead, he wants to explore “to what extent these ideas, which have unconditional value for the Christian faith, have philosophical value, and to what extent they can appear in phenomenology.” This is also the approach taken by the authors of the kenotic turn: namely, investigating what Christian theological notions mean outside of or beyond their immediate context. Their philosophical and theological meanings cannot straightforwardly be identified. Levinas therefore cautions: “I ask myself to what extent the new categories we have just described are philosophical. I am certain that this extent will be judged insufficient by the believing Christian.”<sup>74</sup> This apparent insufficiency for the theologian of the philosophical treatment of Christian concepts is not due to the limitations of philosophy’s perspective compared to theology’s, but to a divergence in the respective concerns orienting them. This distinction is what, for example, the Anglican theologian Graham Ward fails to recognise when, himself tracking the philosophical appropriation of the kenotic motif since Hegel, he complains that “what is absent from modernity’s concept of kenosis is the role played by theological discourse as response to a reception of and participation in the divine.”<sup>75</sup> Yet, to philosophically appropriate the concept of kenosis means precisely to expropriate it from theological discourse: it is articulated by people who do not recognise the divinity it is supposedly participating in. Ward’s complaint presupposes that the Christian theological viewpoint has both priority and ultimate authority, ruling out from the start that an outside or philosophical perspective on its concepts might be useful to that theology (in phenomenology’s appropriation), or that its concepts speak beyond their immediate religious context (in Christianity’s self-deconstruction). Levinas’ goal, like my own, is not to satisfy the theologian, but to interest the philosopher.

What Levinas finds philosophically interesting about kenosis is that, as “the humiliation of God,” it “allows for conceiving the relationship with transcendence in terms other than those of naïveté.” Christianity’s innovation is that, compared to the pagan religions where the gods likewise manifest themselves among men, the Christian God manifests its divinity precisely in its humiliation in humanity:

The appearance of man-gods, sharing the passions and joys of men who are purely men, is certainly a common characteristic of pagan poems. But in paganism, as the price for this manifestation, the gods lose their divinity. Hence philosophers expel poets from the City to preserve the divinity of the gods in men’s minds. But divinity thus saved lacks all condescension. ... Infinity then manifests itself *in* the finite, but it does not manifest itself *to* the finite.<sup>76</sup>

In paganism, the gods either remain entirely transcendent to the concerns of man or lose their divinity in being rendered immanent to the world of men (the city). This maintains the order of man, placing divinity either firmly outside the city as divine or inside as just another man, which precludes the possibility of divine revelation to man. The Christian doctrine of kenosis, meanwhile, disrupts this order by providing a new way of relating to transcendence: a god who is God precisely in being man, whose transcendence lies in condescension, and whose glory exists in humiliation. God’s humiliation – his coming down to our level in order to raise us up to his – allows us to conceive of transcendence, not as what *breaks-into* immanence from *beyond*, but as what *opens-up* immanence from *within*:

The idea of a truth whose manifestation is not glorious or bursting with light, the idea of a truth that manifests itself in its humility, like the still small voice in the biblical expression – the idea of a persecuted truth – is that not henceforth the only possible modality of transcendence? ... To manifest itself as humble, as allied with the vanquished, the poor, the persecuted – is precisely not to return to the order. ... To present oneself in this poverty of the exile is to interrupt the coherence of the universe. To pierce immanence without thereby taking one’s place within it. Obviously such an opening can only be an ambiguity.<sup>77</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 53.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>75</sup> Ward, *Christ and Culture*, 189–98 (196).

<sup>76</sup> Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 54.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.



The ambiguity is the paradox of God's power-in-weakness, transcendence-in-immanence, and divinity-in-humanity: "The ambiguity of transcendence," Levinas says, is not "a failure of the intelligence that examines it" or "the feeble faith surviving the death of God," but "precisely the proximity of God which can only occur in humility" as "the original mode of the presence of God, the original mode of communication."<sup>78</sup>

An example of the fact that Levinas sees Paul's kenosis as speaking to a set of problems far broader than Christology – i.e. our relationship with transcendence rather than Christ's humanity – is his remarkable essay "Judaism and Kenosis." It uncovers Levinas' understanding of kenosis in the Kabbalistic cosmology of the nineteenth-century Lithuanian rabbi Chaim of Volozhin. The rabbi presents God's reign over creation as requiring ethical mediation through human action: "God associates with or withdraws from the worlds, depending upon human behaviour. Man is answerable for the universe! Man is answerable for others."<sup>79</sup> Or, more specifically:

This is the ethical meaning of human activity: ... God's reign depends on me. ... God reigns only by the intermediary of an ethical order, an order in which one being is answerable for another. The world *is*, not because it perseveres in being, not because *being* is its own *raison d'être*, but because, through the human enterprise, it can be justified in its being. ... More important than God's omnipotence is the subordination of that power to man's ethical consent. And that, too, is one of the primordial meanings of kenosis.<sup>80</sup>

Levinas sees this as kenosis because it understands God in terms of weakness, unequal to divinity, emphasises the order of the finite human being's actions in the world down below: "this God, master of power, is powerless to associate himself with the world he creates ... and maintains in being by that very association, without a certain behaviour of man," which consequently ensures that "everything depends on man," for "the vocation, or *raison d'être*, of humanity is precisely to provide the necessary conditions for the association of God with the worlds, and thus for the being of the worlds."<sup>81</sup> Likewise, in Christianity, God becomes human for the sake of his revelation to and reconciliation with humanity. Kenosis thus emphasises man as what Renée van Riessen, in her study of the kenotic motif in Levinas, has called "a place of God." She explains: "Kenosis is the event in which God makes room for human action. Conversely, for Levinas, the human being is 'a place of God.' Its existence is meaningful as a reference to the kenotic God, in the devotional movement of 'À Dieu'."<sup>82</sup> Since God has come down to the level of humanity, the human being becomes the site where divinity takes place as (indirectly) recognisable. "Paradoxically," Levinas therefore concludes, "everything depends on them – those whose bodies are at the lowest level, located within the order of action and work, at the level of matter. Everything depends on them, even the outpouring of God,"<sup>83</sup> since "to some degree, in relation to the human will, the Divine is then subordinate. There is kenosis in this 'sub-'.<sup>84</sup>

