

On Faith: Relation to an Infinite Passing

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ABSTRACT

Faith is a dynamic concept that has been understood both according to its content (as beliefs) and in terms of the relationship that evokes it. In this article faith is considered as event, and the work of three contemporary French thinkers (Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Jean-Luc Marion) is used to elucidate what thinking faith in this way might mean for Christian theology.

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In Christian theology, faith is understood to have two dimensions: it can be understood as a set of beliefs (*fides quae*), or as that by which we believe (*fides qua*). Of interest to me here is how we understand the latter—what we might call the faith event—since it grounds the very possibility of belief. Here I propose to examine briefly contributions that might be made to a theology of faith from three significant contemporary thinkers: Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Jean-Luc Marion. In drawing from their works I do not presume to make them speak on behalf of Christian faith, except where they might choose to, but aim to sketch ways of approaching faith that try to take seriously faith's nescience and its radical character as act. It seems to me that being able to engage with thought such as this, which is undertaken always with an eye to the limits of metaphysics, is rightly part of the challenge of theology today.

Jacques Derrida: faith without object

We turn first to Derrida, that apparently atheistic man of faith, although in recalling his often-quoted phrase, "I quite rightly pass for an atheist," we must be careful not to assume too quickly that we know what he means.¹ Reflections on faith occur in many contexts in Derrida's work, but he often considers faith in the context of reason, and in terms of the Kantian opposition between faith and knowledge. In broad terms, for Derrida, faith is the condition of relation: "that is why," he says, "I constantly refer to the

experience of faith as simply a speech act, as simply the social experience....”² Faith is the condition of possibility for any reason at all, but since faith is also reason’s condition of impossibility (reason cannot be purely reasonable), it is a quasi-transcendental.³ In this sense, faith is fundamentally trust in the other, without reason or ground.⁴

Fundamental to Derrida’s account of faith is that it is not knowledge: “ ... faith, in the moment proper to it, is blind. It sacrifices sight even if it does so with an eye to seeing at last.”⁵ In his extended meditation on blindness, Derrida notes particularly that those who witness to religious faith in a moment of conversion are often struck blind, most dramatically in the case of Paul (as we read in Acts, “though his eyes were open, he could see nothing” [9:8]).⁶ One of Derrida’s most faithful commentators, John D. Caputo, provides the following gloss:

... the eyes of faith are, as such, blind; to see with the eyes of faith is to take on faith precisely what we do not see. That is why the ‘witness’ for Derrida can never be an eye witness but precisely the opposite, someone ‘abocular’ who gives witness or bears witness in his or her life to what they believe but do not see. The witness is not empowered by truth—*sciential* or *savoir*, *intuitus* or *voir*— ... but, following Augustine, the witness does the truth or makes the truth ... in her life. Faith is structurally inhabited by blindness, which is its quasi-transcendental condition.⁷

For Derrida, faith can only be faith if it does not see. It involves the suspension of knowledge (that is, it can have no determined object).⁸ When being asked about prayer, Derrida says: “I could talk of *epochē*, meaning by that the suspension of certainty, not of belief. This suspension of certainty is part of prayer. I consider that this suspension of certainty, this suspension of knowledge, is part of an answer to the question ‘Who do you expect to answer these prayers?’”⁹ Later in the same interview he uses the terms slightly differently: “It is in the *epochē*, in the suspension of belief, the suspension of the position of God as a thesis, that faith appears.”¹⁰

In Derrida’s work, faith touches on the secret. Now, while Derrida’s secret is that there is no secret (there is nothing outside the text), and that the secret “is without content, without a content separable from its performative

experience, from its performative tracing,” the secret does not preclude meaning, but pushes us to find meaning while never allowing us to remain settled in it (in Caputo’s terms, “faith is the passion of unknowing”).¹¹ This is why theological faith (where it is determinate and fixed) is such a potential difficulty for Derrida, although he does not exclude its possibility in what he calls “a unique experience.” Hence, “ ... the experience of faith [and presumably here he means just such a unique experience] is something that exceeds language in a certain way.... In relation to this experience of faith, deconstruction is totally, totally useless and disarmed. ... Perhaps it is because deconstruction starts from the possibility of ... a secret, an absolutely secret experience which I would compare with what you call grace.”¹²

While Derrida’s understanding of faith in its utter blindness can be interpreted as nihilistic, I do not think this needs to be so (and it has even been argued that such a kenotic understanding of faith is “the most rigorously Christlike”).¹³ To say that the experience of faith yields no positive content does not mean that one cannot say “I have faith in God,” but only that in saying this one confesses—beyond all the usual theological caveats—not to know whether one is, in Derrida’s own words, “referring to someone or mentioning a name.”¹⁴ In this context, he goes on to add that to name is to call, and that to call is not to be sure of the response, whether one calls to another person or calls to God.¹⁵ Like justice, love, the gift, hospitality, and a number of other themes examined in Derrida’s writing, God might be recognised in faith as “the impossible to come,” while we admit the structural limits within thought around the in-breaking of this impossibility.¹⁶ Faith resists knowledge; its object cannot be known as such, but this does not mean that it cannot be decided or risked.¹⁷

Jean-Luc Nancy: faith as a relation to the nothing

To use the work of Nancy in the context of a reflection on Christian faith may at first appear quite meaningless. We cannot simply describe his thought as atheistic, yet seeking to go beyond what he sees as the false opposition between theism and atheism, Nancy affirms a kind of atheology in the sense articulated by Georges Bataille.¹⁸ Further, in spite of the fact that much of his

recent material seems to dwell somehow within Christianity, he is insistent that in his work it is not a question of any return to religion.¹⁹ We might say that his thought is a kind of “absentism”: “beyond all positing of an object of belief or disbelief.”²⁰ Without wishing to re-baptise Nancy, I have two reasons to make a preliminary examination of his work on faith: his thinking of the moment of faith as event, and his absolute insistence that the act of faith has nothing to do with beliefs.