### 3.2 Gianni Vattimo

Levinas still understands his philosophical analysis of kenosis as ultimately being completed by a theological one: he merely wants "to show the points beyond which nothing can replace religion."<sup>85</sup> However, in his *Belief*, Gianni Vattimo proposes something far more radical: by centring its theology around kenosis, Christianity de-theologises or secularises itself in a movement he calls *weakening*. For Vattimo, like for Levinas, kenosis introduces a new relation to transcendence, namely as to be found down below within, rather than beyond or above, the world: "The guiding thread of Jesus' interpretation of the Old Testament is

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>79</sup> Levinas, *In the Time of Nations*, 125.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>82</sup> van Riessen, *Man as a Place of God*, 12.

<sup>83</sup> Levinas, *In the Time of Nations*, 124 (translation modified).

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>85</sup> Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 54.

the new and more profound relation of charity established between God and humanity, and consequently between human beings themselves,”<sup>86</sup> meaning “that the ‘kenotic’ interpretation of the articles of faith goes hand in hand with the life of every person,” namely “the commitment to transform them into concrete principles that are incarnate in one’s own existence, and irreducible to a formula.”<sup>87</sup>

However, Vattimo goes further and suggests that the kenotic doctrine of God actually effaces theological transcendence altogether: “The only great paradox and scandal of Christian revelation is the incarnation of God, the kenosis – that is, the removal of all the transcendent, incomprehensible, mysterious and even bizarre features,” at least when this transcendence is understood in “a naturalistic, human, all too human, ultimately unchristian” way (i.e. metaphysically).<sup>88</sup> Transcendence is thus not merely related to differently, it is understood differently, namely kenotically. However, crucially, it is Christianity itself, with its kenotic doctrine of God, that establishes this understanding of divine transcendence as its own effacement: the gesture characteristic of Christianity is to efface divine transcendence, what Nancy calls “de-theologisation” and Vattimo calls “secularisation.”

Vattimo then presents us with a “Christianity recovered as the doctrine of salvation (namely, secularizing kenosis).”<sup>89</sup> He explains:

Salvation is an event in which kenosis, the abasement of God, is realized more and more fully and so undermines the wisdom of the world, the metaphysical dreams of natural reason which conceive God as absolute, omnipotent and transcendent, *ipsum esse (metaphysicum) subsistens*. In this light, secularization – the progressive dissolution of the natural sacred – is the very essence of Christianity.<sup>90</sup>

De-theologisation or “secularization as the essence of modernity and of Christianity itself” thus means a weakening of the metaphysical structures in which Christianity articulated itself along with its theology – i.e. their self-effacement or self-emptying – since at its core sits the secularising “feature of kenosis in which the history of salvation is realized” and “must be attributed to this whole experience of ‘dissolution,’ or the weakening of strong structures.”<sup>91</sup> This gesture does not oppose itself to “Christianity” or “theology,” but instead opens a new Christianity or theology and wrests itself away from a supposedly contingent metaphysical framework. Crucially, however, this movement *beyond* “Christianity” (onto-theo-logy) precisely *starts from* Christianity itself (the kenosis of God). Tracing this movement is the task Nancy’s deconstruction of Christianity sets itself.

### 3.3 Jean-Luc Nancy

In the preamble to his two-volume project entitled *The Deconstruction of Christianity*, Nancy states his intentions: “It is not our concern to save religion, even less to return to it. The much discussed ‘return of the religious,’ which denotes a real phenomenon, deserves no more attention than any other ‘return.’”<sup>92</sup> If Nancy’s deconstruction of Christianity forms his own turn to religion, it does not aim at a return to the religious or theological mode of thought. Instead, his question concerns something entirely different. Nancy is interested in a resource, found *within* Christianity, carrying us *beyond* Christianity: as the religion of the egress of religion, Christianity carries within itself the gesture of its own self-surpassing.<sup>93</sup> The deconstruction of Christianity concerns itself with precisely that gesture:

<sup>86</sup> Vattimo, *Belief*, 49.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 49–50.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>92</sup> Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, 1.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

My question will be very simple, naïve even, as is perhaps fitting at the beginning of a phenomenological procedure: How and to what degree do we *hold* to Christianity? How, exactly, are we, in our whole tradition, held by it? ... Christianity itself, Christianity *as such*, is surpassed. That state of self-surpassing may be very profoundly proper to it; it is perhaps its deepest tradition ... . It is this transcendence, this going-beyond-itself that must therefore be examined.<sup>94</sup>

This gesture of Christianity's self-surpassing – one that *starts from* Christianity yet *moves beyond* Christianity – is envisioned by the deconstruction of Christianity as “the operation consisting in disassembling the elements that constitute it, in order to attempt to discern, among these elements and as if behind them, that which made their assembly possible,”<sup>95</sup> in order to “go back to (or to advance toward) a resource that could form at once the buried origin and the imperceptible future of the world that calls itself ‘modern.’”<sup>96</sup> If we understand deconstruction as the gesture of taking apart a complex whole in order to discover what makes it fit together, only to find that once taken apart, it cannot be put together anymore – i.e. every construction is itself always inhabited by the threat of its own infinite deconstruction – we find that, on Nancy's account, deconstruction is identified with Christianity itself in its movement of self-surpassing: what is characteristic of Christianity moves us beyond Christianity as the agent of its own secularisation or de-theologisation. Indeed, “the gesture of deconstruction,” Nancy says, “is itself shot through and through with Christianity,” and is therefore “only possible within Christianity.”<sup>97</sup> Consequently, the deconstruction of Christianity, like any deconstruction, is a self-deconstruction: deconstruction is not something done to Christianity from without, but something going on within the Christian religion as its very Christianity. Nancy's core claim is that Christianity *is* nothing but this movement, this deconstruction, this de-theologisation or secularisation, of itself as itself.<sup>98</sup> In short, Christianity is Christian in its own “de-Christianisation” or self-deconstruction: “deconstruction ... is itself Christian ... because Christianity is, originally, deconstructive ... . *The structure of origin of Christianity is the proclamation of its end.*”<sup>99</sup>

We can already anticipate where in Christianity Nancy will find its self-deconstructive agent – the origin that proclaims its end – namely, its kenotic doctrine of God: like the Christian God is only God in his self-effacement as “God” (the form), Christianity is only Christian in its self-effacement as “Christianity” (the religion). However, before exploring Nancy's treatment of the kenotic motif and his development of the deconstruction of Christianity, it is worth contextualising this project. We should understand it in the context of an essay by a friend and collaborator of Nancy's, namely Jean-Christophe Bailly's *Adieu: Essai sur la mort des dieux*. In his meditation on the meaning of the death of God, Bailly insightfully remarks that “farewell (*adieu*) has not really been said to God (*à Dieu*). He is no longer there, that's all.”<sup>100</sup> Specifically, “modern Western man did not really want the death of God, he has simply lost God along the way (*en route*), and in such a foolish way that he has not even realised it yet.”<sup>101</sup> This is a perfect summary of Nietzsche's development of this idea, where a “madman” (who nevertheless “lit a lantern in the bright morning hours”) urgently proclaims the death of God, not to the believers, but to the cultured despisers who think to have no need of him. Yet, they do not listen for they do not understand what they have done, they do not comprehend the consequences of this death they themselves nevertheless accomplished.<sup>102</sup> It is with this tremendous, and indeed still ongoing, event that Bailly wants to come to grips by making its extensive reverberations felt. Or, as he puts it: “Truly saying farewell (*adieu*) ... to God (*à Dieu*).”<sup>103</sup> This cannot be done in an instant, merely noting the death is insufficient; it requires a laborious effort of bidding God farewell: not merely writing his obituary, but clearing out his house and selling off his possessions – deconstructing the various constructions secured by him. In other words, we need to perform the work of mourning his death:

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 139–41.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>100</sup> Bailly, *Adieu*, 16.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>102</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 181–2.

<sup>103</sup> Bailly, *Adieu*, 10.

“I propose that thinking what ‘God is dead’ means and doing the work of mourning are one and the same thing.”<sup>104</sup> The work of mourning God’s death is an intellectual labour: thinking through the effects of the death of God, the erasure of the horizon the unchaining of the earth from its sun. It means considering the meaning of a *genuine atheism*, which is not merely a denial of God (anti-theism), but something much more difficult: ceasing any reference to God (a-theism). Atheism, Bailly suggests, means “saying simply that which is, the world shines in the absence of God, any god, it shines *divinely* in this absence.”<sup>105</sup> That is the *challenge* the death of God poses to thought, to be met only in the intellectual labour of mourning this death.

Nancy’s deconstruction undertakes precisely this work of mourning: it is not an accomplishment (i.e. achieving a “deconstructed Christianity” resembling C.S. Lewis’ “mere Christianity”), but the project or endeavour of *bidding farewell to God* (i.e. tracking Christianity in its self-deconstruction). Rather than Christianity, Nancy’s question therefore concerns the possibility of a genuine atheism: thinking in the wake of the death of God. He nevertheless finds the answer in Christianity, precisely because it has made the death of God into a religion: “Only an atheism that contemplates the reality of its Christian provenance can be actual.”<sup>106</sup> That Christian provenance points the way towards a genuine atheism, namely a world without any reference to God, a world without given meaning other than its own being-world.<sup>107</sup> Thinking the world without God, thinking atheologically or *moving beyond* theology, is Nancy’s project. Yet, he says, it must be done precisely by *starting from* Christianity itself, the de-theologisation going on within it, the self-deconstruction that it is. This is what it means to bid farewell to God, to carry out the work of mourning his death, to de-theologise thought – indeed, to deconstruct Christianity. If we were to apply this to contemporary phenomenology, as I will now argue that we must, we could equally say that this is what it means to think *after the theological turn*, namely to let phenomenology de-theologise itself.

## 4 Deconstructing the theological turn

Having now sketched the logic of kenosis – both theologically and philosophically – as the way in which theology accomplishes its own self-deconstruction or provides an egress (*sortie*) from itself, as well as having indicated its central place within continental philosophy of religion, it is time to return to our topic at hand: after the theological turn, what is next for continental philosophy of religion? Or more precisely, what can it mean to think *after the theological turn* in terms of the phenomenological method that is precisely at issue in that turn? My proposal is that it is time to engage, phenomenologically, with the authors of what I have been calling the “kenotic turn” in an attempt at spelling out the full consequences of the theological turn phenomenology took at the end of the previous century: insofar as Christian theology’s kenotic logic dictates that any turn towards theology eventually results in a movement beyond it, that movement remains unthought by the former as a question of phenomenology. In other words, another deconstruction announces itself: neither of phenomenology (Derrida), nor of Christianity (Nancy), but of phenomenology’s theological turn. Here, I propose that this project can be pursued as what I would somewhat paradoxically call a *phenomenology of kenosis*. I will spell out the significance or meaning of these two programmatic phrases in what remains, even if their full development will then have to take place elsewhere.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 18–9.

<sup>106</sup> Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, 140 (translation modified).

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 35.