Nancy is concerned with the drive to discover the basic principle or principles that give reason to the world.²¹ “The signal weakness of any logic of the premise,” Nancy observes, “... shows itself at the crucial point where theism and atheism prove to belong to each other.... The decisive point is this—it ought to be the task of the principle, as we have sketched it above, *to exceed qua principle principiation itself.*”²² In this context, faith is not knowledge of the principle (or premise), although this might be its function in religion. Instead, Nancy maintains:

Faith is not weak, hypothetical, or subjective knowledge. It is neither unverifiable nor received through submission, nor even through reason. It is not a belief in the ordinary sense of the term. On the contrary, it is the act of the reason that relates, itself, to that which, in it, passes *it* infinitely: faith stands precisely at the point of an altogether consequent atheism. This is to say that it stands at the point where atheism is dispossessed of belief in the premise or principle and in principate, in general. ... Reason does not suffice unto itself: *for itself* it is not a *sufficient reason.*²³

Faith opens reason to its own beyond. This is reminiscent of Kant’s practical reason, in many ways, but stripped of its teleology.²⁴ Yet we may still be enabled to speak of “God,” albeit in an atheological mode.²⁵ Nancy comments:

What the name ‘God’ or that of the ‘holy’ rigorously attempts to designate in this atheological regime ... refers not only to a ruining of the premise but ... to ‘something,’ to ‘someone,’ or to ‘a nothing’ ... of which faith is itself the birthplace or the creative event. That ‘God’ himself may be the fruit of faith, which at the same time depends only on his grace ... is a thought profoundly foreign to the theism/atheism pair. It is the thinking of alterity opened by and exposed outside of sameness, as that which exceeds thinking infinitely without in any way being principial to it. Yet this thinking is not foreign to Christian reflection....²⁶

He goes on to cite as an example the words of Makarios of Magnesia about giving birth to Christ through faith, but we could equally be reminded of the expressions of Meister Eckhart.²⁷ Having said this, Nancy still questions whether “God” is an appropriate name for “this alterity of reason.” Yet naming becomes important once again in his extended meditation on the epistle of James, where faith “draws its consistency from somewhere else: from a proper name” (in this case, the name of Jesus). Nancy underscores that here the crucial thing is that “the proper name does not turn into a concept.”²⁸

What strikes me about Nancy’s thinking of faith as “the act of the reason that relates, itself, to that which, in it, passes *it* infinitely,” is its character as event. Coming from nowhere, and giving no-thing as such, we have here a thinking of the moment of thought’s destitution. The extreme astringency of this moment is almost unbearable, but it is also potentially very exciting, and, approached in a particular way, not *antithetical* to Christian thought. This is apparent in Nancy’s consideration of faith versus beliefs.

In the context of a discussion of divine kenosis, Nancy argues that the God of Christianity is not a God hidden in withdrawal, but instead completely “emptied out,” and therefore without signification.²⁹ “Christian assurance,” he maintains, “can take place only at the cost of a category completely opposed to that of religious beliefs: the category of ‘faith,’ which is faithfulness to an absence and a certainty of this faithfulness in the absence of all assurance. In this sense, the atheist who firmly refuses all consoling or redemptive assurance is paradoxically or strangely closer to faith than the ‘believer.’” This is not faithfulness to an absent God (that is, to a God present elsewhere) but faithfulness in the face of God-in-absence.³⁰ Now, while we have to keep in mind Nancy’s atheological perspective, such an “experience”—if we are able to call it such—is nevertheless again suggestive of what is described by some of the Christian mystics.³¹

A second example occurs in the context of the discussion of James. Nancy insists that faith is understood here to be an act, and not “adherence to a

message.”³² Faith is *praxis*, or “the *praxical* excess of and in action or in operation....”³³ So, we read:

In that sense, this faith can no more be a property of the subject than it can be the subject’s ‘work’: this faith must be asked for and received—which does not prevent it from being asked for with faith.... (... [T]here is at the heart of faith a decision of faith that precedes itself and exceeds itself.) In this sense, faith cannot be an adherence to some contents of belief. If belief must be understood as a weak form or an analogy of knowledge, then faith is not of the order of belief. It comes neither from a knowledge nor from a wisdom, not even by analogy.³⁴

Comparing James with Paul in their various understandings of the figure of Abraham, Nancy maintains that James’ Abraham is great because he *does*, not because he *believes*.³⁵ However, to the extent that faith does implicate the understanding, Nancy declares:

... this faith resides in the inadequation of one’s own ‘*logos*’ to itself. The reasons that this faith has ‘to believe’ are not reasons. Thus it has nothing, in sum, with which to convince itself. This faith is but the ‘conviction’ that gives itself over in act—not even to something ‘incomprehensible’ (according to a logic of the ‘I cannot understand but I must or I may still believe,’ and still less according to a logic of the *credo quia absurdum*) but to that which is another act: a commandment. Faith is not argumentative; it is the performative of the commandment—or it is homogenous with it. Faith resides in inadequation to itself as a content of meaning. [Faith is] the contrary of a truth *believed*. This faith, above all, does not *believe*. *It is a non-belief whose faith guarantees it as non-believable*.³⁶

Faith comes from the other, or from the outside: extrapolating from the idea of faith as “the performative of the commandment,” and drawing from the work of Jean-Louis Chrétien and Marion, we might say that it is given as *the response*.³⁷ This leads us to raise, if only in a preliminary way, the question of faith as gift. Nancy makes reference to this a number of times, but the most striking example is where he discusses the way in which the act of faith exceeds itself, noting that “in this, faith would be the very act of a *homoiōsis* with the gift itself, understood in the sense of its act. *Homoiōsis as heteroiōsis*, the identity of the concept ... qua the incommensurability of the conceiving in act.”³⁸ While he does not explicitly refer to Derrida’s analysis of the gift, this essay is actually an address to Derrida, and we could argue that it is to Derrida’s gift that he refers here.³⁹ That would mean that in the same way that

the gift is aporetic, so also faith: it is instantiated as the impossible. The gift (“if there is one”) would not be known *as such*.