## 4.1 Thinking after the theological turn

Curiously, the authors of the kenotic turn are rarely studied in relation to phenomenology's theological turn, presumably because – as indicated – these respective movements proceed in opposite directions. The question therefore arises whether the return of religion really is a unified phenomenon. Assuming that it is, as the scholarship does, an account of how the theological turn relates to the kenotic turn is required: What do these two diverging movements, *taken together*, give us to think? Well, if the *theological* turn exemplifies how philosophy (and phenomenology in particular) turns (in)to theology (e.g., by taking the Revelation of Christ as paradigm for experience generally); and if the *kenotic turn* shows how Christianity exists in a movement of self-effacement or de-theologisation (e.g., by depicting God's self-emptying of divinity in the Incarnation as setting in motion Christianity's self-deconstruction); then I would suggest that the *return of religion* is the movement in which philosophy (and phenomenology in particular), precisely in and only by turning to theology, de-theologises itself. If the Word must assume a condition foreign to itself (humanity) in order to come to itself (Jesus Christ as incarnate divinity), then philosophy must turn to theology in order to properly understand itself in its atheological bearing. In short, by thinking *after the theological turn*, I mean a deconstruction or de-theologisation of phenomenology's inherent theological structure as a movement *beyond*, though *starting from*, the theological turn it facilitated: a phenomenology that does not straightforwardly turn into theology, that has been de-theologised, is best equipped to account for religious or theophanic experience *phenomenologically* (i.e. an account that is not itself "theological").

This parallels the project Derrida undertakes in his final book, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, an extensive study of his friend's work: reprising his earlier critique of phenomenology as always oriented towards an impossible immediate and auto-affective presence by way of a comprehensive deconstruction of Husserl's "principle of all principles," he suggests that phenomenology's structural problems are exacerbated when it comes into contact with Christianity, as it does in phenomenology's theological turn. Whereas Derrida concerns himself primarily with Husserl, it is worth taking up that same deconstruction in reference to Husserl's theologising French interpreters. However, here too, everything still depends on what Husserl understands as the principle of phenomenology, namely that its field of study is intuition as it is *leibhaftig gegeben* (literally "bodily given"), or "given in its personal actuality" (its usual idiomatic English translation).<sup>108</sup> Phenomenology is the study of the appearing of things *in propria persona*, letting them appear as they give themselves out to be: "to let what shows itself be seen from itself," Heidegger says, "just as it shows itself from itself."<sup>109</sup> Yet, everything turns on how the German is translated. In France (and Italy), the translation lends itself easily to theologising: namely, *givenness in the flesh* (*en chair, in carne*). This Gallicism inscribes the potential for a theological turn (i.e. towards *sarx*) within phenomenology from the outset by overdetermining the meaning of its principle, thereby allowing for example Didier Franck to speak of *incarnate givenness*, which Marion identifies with *revelation*.<sup>110</sup> Take the opening lines of Marion's Gifford lectures, entitled *Givenness and Revelation*: "this title may ... surprise," he says, "nothing seems to join an apparently old and steadfastly theological notion together with a philosophical concept drawn from the most recent phenomenology. However, if we wanted to consider better their respective features, the two terms could instead converge."<sup>111</sup> For Marion and his colleagues, the philosophical and theological converge in or as phenomenology, in philosophy's (re)turn to religion. In short, phenomenology facilitates a *theologisation of philosophy* by placing the terms proper to each discipline on the same axis as *phenomenologically* synonymous. Specifically, the theological turn understands: (1) givenness (*Gegebenheit*) along the lines of revelation; (2) embodiment (*Leiblichkeit*) along the lines of incarnation; and (thereby) (3) phenomenological philosophy along the lines of revealed theology. Derrida observed that this is due to the structural tendency of phenomenology itself, which makes its turn to theology possible in principle; yet,

<sup>108</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, 43/44; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 346/318; Derrida, *On the Name*, 236.

<sup>109</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 34/30.

<sup>110</sup> See respectively: Frank, *Flesh and Body*; Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed*.

<sup>111</sup> Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 1.



these structural tendencies are exacerbated, and manifested particularly acutely, when phenomenology explicitly entertains the Christian understanding of Revelation or Incarnation, as it does in its actual theological turn.

Proceeding along the path cleared by Derrida's study of Nancy, a deconstruction of phenomenology's theological turn therefore claims the following: when exploring philosophy's theologisation in phenomenology's theological turn, facilitated by the *apparent* convergence of philosophical and theological notions in the basic terms of phenomenology, we discover that these notions *in fact* diverge in the way they expose phenomenology's structural problems, thereby de-theologising philosophy and even de-Christianising phenomenology (i.e. making evident the divergence).<sup>112</sup> In other words, a deconstructive approach to the authors of the theological turn might demonstrate how they incorrectly place philosophical and theological terms on the same axis, regarding them as phenomenologically synonymous: (1) givenness cannot be thought along the lines of revelation (against Marion); (2) embodiment cannot be thought along the lines of incarnation (against Henry); and (therefore) (3) phenomenological philosophy cannot be thought along the lines of revealed theology. Only once established that *Gegebenheit* does not mean the Revelation of Christ, and that *Leiblichkeit* does not mean the Incarnation of God (i.e. only once phenomenology is de-theologised), can we appreciate the properly *phenomenological* meaning of these terms (i.e. as distinct from their theological resonance – which, it cannot be stressed enough, they lack *entirely* in German).

Like Derrida's engagement with Husserl, this would not be a critique coming from without, but a deconstruction going on within that it would be a matter of documenting: it is a question of exposing how the shortcomings of the existing phenomenological accounts are due to the inherent play of contradiction and displacement within their basic assumptions. In short, *thinking after the theological turn* means showing how the *phenomenological coupling* of philosophical (givenness and embodiment) and theological terms (revelation and incarnation) *deconstructs itself* within that turn. Only by delving into phenomenology's turn *towards* theology (the texts and language of the Christian tradition) does the kenotic turn then show us how to turn *away* from “the theological” (the metaphysical priority of transcendence): to de-theologise philosophy. Thinking *after the theological turn*, purging philosophy of “theology,” can then only be done by exploring its inherently theological structure, precisely by taking a *kenotic turn*.