While we have dwelled on Nancy’s thought perhaps longer than we ought to have, it is important at least to mention some of the other ways in which he speaks about faith. One of these is the possibility that faith is a saturated phenomenon. As we will see in our discussion of Marion, a saturated phenomenon gives itself in an excess of intuition, for which intentional concepts are inadequate. Nancy suggests that faith is “*the adhesion to itself of an aim without other,*” or without object.⁴⁰ He writes: “one could perhaps say that faith is pure intentionality, or that it is the phenomenon of intentionality as a self-sufficient phenomenon, as a ‘saturated phenomenon,’ in Jean-Luc Marion’s sense.”⁴¹ Nancy also speaks of faith as “exposure,” or allowing oneself “to be exposed to the absence of *parousia*...”⁴² He then addresses the question of the relation between the *fides qua* and the *fides quae*, as faith in the word of God.⁴³ Maintaining that this relation is played out in two ways, he suggests either that the act is dominant, in which case “... the sense of faith is so intimate, so private, that it is inaccessible to the subject,” or that the spoken word received by the community (that is, the content of faith as beliefs) is dominant, but that it is dissolved or dissipated in the division of the community (the beliefs never actually harden into a single interpretation).⁴⁴ According to either means, he argues that “faith always comes down to the infinity of sense...,” and that it ultimately becomes “*faithfulness to faithfulness itself.*”⁴⁵ Finally, some mention needs to be made of Nancy’s comments on prayer, since they relate so closely to what Derrida has said. In an essay concerning the work of Michel Deguy, Nancy speaks of “praying without prayer.”⁴⁶ For Nancy, prayer has no object, but is instead “the very act of *transcending,*” the act of remaining faithful without the assurance of belief.⁴⁷

Jean-Luc Marion: faith in the n/Name⁴⁸

We turn now to the work of Marion, which offers us the least explicit commentary on faith but is situated within a context of Christian commitment.⁴⁹ Marion’s work is actually more oriented to the flip side of faith,

which is the question of revelation, but this, together with his thought of experience, as well as occasional remarks on faith and belief, enables us to draw some conclusions about his understanding.

For Marion, phenomenology allows us to think the possibility of phenomena of revelation by way of the saturated phenomenon, that is, where the givenness of the phenomenon overruns the available concepts that might enable us to see it as any *thing*.⁵⁰ There is thus an inevitable (if ambiguous) role for hermeneutics in Marion's phenomenology. What is given in revelation is Revelation only because what is given excessively (and thus beyond determination) is interpreted as such. This highlights the relationship between revelation and faith.⁵¹

From the perspective of experience, the saturated phenomenon can be understood as counter-experience; by way of it we "experience ... the counter-experience itself."⁵² This is not the experience of any thing, but is "a contrary experience or rather one that always counteracts"; "it is confined to counteracting the counteracting of intuition by the concept."⁵³ There are three characteristics of counter-experience: there is no longer any concept at which intentionality can aim; all concepts are saturated by intuition; and it unsettles, perturbs, or agitates the witness whom it afflicts.⁵⁴ The counter-experience affects me, and has the potential to change me.⁵⁵

So, what might be given in a counter-experience of God? Marion writes that the givenness of God (which he describes as an "absolute mode of presence")

cannot present itself as an object, which is necessarily limited. Consequently, it occupies no space, fixes no attention, draws no look. In his very bedazzlement, 'God' shines by his absence. Evidence evoids—it voids the saturated horizons of any definable visible thing. The absence or unknowability of 'God' does not contradict his givenness but on the contrary attests to the excellence of that givenness.⁵⁶

How would we "know" God in this "experience" of dazzling excess? We "know" God only in the pragmatics of naming God, of addressing ourselves to

God. In the context of a more recent discussion, concerning mystical theology, Marion maintains:

In the case of God, knowledge becomes an unknowing, or rather until it becomes one that is capable of acknowledging the incomprehensible, and thereby respects the operative, pragmatic, and endlessly repeatable de-nomination of God....

De-nomination ... does not end up in a 'metaphysics of presence'.... Rather, it ends up as a *pragmatic theology of absence*—where the name is given as having no name, as not giving the essence, and having nothing but this absence to make manifest....⁵⁷

Strikingly, despite the enormous gulf between Marion and Nancy, their descriptions at this point bear a remarkable similarity.

It is in light of these aspects of Marion's thought that we turn to consider his descriptions of faith. As Shane Mackinlay demonstrates (and here I am indebted to his analysis), Marion's most extended discussion of faith is also, unfortunately, the most problematic.⁵⁸ Marion begins his discussion of the Emmaus story with a sketch of what faith is not, that is, a way "to compensate faulty intuition...." On this account, "I believe because ... I want to hold as true that which does not offer intuitive data sufficient to impose itself by itself."⁵⁹ Marion holds this view to be blasphemous, not least because it places the believer in the position of having to *decide* "on the existence of God and the truth of Christ."⁶⁰ Instead of faith concerning a deficit in intuition, Marion prefers to think it as involving a deficit in concepts adequate to the superabundantly given intuition (of revelation). In his discussion of Emmaus, the disciples move from receiving excessive intuition without recognising it, owing to their lack of adequate concepts, to matching that intuition with appropriate concepts in the moment of Christ's breaking of the bread. Marion argues:

Faith does not compensate ... for a defect of visibility: on the contrary, it allows reception of the intelligence of the phenomenon and the strength to bear the glare of its brilliance. Faith does not manage the deficit of evidence—it alone renders the gaze apt to see the excess of the pre-eminent saturated phenomenon, the Revelation.⁶¹