## 4.2 A phenomenology of kenosis

Kenosis thus embodies what thinking ‘after theology’ means: thinking *from* theology (the theological notion of kenosis), *beyond* ‘theology’ (the *theos* effacing itself within that notion); ‘the theological’ deconstructing itself (self-emptying); “the theological” deconstructing itself (self-emptying). However, what would be involved in developing a *phenomenology* of kenosis?<sup>113</sup> With the philosophers, we must again understand kenosis broadly, but always without abstracting from its theological significance and context: *starting from* its theological significance and context, it is a matter of conceiving how kenosis embodies a gesture that demands to be applied *beyond* it. That gesture is self-emptying, self-effacement, or withdrawal. So, the theological figure (kenosis) can facilitate a conception of a broader philosophical dynamic (withdrawal or self-effacement), and precisely in that sense de-theologises itself, withdraws from itself, or deconstructs itself.

Schematically, the notion of kenosis can then operate on four levels, moving from the theological to the philosophical and ultimately the phenomenological. First, there is (1) *kenosis as the self-emptying of divinity*: this is the Pauline understanding of the Incarnation wherein God takes leave of his divine form in order

<sup>112</sup> Limitations of space prohibit me from developing this evident divergence of phenomenological language from theological language here, but it is masterfully illustrated – if not systematised – by Falque in his *The Loving Struggle*. For my specific argument, against Marion, that givenness cannot be equated with revelation, see my “Givenness and Existence”.

<sup>113</sup> My proposal should be distinguished from Wells, *The Manifest and the Revealed: A Phenomenology of Kenosis*, which moves in the precise opposite direction (i.e. conceiving of the Incarnation as Fink's *Entmenschlichung*, rather than Falque's *Menschwerdung*). For a detailed comparison, see my review essay “Radicalisation as *Entmenschlichung*.”

to assume the human or servant form. It emphasises God's complete assumption of the human condition in the Incarnation, including its "lowly" elements: his exaltation is his humiliation on the cross, his power is the weakness of the servant, his divinity lies in voluntarily suffering human finitude. In short, the relevant theological implication is that divinity takes place "here below": in the world, in a human being just like us, in finitude and historicity, suffering and embodiment. Secondly, this becomes (2) *kenosis as the self-emptying of Christianity*: in itself producing secular modernity by effacing itself, Christianity takes place in and as the secular modern world, instead of being bypassed as its opposite. This is kenosis as understood by the authors of the post-secular turn strictly conceived: the self-emptying or self-effacement characteristic of the Christian God becomes characteristic of the Christian religion as such, resulting in an understanding of modernity as Christianity-after-Christianity, a de-theologised Christianity stemming directly from Christianity itself (of "Christian provenance," as Nancy's puts it).<sup>114</sup> Clearly, (2) can be concluded from (1): if the Christian God is only God insofar as he empties himself out of his divine form; then Christianity is only Christian insofar as it egresses its religious or theological mode, de-theologises itself by making way for concrete action in the world (e.g., Bonhoeffer's "religionless Christianity").<sup>115</sup> Thirdly, we have (3) *kenosis as the self-emptying of God's phenomenality*: God does not appear, or is not revealed, *as God*, but *as a man*, a historical, finite, and embodied human being; thus, God *empties himself out* of his own divinity, of his phenomenality as divine, insofar as he appears or becomes phenomenal. Put otherwise, divine transcendence, by definition, cannot appear, except insofar as it assumes the human and historical condition, becomes immanent to the world, empties itself of that transcendence and thus of itself. This, too, follows from (1), since if there is only revelation insofar as there is incarnation, there is equally only revelation insofar as there is kenosis: *in* appearing, God's divinity *withdraws from* appearing. We find this understanding of kenosis in certain theologically interested French phenomenologists who nevertheless do not belong to the theological turn strictly conceived, such as Emmanuel Falque and Jean-Yves Lacoste. The former proclaims that "We have no other experience of God than the experience of the man (*l'expérience de l'homme*)" he became in his incarnation.<sup>116</sup> The latter likewise insists that God "does not appear to be described, since there is nothing *to* describe, only a man like other men," meaning that "to make an appearance ... the god must be present kenotically."<sup>117</sup> Or as he puts it slightly more vividly: "God does not appear like the Alps, huge and undeniable," but "in such a way that we can make up our mind about him, for or against."<sup>118</sup> Finally, we have (4) *kenosis as the self-emptying of phenomenality generally*: all appearing depends on an element that itself does not appear, meaning that appearing therefore necessarily *withdraws* into or gives way to the extra-phenomenal element that makes it possible. If (2) is concluded from (1) as its general implication, or (2) understood as the de-theologised version of (1), then the same is the case with (4) in relation to (3): divinity's self-emptying in appearing, the kenosis of God's divinity in coming to phenomenality, becomes the model for thinking all appearing, for the kenosis of phenomenality and kenosis as phenomenality more generally. Put differently, just as God's phenomenality depends on an extra-phenomenal element, so too does all phenomenality depend on an extra-phenomenal element: the phenomenal always withdraws into something that does not belong to it, yet that nevertheless makes it possible.<sup>119</sup> However, (1–3) are useful in illustrating both (4) as well as how the de-theologising movement from (1) to (4) is inherent to and set in motion by (1).

A phenomenology of kenosis would then describe two things: (a) the *kenosis of God*, or how God appears by withdrawing from appearing since his divinity transcends appearance by definition (beyond phenomenality); (b) the *kenosis of phenomenality*, or how phenomenality itself withdraws or descends into something that makes it possible whilst nevertheless remaining extra-phenomenal (below

<sup>114</sup> Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, 140 (translation modified).

<sup>115</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Prisoner for God*, 122–3.

<sup>116</sup> Falque, *The Metamorphosis of Finitude*, 15 (translation modified).

<sup>117</sup> Lacoste, *The Appearing of God*, 91/72.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 107/87.