Mackinlay maintains that Marion's understanding of faith here is inadequate on three basic counts. First, Marion misreads the story: "The disciple's lack of

faith is not simply a lack of concepts to understand the excess of Jesus' revelation, but also a lack of openness to his revelation as such, which prevents them from seeing it either as revelatory or excessive."⁶² In the story, the disciples actually move from seeing Christ as quite ordinary to having an excessive intuition of him only in his breaking of bread and disappearance.⁶³ Second, Marion goes against the Gospel sense of faith, which Mackinlay argues is "first of all ... existential and hermeneutic," rather than conceptual.⁶⁴ Finally, Marion goes against his own methodology, since his argument results in the saturated phenomenon of Christ becoming quite ordinary once its saturation is neutralised by concepts in the disciples moment of insight.⁶⁵

Through an analysis of other texts, Mackinlay goes on to argue that the understanding of faith expressed in the Emmaus piece is actually an aberration in Marion's thought, which tends towards faith as an existential. Elsewhere the evidential aspect is not what is crucial for faith. For example, Marion writes: "faith neither compensates for the lack of evidence nor resolves itself in arguments, but decides by the will for or against the love of Love."⁶⁶ In other texts, although not always explicitly, faith seems to be a condition for revelation to occur.⁶⁷ And in Marion's discussion of mystical theology, Mackinlay observes "... what Marion describes as the way in which apophatic theology's pragmatic commitment of faith opens a hermeneutic space in which the phenomenon of revelation can appear."⁶⁸ Mackinlay's view is reinforced by a comment Marion makes in an interview, where belief (and here I suggest he means faith) is a commitment to someone that "open[s] a field of experience."⁶⁹ He continues: "And so it's not only a substitute for not knowing, it is an act which makes a new kind of experience possible. It is because I believe that I will see, and not as a compensation. It's the very fact that you believe which makes you see new things, which would not be seen if you did not believe."⁷⁰

Thus recognising that Marion holds an orthodox view of faith as opening a space for belief, for our purposes we also need to focus more precisely on the faith event as he might understand it. For Marion, faith is the knowledge arrived at by way of love, a love that wills to believe.⁷¹ "Nothing separates,

perhaps, he who believes from he who does not believe, except this: not reasons, of course, not some certainty..., but merely believing despite the belief that one does not believe.”⁷² Significantly, this act of assent is without ground: “nothing separates the believer from the unbeliever, except faith, which plays out over nothing: *nothing*, which is here a way to say the oscillation of the will in front of Love.”⁷³ Considering the context of the “pragmatic theology of absence” cited earlier, no-thing is precisely what is at issue. In faith we name what we do not know, in response to a call that is only made manifest precisely in that response.⁷⁴

Some theological implications

Three contemporary thinkers, three men of faith: I have tried to sketch here, in a very introductory way, what faith might mean in a context where metaphysics is perpetually in its death throes. To conclude, I will endeavour to draw out some implications of this sketch for theology.

In drawing from thinkers whose work tends to exclude “God” in the sense traditionally used by theology and/or as this assumes the presuppositions of metaphysics, the jury has to remain out on the question of whether when we use the word “God” we are “referring to someone or mentioning a name.” Even Marion, who appeases his audience in the preface to the English edition of *Dieu sans l'être* by affirming “God is, exists, and that is the least of things,”⁷⁵ cannot ultimately take us any further than the n/Name. While he would agree that this is so phenomenologically, I would also suggest that it is true theologically (although this requires a more substantial argument than I can present here). Even Marion recognises that the ground of beliefs is itself “groundless,” since beliefs rest on a decision of trust that is necessarily blind.⁷⁶ While Marion tries to steer us away from faith understood as a decision, his material on the knowledge of love repeatedly forces us to acknowledge the role of the will to love.⁷⁷ Christian theology affirms faith as a positive response to God’s self-revelation, but it also admits that faith cannot depend on any (other) ground than trust in God, which cannot be a matter of demonstration.⁷⁸ Theology must remain cognisant of its non-foundational foundations.⁷⁹ In this, faith is not opposed to reason, but is at the heart of

reason (it is reason's reason), without being knowledge *as such*. The theological affirmation of the nexus between faith and reason is reiterated, albeit in a new key.

The greatest potential overlap between the thought introduced here and Christian theology is in the areas of mystical and kenotic theologies. While it is evident that any kind of conversation is affected by the beliefs that frequently supplement faith, the thinking of faith itself as a moment of encounter with nothing is very helpful theologically, particularly as it is set within a framework that is cognisant of the limits of metaphysics. However, in privileging faith as unknowing (and revelation as hermeneutically conditioned), could we be accused of trying to inhibit the initiative or self-giving of revelation? While it is common for this argument to be invoked by theologians in the face of philosophers trying to determine conditions of possibility (but also impossibility) for revelation, thinking faith in this way does not preclude the possibility of faith as gift (or of revelation as being genuinely revelatory). It simply allows for humans to be human and, God help us, for God to be God.

¹ Jacques Derrida, "Circumfession," in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) 155.

² Jacques Derrida, in John D. Caputo, Kevin Hart, and Yvonne Sherwood, "Epochē and Faith: An Interview with Jacques Derrida," *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments*, ed. Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hart (New York: Routledge, 2005) 27-50, 45.

³ On the heterogeneity of faith and reason, see also Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: the Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," trans. Samuel Weber, *Religion*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) 18, 44-5, 63-4.

⁴ Discussing "Faith and Knowledge," Rei Terada explains: "Messianicity and the desire to which it is linked find their representation not in any theme but in the continuous performance of linguistic acts as acts of faith or as appeals to faith. We perform these acts and addresses *not* because words have a 'minimal trustworthiness' (3) (as to Jürgen Habermas's theories of communication), it is important to note, but even though we *cannot* assume their minimal trustworthiness." "Scruples, or, Faith in Derrida," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106.2 (2007) 237-264, 246.

⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) 30.

⁶ Derrida, *Memoirs*, 104, 112.

⁷ John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997) 311-12. Caputo speaks of blindness as the quasi-transcendental (that is, condition of possibility and impossibility) of faith, which means that faith structurally requires blindness but cannot be completely blind: this is, indeed, the whole problem.

⁸ “At some point, you ... translate your faith into something determinable, and then you have to keep the ‘name’ of the resurrection. My own understanding of faith is that there is faith whenever one gives up not only certainty but also any determined hope. If one says that resurrection is the horizon of one’s hope, then one knows what one names when one says ‘resurrection’—faith is not pure faith. It is already knowledge.” Derrida in conversation with Richard Kearney in *Debates in Continental Philosophy: Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004) 3-14, 12. An important point here is the qualification that “one knows what one names,” which may not, in fact, be the case. Caputo describes the relationship between faith and deconstruction: “By inscribing theology within the trace, by describing faith as always and already marked by the trace, by *différance* and undecidability, deconstruction demonstrates that faith is always *faith*....” *Prayers and Tears*, 6. Note, however, Derrida’s thinking of the mutual contamination of faith and knowledge, and the discussion by Terada in “Scruples,” 250-52. Terada argues that while knowledge is contaminated by faith, that faith in Derrida’s own terms effectively resists contamination by knowledge. See also the discussion in Deborah Madden and David Towsey, “Derrida, Faith and St Paul,” *Literature and Theology* 16.4 (2002): 396-409 and Hent de Vries, “Of Miracles and Special Effects,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 50 (2001): 41-56, 43.

⁹ Derrida, “Epochē and Faith,” 30-31. See also Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 80: “Our faith is not assured, because faith can never be, it must never be a certainty.”

¹⁰ Derrida, “Epochē and Faith,” 47. I consider the discrepancy between the terms used in these two quotes insignificant to the point being made about knowledge in relation to faith (Derrida is extemporising in English over a period of two hours in front of an audience of two thousand).

¹¹ Jacques Derrida, “Passions,” trans. David Wood, *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) 24, and 29-30: “... when there is no longer even any sense in making decisions about some secret behind the surface of a textual manifestation (and it is this situation which I would call text or trace), when it is the call [*appel*] of this secret, however, which points back to the other or to something else, when it is this itself which keeps our passion aroused, and holds us to the other, then the secret impassions us. Even if there is none, even if it does not exist, hidden behind anything whatever. Even if the secret is no secret, even if there has never been a secret, a single secret. Not one.” The reference to Caputo is from *Prayers and Tears*, 311.

¹² Derrida, “Epochē and Faith,” 39.

¹³ Madden and Towsey, “Derrida, Faith and St Paul,” 407.

¹⁴ Derrida, "Epochē and Faith," 38.

¹⁵ Derrida, "Epochē and Faith," 38.

¹⁶ See the discussion by Hugh Rayment-Pickard: "It is reasonable to question whether there is any significance to an act of faith that is unfocused and non-specific. Recalling Husserl's critique of empty consciousness, we may ask whether faith, like consciousness, should not be intentional, that is to say faith *in* something." Rayment-Pickard goes on to say that Derridean faith is undecidable rather than empty. However, he also notes: "... Derrida's faith in God is structurally restricted to some extent by the anti-metaphysical trajectory of deconstruction. The possible forms of the impossible God do not include the existence of God as a 'real presence', or an agent able to act in human affairs. The simple assertion of God's reality is excluded by the 'logic' of his impossibility, indeed the argument for God's impossibility is a way of protecting God from the restrictions of realist classification." *Impossible God: Derrida's Theology* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2003) 147-48.

¹⁷ Abraham, then, serves as a paradigm of faith. See Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, especially chapter 3. The summary of "deconstructive faith" provided by Ian Edwards emphasises the aspect of decision: "A deconstructive faith is sacrifice. First, it sacrifices the god that is known (It is a faith in God without God). Second, it sacrifices the object that one believes in. (It is a belief in the unbelievable [the impossible]). Third, it sacrifices faith itself. (It is a faith without faith.) And finally, it sacrifices definiteness. (It is being undecidably sure.) A deconstructive faith is a faith where decision, inscribed in indecision, is an element of what it means to be faithful." "Derrida's (Ir)religion: A Theology (of Différance)," *Janus Head* 6.1 (2003): 142-53, 150. Finally, we note Derrida's comment: "Each time, it was necessary to point to the possible (the condition of possibility) as to the impossible itself. And 'if there is any' doesn't say 'there is none,' but rather, there isn't anything that could make room for any proof, knowledge, constative or theoretical determination, judgment—especially not any determining judgment." Jacques Derrida, *On Touching: Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005) 288.

¹⁸ See, for example, Jean-Luc Nancy, "Atheism and Monotheism," trans. Gabriel Malenfant and Bettina Bergo *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008) 14-28, 26, 16-17. I will cite the essays from this book—which, aside from an appendix, belongs entirely to Nancy—separately, since they were not written together, have not been placed in chronological sequence, and have different translators.

¹⁹ In his deconstruction of Christianity, Nancy asserts: "Christianity designates nothing other, essentially ... than the demand to open in this world an alterity or unconditional alienation." Nancy, "Opening," *Dis-Enclosure*, 10. Identifying what he hopes to achieve in this project, Nancy elsewhere argues: "... we must ask ourselves anew what it is that, without denying Christianity but without returning to it, could lead us toward a point—toward a resource—hidden beneath Christianity, beneath monotheism, and beneath the West, which we must henceforth bring to light..." Jean-Luc Nancy, "A Deconstruction of Monotheism," trans. Gabriel Malenfant, *Dis-Enclosure*, 29-41, 34. On not returning to religion, see, for example, "Opening," trans. Bettina Bergo, *Dis-Enclosure*, 1-13, 1.

²⁰ The comment is made with reference to the thought of Maurice Blanchot. Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Name *God* in Blanchot," trans. Michael B. Smith, *Dis-Enclosure*, 85-88, 88.

²¹ Nancy, "Atheism and Monotheism," *Dis-Enclosure*, 15.