<sup>119</sup> This is beyond the scope of the present essay, as it does not concern a question of the philosophy of religion, but a possible account of this dynamic is provided by Falque, *Hors Phénomène*.

phenomenality).<sup>120</sup> Put otherwise, we can only speak phenomenologically about what transcends phenomenality (the experiences believers recognise as theophanic) by descending below the phenomenal into what makes that phenomenality possible (the faith that conditions experience as theophanic). Strictly speaking, such a phenomenology of kenosis would not deal with a “phenomenon” at all and therefore could not properly be conceived of as a “phenomenology,” but would instead thematise God’s withdrawal from phenomenality, precisely because he can only become phenomenal by emptying himself of his divinity. Consequently, such phenomenology could offer a way of speaking phenomenologically about incarnation and revelation without insisting with the theological turn that these theological notions are coextensive with those of phenomenological philosophy.

In that sense, both the kenotic turn and the theological turn are engaged in a critical interrogation of what transcends the limits of phenomenality. As the editors of a major volume on the deconstruction of Christianity, which is the prime example of the kenotic turn, put it: “Nancy, together with those advocating a “theological turn,” does not disagree with phenomenology itself. Rather, they seek to establish a turn within phenomenology, bringing it toward and maybe even outside its limits.” However, they do so in different directions:

Nancy disagrees at a fundamental methodological level on ... how to deal with the *theological* in that turn. Those who advocate the theological turn are dealing, broadly speaking, with the nonapparent ... as belonging to the realm of phenomenality. ... According to Nancy, however, the nonapparent ... can never end in a reconciliation ... with phenomena. Absence can never stop being the blind spot of presence, of phenomenality, and thus of phenomenology. In other words, phenomenology cannot be “improved” or “completed” by making it theological.<sup>121</sup>

In short, whereas the theological turn assumes the presence of distinctly and undeniably theological phenomena within the realm of human experience, a *phenomenology of kenosis* as a deconstruction of that turn would instead show this theological qualification to be made up by a persistently extra-phenomenal element in which divinity’s supposed phenomenality therefore withdraws. It is precisely in this way that I propose that the figure of kenosis can be used to *think after the theological turn*: in turning to theology, phenomenology de-theologises itself, makes evident how its basic notions diverge from their theological appropriation. Moreover, in doing so, it would provide a better account of religious experience than that of phenomenology’s theological turn for reasons that are as much theological as they are phenomenological: namely, an account that insists on God’s absolute transcendence, meaning the irreconcilable estrangement of his *divinity* from phenomenality.<sup>122</sup>

## Conclusion

Even if said phenomenology of kenosis will have to be developed elsewhere,<sup>123</sup> this essay has indicated its potential significance: the challenge of contemporary continental philosophy of religion is indeed to think “after the theological turn,” to deconstruct the theological turn by critically engaging the state in which it has left the field rather than forever continuing to “turn” (undoubtedly in circles) in what would amount to a new form of scholasticism. In that sense, “phenomenology is not a school,” as Heidegger reminds us, but

<sup>120</sup> See further my “Kenosis and Transcendence.”

<sup>121</sup> Alexandrova et al., “Re-opening the Question of Religion”, 35.

<sup>122</sup> In essence, a phenomenology that engages responsibly with the Christian theological tradition has just a single (phenomenologically relevant) lesson to learn from it: divinity (which is not synonymous with “God”) is never phenomenal, never given in the experience of an object, never the product of intentional constitution, and never in any way before consciousness as something external. This is not an insight that can itself be established phenomenologically – since, by definition, phenomenology sticks to questions of phenomenality – but is rather an example of how theology might be useful to phenomenology: to produce a phenomenology of God, the definition of what counts as “God” must come from theology.

<sup>123</sup> I have made a start with my “Kenosis and Transcendence.”

merely denotes “the possibility of thinking” as “corresponding to the claim of what is to be thought.”<sup>124</sup> Today, it is indeed still the theological turn that demands to be thought but only insofar as it has been completed (only a single one of its authors still being alive): the turn has been taken and it is now time to look ahead towards where the road might take us next as well as to look back in the rear-view mirror to see how exactly we ended up where we are (in the ditch of theology, as Janicaud insisted).

The proposal I have put forward here, or at least the direction I hope to give for any future turn phenomenology might take following this first (theological) step, centred on the theological notion of kenosis and its role as a Christian metaphor for deconstruction within contemporary continental philosophy. In other words, I have suggested that “thinking after the theological turn” concerns the deconstruction of the theological structure inherent to phenomenology in principle and manifested acutely by its actual theological turn: namely, by *starting from* the theological turn phenomenology was structurally inclined to produce, *moving beyond* theology as such. Phenomenology must thus take it upon itself to bid farewell (*adieu*) to God (*à Dieu*), must undertake the work of mourning his death, by engaging in what I proposed to call a “phenomenology of kenosis.” We might then say that after “the theological turn of recent phenomenology” (a turn *towards theology*) could come “the kenotic turn of contemporary phenomenology” (a turn *away from theology* but precisely following and only *on the basis of* the earlier turn): today, phenomenology must indeed turn to theology, but only to discover therein what is properly speaking “phenomenological” by immediately also moving beyond “the theological” – as an instance of what Emmanuel Falque, who is arguably the first philosopher to think “after the theological turn” in this way, has insightfully referred to as the “backlash” of theology on phenomenology.<sup>125</sup> It is the Christian theological notion of kenosis, which captures the meaning of God as the very effacement of the *theos*, that provides phenomenology with the opportunity to do just that, to de-theologise itself precisely by feeling the backlash of theology.

**Conflict of interest:** Author states no conflict of interest.

## References

- Agamben, Giorgio. *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, translated by Patricia Dailey. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.
- Alexandrova, Alena, Ignaas Devisch, Laurens ten Kate and Aukje van Rooden, “Re-opening the Question of Religion: Dis-enclosure of Religion and Modernity in the Philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy.” In *Re-treating Religion: Deconstructing Christianity with Jean-Luc Nancy*, edited by Alena Alexandrova, Ignaas Devisch, Laurens ten Kate and Aukje van Rooden, 22–40. New York: Fordham University Press, 2012.
- Alexandrova, Alena, Ignaas Devisch, Laurens ten Kate and Aukje van Rooden (eds.), *Re-treating Religion: Deconstructing Christianity with Jean-Luc Nancy*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2012.
- Athanasius. *On the Incarnation*, translated and edited by a religious of C.S.M.V., 2nd rev. ed. Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, 1953.
- Badiou, Alain. *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, translated by Ray Brassier. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- Bailly, Jean-Christophe. *Adieu: Essai sur la mort des dieux*. Paris: Cécile Defaut, 2014.
- Bauckham, Richard. *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.
- Blond, Philip (ed.). *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology*. London: Routledge, 1997.
- Baird, Marie L., “Whose Kenosis? An Analysis of Levinas, Derrida, and Vattimo on God’s Self-Emptying and the Secularisation of the West.” *The Heythrop Journal* 48:3 (May 2007), 423–37.
- Bonaventure. *Collations on the Six Days*, translated by José de Vinck. Paterson: St. Anthony’s Guild, 1970.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Prisoner for God: Letters and Papers from Prison*, edited by Eberhard Bethge, translated by Reginald H. Fuller. New York: Macmillan, 1959.

<sup>124</sup> Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, 82.

<sup>125</sup> Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 149–50 (translation modified); Falque, *The Loving Struggle*, 172.

- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*, rev. edition. New York: Macmillan, 1963.
- Breider, Martin. *Die kenotische Christologie des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus Mohn, 1977.
- Brito, Emilio. "Kenosis." In *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology*, edited by Jean-Yves Lacoste, vol. 2, 853–6. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Brown, David. *Divine Humanity: Kenosis Explored and Defended*. London: SCM, 2011.
- Bulgakov, Sergius. *The Bride of the Lamb*, translated by Boris Jakim. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.
- Bulgakov, Sergius. *The Lamb of God*, translated by Boris Jakim. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.
- Caputo, John D. "The Hyperbolization of Phenomenology: Two Possibilities for Religion in Recent Continental Philosophy." In *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, edited by Kevin Hart, 67–94. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.
- Caputo, John D., *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006.
- Caputo, John D. *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- Cassidy-Deketelaere, Nikolaas. "Kenosis and Transcendence: Jean-Yves Lacoste and Søren Kierkegaard on the Phenomenality of God." In *God and Phenomenology: Thinking with Jean-Yves Lacoste*, edited by Joeri Schrijvers and Martin Koci. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2022.
- Courtine, Jean-François (ed.), *Phénoménologie et théologie*. Paris: Criterion, 1992.
- Crockett, Clayton, B. Keith Putt and Jeffrey W. Robbins (eds.). *The Future of Continental Philosophy of Religion*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014.
- Crossan, Dominic John and Jonathan Reed. *In Search of Paul: How Jesus's Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom*. San Francisco: Harper, 2004.
- Dawe, Donald G. *The Form of a Servant: A Historical Analysis of the Kenotic Motif*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964.
- Deketelaere, Nikolaas. "Givenness and Existence: On the Possibility of a Phenomenological Philosophy of Religion." *Palgrave Communications* 4.1 (2018), 1–13.
- Deketelaere, Nikolaas. "Radicalisation as Entmenschlichung: Notes on the Credibility of a Phenomenology of Scripture." *Phenomenological Reviews* 5.1 (2019).
- de Vries, Hent and Lawrence E. Sullivan (eds.). *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2006.
- de Vries, Hent. *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.
- Derrida, Jacques. *On the Name*, translated by David Wood, edited by Thomas Dutoit. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- Derrida, Jacques. *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, translated by Christine Irizarry. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.
- Dubilet, Alex. *The Self-Emptying Subject: Kenosis and Immanence, Medieval to Modern*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2018.
- Falque, Emmanuel. *Crossing the Rubicon: The Borderlands of Philosophy and Theology*, translated by Reuben Shank. New York: Fordham University Press, 2016.
- Falque, Emmanuel. *The Loving Struggle: Phenomenological and Theological Debates*, translated by Bradley B. Onishi and Lucas McCracken. London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018.
- Falque, Emmanuel. *The Metamorphosis of Finitude: An Essay on Birth and Resurrection*, translated by George Hughes. New York: Fordham University Press, 2012.
- Falque, Emmanuel. *Hors Phénomène: Essai au confins de la phénoménologie*. Paris: Hermann, 2021.
- Flood, Gavin. *Beyond Phenomenology: Rethinking the Study of Religion*. London: Bloomsbury, 1999.
- Franck, Didier. *Flesh and Body: On the Phenomenology of Husserl*, translated by Joseph Rivera and Scott Davidson. London: Bloomsbury, 2014.
- Gavrilyuk, Paul L. "The Kenotic Theology of Sergius Bulgakov." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58:3 (2005), 251–69.
- Gorman, Michael J. *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays*, translated by Ciaran Cronin. Cambridge: Polity, 2008.
- Hawthorne, Gerald F. *Philippians*. Waco: Word, 1983.
- Hegel, G. W. F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*, translated by Joan Stambaugh, rev. by Dennis J. Schmidt. Albany: Suny Press, 2010.
- Heidegger, Martin. *On Time and Being*, translated by Joan Stambaugh. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.
- Henry, Michel. *Incarnation: A Philosophy of Flesh*, translated by Karl Hefty. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015.
- Husserl, Edmund. *Husserliana: Edmund Husserl – Collected Works, Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy – First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, vol. 2., translated by F. Kersten, The Hague: Martinus Nijhof, 1982.
- Hutchens, B. C. *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005.
- James, Ian. "Incarnation and Infinity." In *Re-treating Religion: Deconstructing Christianity with Jean-Luc Nancy*, edited by Alena Alexandrova, Ignaas Devisch, Laurens ten Kate and Aukje van Rooden, 246–60. New York: Fordham University Press, 2012.
- James, Ian. *The New French Philosophy*. Cambridge: Polity, 2012.