²² Nancy, "Atheism and Monotheism," *Dis-Enclosure*, 22-23.

²³ Nancy, "Atheism and Monotheism," *Dis-Enclosure*, 25.

²⁴ " ... the e-levation takes place without knowledge and outside of sense. Neither firm knowledge (science), nor weak knowledge (belief). Neither belief in God, nor belief in man, nor belief in knowledge, nor even in art. Yet a firmness, yes, and a fidelity, even a *devotion*...." "What Kant's expression holds open for us is none other than this: a critique of reason ... makes unconditionally requisite, within reason itself, an opening and an e-levation of reason. It is not a question of 'religion' here, but rather of a 'faith' as a sign of the fidelity of reason to that which *in and of itself* exceeds reason's phantasm of justifying itself as much as the world and man." Nancy, "Atheism and Monotheism," *Dis-Enclosure*, 28.

²⁵ Nancy uses both God and god, depending on the context. While I recognise the distinction is significant in terms of religious commitment, I will use the capital throughout my discussion.

²⁶ Nancy, "Atheism and Monotheism," *Dis-Enclosure*, 26.

²⁷ " 'The one who does the will of my Father gives birth to me by participating in this act, and he is born with me. He who believes in effect that I am the only Son of God engenders me in some sense through his faith.' " Nancy, "Atheism and Monotheism," *Dis-Enclosure*, 26, from Makarios, *Le Monogénèse 2*, trans. Richard Goulet (Paris: Vrin, 2003) 23. With regard to Eckhart, see, for example: "The Father gives birth to his Son in eternity, equal to himself.... Yet I say more: He has given birth to him in my soul. Not only is the soul with him, and he equal with it, but he is in it, and the Father gives his Son birth in the soul in the same way as he gives him birth in eternity, and not otherwise." *Sermon 6*, which appears in *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, trans. and intor Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn (New York: Paulist, 1981) 185-198, 187. See the discussion of the birth found in Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart: The Man from whom God Hid Nothing* (New York: Crossroad, 2001), chapter 4. See also Robert K. C. Forman, *Meister Eckhart: The Mystic as Theologian—and Experiment in Methodology* (Rockport, MA: Element, 1991), chapter 6.

²⁸ Nancy, "The Judeo-Christian (on Faith)," trans. Bettina Bergo, *Dis-Enclosure*, 42-60, 56, and 58. See also Nancy, "The Deconstruction of Christianity," trans. Michael b. Smith, *Dis-Enclosure*, 139-57, 152: "Faith consists in relating to God and to the name of God, to the extent that God and his love are not present, not shown."

²⁹ And here he refers to the famous phrase from Meister Eckhart: "I pray to God that he make me free of God." Nancy, "A Deconstruction of Monotheism," *Dis-Enclosure*, 36.

³⁰ “This truth and this justice open most precisely where it is no longer a sacred presence that assures and guarantees, but the fact itself—the act and the work—of not being assured by any presence that might not be of the other, and other than itself ... in a sense, or if one wishes, the sacred itself or the holy (to fuse them for an instant), but as not given, not posited, not presented in an order of divine presence—on the contrary, ‘God’ ‘himself’ as unlike any god, as gift and as the gift of the faith that is given to the other and that believes in nothing.” Nancy, “The Judeo-Christian (on Faith),” *Dis-Enclosure*, 55.

³¹ Perhaps Meister Eckhart, John of the Cross, the later Mechtild of Magdeburg, and so on.

³² This phrase is actually from another essay, “An Experience at Heart, trans. Michael B. Smith, *Dis-Enclosure*, 75-84, 77.

³³ Nancy, “The Judeo-Christian (on Faith),” *Dis-Enclosure*, 52.

³⁴ Nancy, “The Judeo-Christian (on Faith),” *Dis-Enclosure*, 52.

³⁵ Nancy, “The Judeo-Christian (on Faith),” *Dis-Enclosure*, 53.

³⁶ Nancy, “The Judeo-Christian (on Faith),” *Dis-Enclosure*, 53-4.

³⁷ “ ... this faith (‘persuasion,’ ‘wager of confidence,’ or ‘assurance of faithfulness’) must come from the other, this faith must come from outside, it is the outside opening in itself a passage toward the inside.” Nancy, “The Judeo-Christian (on Faith),” *Dis-Enclosure*, 54. We cannot avoid asking, of course, just who this other might be. In the following paragraph, Nancy writes: “This act would be tied first to faith in the other—which the other James, or Jacques [Derrida] calls ‘the relation to the other as the secret of testimonial experience’....” He goes on to explain that testimony might be of the other or of the other that I am to myself. The moment of faith being “homogenous” with a commandment is very suggestive of the receipt of the call described by both Chrétien and Marion. See, for example, Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, trans. Anne A. Davenport (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004); Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) 289-90; “ ... the gifted has nothing passive about it since by its response (hermeneutic) to the call (intuitive), it, and it alone, allows what gives itself to become, partially but really, what shows itself,” “The Banality of Saturation,” trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky, *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. Kevin Hart (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007) 383-418, 408-09.

³⁸ Nancy, “The Judeo-Christian (on Faith),” 54. Faith is the act of likeness with the gift, but this likeness as unlikeness (identity as incommensurability).

³⁹ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, 179n; “The Judeo-Christian (on Faith),” *Dis-Enclosure*, 46.

⁴⁰ Nancy, “The Deconstruction of Christianity,” *Dis-Enclosure*, 152.

⁴¹ Nancy, “The Deconstruction of Christianity,” *Dis-Enclosure*, 152-3. We should note here, of course, substantial differences from Marion, although I do not think there is an essential violence done to Marion’s thought here.

⁴² Nancy, "The Deconstruction of Christianity," *Dis-Enclosure*, 153.