- Janicaud, Dominique. "The Theological Turn in French Phenomenology." In *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate*, translated by Bernard G. Prusak, 1–103. New York: Fordham University Press, 2000.
- Janicaud, Dominique. *La phénoménologie dans tous ses états*. Paris: Gallimard, 2009.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Philosophical Fragments*, translated by David F. Swenson, rev. by Howard V. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Training in Christianity*, translated by Walter Lowrie. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944.
- Lacoste, Jean-Yves. *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man*, translated by Mark Raftery-Skehan. New York: Fordham University Press, 2004.
- Lacoste, Jean-Yves. *The Appearing of God*, translated by Oliver O'Donovan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Lambert, Gregg. *Return Statements: The Return of Religion in Contemporary Philosophy*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016.
- Latré, Stijn, Walter van Herck and Guido Vanheeswijck (eds.), *Radical Secularisation? An Inquiry into the Religious Roots of Secular Culture*. London: Bloomsbury, 2014.
- Law, David R. *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Law, David R. "Kenotic Christology." In *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth Century Theology*, edited by David Fergusson, 251–80. Oxford: Blackwell, 2010.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, translated by Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *In the Time of Nations*, translated by Michael B. Smith. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, translated by Bettina Bergo. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- Macquarrie, John. *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought*. London: SCM, 1990.
- Malabou, Catherine. *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, Dialectic*, translated by Lisabeth During. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Marion, Jean-Luc. *Givenness and Revelation*, translated by Stephen E. Lewis. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Marion, Jean-Luc. *The Visible and the Revealed*, translated by Christina M. Gschwandtner et al. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008.
- Meillassoux, Quentin. *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, translated by Ray Brassier. London: Bloomsbury, 2009.
- McCormack, Bruce. "Kenoticism in Modern Christology." In *The Oxford Handbook of Christology*, edited by Francesca Murphy, 444–57. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- McCormack, Bruce. "Scottish Kenotic Theology." In *The History of Scottish Theology, vol. 3: The Long Twentieth Century*, edited by David Fergusson and Mark Elliot, 19–34. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.
- McLennan, Gregor. "The Postsecular Turn." *Theory, Culture & Society* 27:4 (2010), 3–20.
- Milbank, John, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (eds.), *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, translated by R. A. Wilson and John Bowden. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. "Entzug der Göttlichkeit. Zur Dekonstruktion und Selbstüberschreitung des Christentums." *Lettre Internationale* 59 (Winter 2002), 76–80.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Adoration: The Deconstruction of Christianity II*, translated by John McKeane. New York: Fordham University Press, 2012.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, translated by Gabriel Malenfant, Michael B. Smith and Bettina Bergo. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Expectation: Philosophy, Literature*, translated by Robert Bononno. New York: Fordham University Press, 2017.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Inoperative Community*, translated by Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland and Simona Sawhney. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1991.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*, translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1974.
- Rahner, Karl. "On the Theology of the Incarnation." In *Theological Investigations, vol. 4: More Recent Writings*, translated by Kevin Smyth, 105–20. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966.
- Ridderbos, Herman. *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.
- Rose, Tim. *Kierkegaard's Christocentric Theology*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001.
- Silva, Moisés. *Philippians*, 2nd edition. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005.
- Smith, Anthony Paul and Daniel Whistler (eds.). *After the Postsecular and the Postmodern: New Essays in Continental Philosophy of Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Smith, James K. A. "Liberating Religion from Theology: Marion and Heidegger on the Possibility of a Phenomenology of Religion." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 46:1 (August 1999), 17–23.
- Stallings, Jack W. *The Gospel of John*. Nashville: Randall House, 1989.
- Staudigl, Michael and Jason W. Alvis (eds.). *Phenomenology and the Post-Secular Turn: Contemporary Debates on the "Return of Religion"*. London: Routledge, 2018.
- Thomasius, Gottfried. "The Person of the Mediator." In *God and Incarnation in Mid-Nineteenth Century German Theology*, edited and translated by Claude Welch. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965.

- Thompson, Thomas R. "Nineteenth-Century Kenotic Christology: The Waxing, Waning, and Weighing of a Quest for a Coherent Orthodoxy." In *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*, edited by C. Stephen Evans, 74–111. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Torrance, T. F. *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, edited by Robert T. Walker. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008.
- van Riessen, Renée D. N. *Man as a Place of God: Levinas' Hermeneutics of Kenosis*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2007.
- Vattimo, Gianni. *Belief*, translated by Luca D'Istano. Cambridge: Polity, 1999.
- Vial, Marc. "Dieu jusque dans le néant: Sur la kénose." *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 95:3 (2015), 339–357.
- von Balthasar, Hans Urs. *Mysterium Paschale*, translated by Aidan Nichols. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000.
- Vos, Pieter. "Working Against Oneself: The Kenotic Character of Kierkegaard's Thought." In *Letting Go: Rethinking Kenosis*, edited by Onno Zijlstra, 109–39. Bern: Peter Lang, 2002.
- Vos, Pieter. *De troost van het ogenblik: Kierkegaard over god en het lijden*. Kampen: Ten Have, 2002.
- Ward, Graham. *Christ and Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005.
- Watkin, Christopher. *Difficult Atheism: Post-Theological Thinking in Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy and Quentin Meillassoux*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011.
- Wells, Adam Y. *The Manifest and the Revealed: A Phenomenology of Kenosis*. Albany: Suny Press, 2018.
- Westphal, Merold. "Kenosis and Offense: A Kierkegaardian Look at Divine Transcendence." In *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Practice in Christianity*, edited by Robert L. Perkins, 19–46. Macon: Mercer University Press, 2004.
- Wright, N. T. *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993.
- Zijlstra, Onno (ed.). *Letting Go: Rethinking Kenosis*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2002.
- Žižek, Slavoj. *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003.