⁴³ Nancy compares the act of Christian faith with "faithfulness in love." "... the true correlate of Christian faith is not an object but a word. Faith consists in entrusting oneself to the word of God." "... our amorous faith is entirely Christian, since, as faithfulness, it entrusts itself to the word of the other, to the word that says 'I love you,' or doesn't even say it." Nancy, "The Deconstruction of Christianity," *Dis-Enclosure*, 153.

⁴⁴ Nancy, "The Deconstruction of Christianity," *Dis-Enclosure*, 153-4.

⁴⁵ Nancy, "The Deconstruction of Christianity," *Dis-Enclosure*, 154.

⁴⁶ Nancy, " 'Prayer Demythified'," trans. Michael B. Smith, *Dis-Enclosure*, 129-138, 133.

⁴⁷ Nancy, " 'Prayer Demythified'," *Dis-Enclosure*, 138.

⁴⁸ Note the unannounced shift from "name" to "Name" within chapter 6 of Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002)

⁴⁹ Jean-Luc Marion, "They Recognized Him; and He Became Invisible to Them," trans. Stephen E. Lewis, *Modern Theology* 18.2 (2002): 145-52; Conversations between Jean-Luc Marion and Richard Kearney in *Debates in Continental Philosophy*, 15-32. Although I do not refer to it further here, see also the homiletic piece, "Faith and Reason," in Marion, *Le visible et le révélé* (Paris: CERF, 2005); *The Visible and the Revealed*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner and others (New York: Fordham, 2008) 145-154.

⁵⁰ The essentials of Marion's argument concerning revelation are as follows. Phenomenology has to do with the givenness of phenomena apart from any and all conditions. On the potential ambiguity here, see Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given*, 61ff. Free from the principle of sufficient reason, phenomena do not have to appear according to the metaphysical horizons of object-ness, or even being, and they are not dependent on the constitutive capacities of the transcendental I. See, for example, the essay originally published in 1988, "Le possible et la revelation," in Marion, *Le visible et le révélé* 13-34, 18ff.; *The Visible and the Revealed*, 1-17, 10ff. A fuller treatment is given in the phenomenological trilogy, particularly in *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger and Phenomenology*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998). Instead, phenomena appear as given (they "give themselves"), constituting their witness as a screen upon which they are projected. Marion frequently uses the reflexive form of the verb, that is, *se donner*, not to personalise what gives itself but to indicate that manifestation does not rest on the initiative of the witness. This becomes an issue where his critics argue that he always has in mind a divine Giver behind phenomenological gifts. While there are some phenomena that are poor in intuition, there are also phenomena that are saturated in intuition. It is not only the case that concepts overrun intuition (meaning exceeds what is actually given) but that intuition can also overrun the available concepts (what is given exceeds a single meaning, or even multiple meanings). See §§19-23 of Marion, *Being Given*. Further, as Heidegger showed, the invisible can give itself. See "Le possible et la revelation," 20. See also the discussion that culminates in *Being Given*, 52. There is thus a

philosophical place for phenomena such as events, works of art, flesh, other persons, and revelation, none of which appear as objects to be conceptualised and yet all of which can still be given to consciousness. Now, Marion argues that a suitably modified phenomenology is “the method of manifestation of the invisible through its indicial phenomena,” and “thus also the method of theology.” Marion, “Le possible et la revelation,” *Le visible et le révélé* 22, 29ff.; *The Visible and the Revealed*, 7-8. While Marion maintains that phenomenology might provide a context for the possibility of phenomena of revelation, he insists that it cannot determine their actuality as Revelation. See Marion, *Being Given*, 367, 242, 297.

⁵¹ How these phenomena are given is set out in Marion, *Being Given* and *In Excess*. This passage in the note above is a summary taken from Robyn Horner, “Excesso excessivo: Jean Luc-Marion e a superação da metafísica,” trans. of “Exceeding Excess: Jean-Luc Marion and the Overcoming of Metaphysics,” *Teologia e pós-modernidade*. Novas perspectivas em teologia e filosofia da religião, ed. Jaci Maraschin e Frederico Pieper Pires (São Paulo: Fonte Editorial, 2008). For the detail, see especially Robyn Horner, *Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida, and the Limits of Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001); “Aporia or Excess? Two Strategies for Thinking R/revelation,” *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments*, Ed. Kevin Hart and Yvonne Sherwood (London: Routledge, 2004) 325-336; and *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-Logical Introduction* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2005).

⁵² Marion, “Banality,” *Counter-Experiences*, 401. Considering experience, Marion claims that it “does not always aim at an object nor is it always determined by a subject; it can also expose an ‘I’ that is non-transcendental (and non-empirical), but given over, to a non-constitutable because saturated phenomenon.” Marion, “Banality,” *Counter-Experiences*, 400. Marion earlier argues that the belief that experience cannot be thought without a subject in fact “rests on the univocity of the concept of subject” (384).

⁵³ Marion, “Banality,” *Counter-Experiences*, 400.

⁵⁴ Marion, “Banality,” *Counter-Experiences*, 402-404.

⁵⁵ Marion, “Banality,” *Counter-Experiences*, 404-405. See the fuller discussion in Robyn Horner, “The Insistent and Unbearable Excess: On the Experience of God in Marion’s Phenomenology.” *ARC: the Journal of the Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University* 35 (2007): 105-30.

⁵⁶ Jean-Luc Marion, “Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology,” trans. Thomas A. Carlson, *Critical Inquiry* (1994): 572-591. 589, trans. modified in line with Marion’s more recent preference for translating *la donation* (itself with reference to *Gegebenheit*) with “givenness.” The French original of this text was republished in 2005 as part of *Le visible et le révélé*.

⁵⁷ Marion, *In Excess*, 155.

⁵⁸ Shane Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess: The Implicit Hermeneutics of Jean-Luc Marion’s Saturated Phenomena* (PhD Diss. Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2004) 229-279; “Eyes Wide Shut: A Response to Jean-Luc Marion’s Account of the Journey to Emmaus,” *Modern Theology* 20.3 (2004); 447-56.

⁵⁹ Marion, “They Recognized Him,” 145.

⁶⁰ Marion, "They Recognized Him," 146. It is, of course, this very characteristic of deciding the undecidable that emerges in the work of Derrida. Ultimately, given the necessary hermeneutic dimension of phenomenology, it is hard to see how faith can be other than a decision.

⁶¹ Marion, "They Recognized Him," 150. The problem here in the context of the wider text is that faith appears to allow for an understanding of the revelation. This particular passage could be read alternately to mean that faith allows us to see the phenomenon as revelation, which is quite a different thing.

⁶² Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess*, 245.

⁶³ Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess*, 246, 248.

⁶⁴ Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess*, 249. Mackinlay argues that the conceptual component of faith is derivative, "made possible by a more fundamental level of faith that underlies it: faith as openness to receiving revelation, as acceptance of the claims made in revelation, as trust in what is given, and as preparedness to make a personal commitment in response. Faith in the sense of concepts and beliefs *about* something derives from this primary, existential sense of faith as personal trust in – and commitment to – a complex of meaning-filled relationships and significations in which a person situates himself or herself. Such an existential faith is an instance of what Heidegger describes as the fundamental or ontological sense of hermeneutics. Primarily, faith is an acceptance that opens a hermeneutic space of meaning, in which a phenomenon can first be recognised as revelatory; faith is an existential commitment that makes it possible for revelation to be made manifest. Revelation does not simply impose itself on us; rather, it must be actively received and recognised in the meaning-filled world of a recipient's faith." (250)

⁶⁵ Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess*, 246.

⁶⁶ Jean-Luc Marion, "Evidence and Bedazzlement" *Prolegomena to Charity*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002) 53-70, 62.

⁶⁷ Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess*, 273ff.

⁶⁸ Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess*, 275.

⁶⁹ The first part of this passage reads: "... in philosophy we have to 'see' to believe. What does that mean, to believe? For us, because we start from a philosophical point of view, we spontaneously think that to believe is to take for true, to assume something as if it were true, without any proof. This is our interpretation of belief. In that case, it is either belief or seeing. But is this the real meaning of belief? In fact, belief is also to commit yourself, and in that case, it is also, perhaps, a theoretical attitude. Because, by committing yourself to somebody else, you open a field of experience." "The Hermeneutics of Revelation," in Kearney, *Debates in Continental Philosophy*, 29.

⁷⁰ See the discussion in "The Weight of Love," *Counter-Experiences*, 235-251, 237-39, and Jean-Luc Marion, "Christian Philosophy and Charity," *Communio* XVII (1992): 465-73, 469, 470. In the latter text, Marion notes: "... new phenomena appear among the things of this world to an eye that is initiated in charity." "... only

those who love see the phenomena of love. The result is that for many observers, perhaps even most, these phenomena remain invisible, or else are reduced to an arbitrary interpretation, one of several possible interpretations....”

⁷¹ “the revelation that Christ brings, that “God is love” (1 John 4:18) shows us not only what we can know [*ce que nous pouvons connaître*], but, moreover, how we can know [*comment nous pouvons connaître*]. Love constitutes the content as well as the advancement of faith....” Jean-Luc Marion, “Amour de Dieu, amour des hommes,” *Résurrection* 34 (1970): 89-96, 90.

⁷² Marion, “Evidence and Bedazzlement,” *Prolegomena to Charity*, 64.

⁷³ Marion, “Evidence and Bedazzlement,” *Prolegomena to Charity*, 64. Marion is insistent here, in accord with the tradition, that it is the will’s own act, even as it is enabled by grace (64-65). In the description of self-abandonment that follows, Marion uses familiar tropes of the gift and of distance, which open onto difficulties that must not delay us here. See *Rethinking God as Gift* and *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-Logical Introduction*.

⁷⁴ Marion argues: “the gifted has nothing passive about it since by its response (hermeneutic) to the call (intuitive), it, and it alone, allows what gives itself to become, partially but really, what shows itself.” “The Banality of Saturation,” *Counter-Experiences*, 409.

⁷⁵ *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) xix.

⁷⁶ The relationship between faith and love is obviously critical here, and no more so than in Marion’s understanding of what happens in the encounter with God.

⁷⁷ See the discussion in “The Weight of Love,” *Counter-Experiences*, 239, 240-42.

⁷⁸ This is highlighted at many points in the tradition, but see, for example, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, available at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.html> (accessed May 20 2008): “Two things are requisite for faith. First, that the things which are of faith should be proposed to man: this is necessary in order that man believe anything explicitly. The second thing requisite for faith is the assent of the believer to the things which are proposed to him. Accordingly, as regards the first of these, faith must needs be from God. Because those things which are of faith surpass human reason, hence they do not come to man’s knowledge, unless God reveal them.” ST 2a2ae. 6. 1. In faith the intellect is moved by the will (itself inspired by God) “to assent ... to that which is believed.” ST 2a2ae.1.4: “Now the act of faith is to believe ... which is an act of the intellect determinate to one object of the will’s command.” ST 2a2ae.4.1. Those things that are believed are not seen by the intellect (in the sense of demonstrated to it) but are known “by the light of faith which makes [the faithful] see that they ought to believe them....” ST 2a2ae.1.5. “But in the knowledge that is of faith, though there is high perfection on the part of the object so apprehended, there is great imperfection on the side of intellect, for intellect does not understand that to which it assents in believing. / 2. ... in the knowledge of faith the will has a leading part: for the understanding assents by faith to the things proposed to it, because it wills to do so, without being necessarily drawn by the direct evidence of truth. / 3. He who believes, yields assent to things proposed to him by another, which himself he does not see: hence the knowledge of faith is more like hearing

than seeing.” Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3.40, available at: <http://www2.nd.edu/Departments/Maritain/etext/gc.htm> (accessed May 20 2008).

⁷⁹ This entry into the abyss that is faith is reminiscent in some ways of Heideggerian being-towards-death.

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