Jean-Luc Marion proposes revelation as a paradigm of his notion of “saturated phenomena.” According to Marion, one of the key characteristics of saturated phenomena is that they impose themselves on us, crashing into a receiver who acts as a screen for their appearance.\(^1\) Marion’s description of revelation imposing itself on a passive subject leads him to misrepresent the New Testament account of revelation, particularly with respect to the role of faith. He does not even mention faith in his main works. Marion’s recent account of the journey to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35) is therefore particularly significant, because it is his only text to address faith’s role in revelation (‘‘They Recognised Him; and He Became Invisible to Them’’, Modern Theology, vol. 18, April 2002).\(^2\)

In ‘‘They Recognised Him; and He Became Invisible to Them,’’ Marion examines the relation between faith and revelation in the gospel account of the journey to Emmaus. He argues that faith is not a compensation for a lack of evidence or intuition, but rather a compensation for a lack of concepts with which to understand the

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overwhelming intuition given by revelation. In other words, faith provides a conceptual interpretation of revelation – after it has occurred.

I contest Marion’s analysis of the journey to Emmaus, and argue that what he describes in this essay is only a derivative sense of faith. Marion understands faith as giving a conceptual interpretation of revelation. However, he overlooks the primary sense of faith, where it 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.

In this response to “‘They Recognised Him; and He Became Invisible to Them,’” I first summarise what Marion means by “saturated phenomena,” and indicate the broader significance of what he says about revelation for his understanding of phenomena in general. I then outline his account of the journey to Emmaus, and identify the difficulties in the conclusions that he draws about the relationship between faith and revelation. Finally, I set out the hermeneutic role of faith that Marion overlooks.

1 The Significance of Revelation in Marion’s Phenomenology

In Being Given (BG), Marion uses key concepts from Husserl as the starting point for setting out his phenomenology. According to Husserl, a phenomenon is constituted as an object when intuition (or sensation) supplies the content for a concept provided by an intending subject. A particular intuition can be more or less adequate to a concept, depending on the degree to which it fills it. Marion goes beyond Husserl by introducing the idea of a saturated phenomenon (which he calls the “paradigm” or
“norm” of phenomenality \(\text{[BG} 227/316]\)\(^3\), in which intuition supplies more than is needed to fill a particular concept. Saturated phenomena have an excess of intuition, beyond what is needed for adequation, and beyond what our concepts can organise. Therefore, we cannot actively constitute these phenomena as objects defined by a determinate horizon, but instead we experience them by way of a “passive synthesis” which they impose on us (BG 226/315).

Marion distinguishes four ways in which phenomena can be saturated, namely the four divisions of Kant’s table of categories: quantity, quality, relation and modality. He then introduces a fifth type of saturated phenomenon that combines the other four in itself. This is the phenomenon of revelation, which “saturates phenomenality to the second degree, by saturation of saturation” (BG 235/327). Because of this double saturation, Marion sees revelation as “a phenomenon that gives (itself) according to a maximum of phenomenality” (BG 234/326), and that is therefore the paradigm of the paradigm. Finally, Marion proposes “the manifestation of Jesus Christ, as it is described in the New Testament,” as a privileged example and “paradigm of the phenomenon of revelation” (BG 236/329). What he says about Christ, then, is significant not only in itself, but also because of its consequences for his understanding of revelation, of saturated phenomena, and of phenomenality in general.

2 Marion’s Account of the Journey to Emmaus

Marion begins “‘They Recognised Him; and He Became Invisible to Them’” (TRH) by proposing what he believes to be the most common understanding of faith. According to this understanding, faith compensates for a deficit in intuition that prevents us from having adequate knowledge about God. Because we do not have a full

\(^3\) In references to a translated text, the English page reference is given first, followed immediately by the original page reference. An asterisk following a page reference indicates that the translation has been modified.
intuition of God’s presence, our concepts about God remain only partially filled, and require faith to make up for this: “I believe because, in spite of everything, I want to hold as true that which does not offer intuitive criteria sufficient to impose itself of itself [s’imposer de lui-même]” (TRH 145*/134). That is, faith extends our limited intuition so that it adequately fills our concepts.

Marion rejects the “inanity” of this understanding of faith, while accepting the idea that faith compensates for a lack (TRH 146/135). Whereas the first view identifies intuition as deficient, Marion proposes that the deficiency lies in our concepts. In Marion’s understanding, the revelation of God (and Christ) gives more intuition than we can grasp by means of our insufficient concepts; revelation is a phenomenon that is saturated with intuition, and that requires faith in order to compensate for the lack in our conceptual capacity. That is, faith extends our limited concepts so that they can adequately accommodate the excess of intuition we are given.

Marion then turns to the gospel episode itself. Three days after Jesus’ death, a group of women find his tomb empty, and are told by angels that he has risen. The apostles do not believe the women’s story, though Peter goes and confirms that the tomb is indeed empty. Later that day, two disciples travelling from Jerusalem to Emmaus are joined by Jesus, but do not recognise him. He asks them what they are discussing and, astonished at his ignorance, they tell him about their belief that Jesus was a prophet, their hope that he may have been Israel’s redeemer, their distress at his death, and their confusion after what the women have told them. Jesus rebukes them for being “foolish” and “slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared” (v. 25). He insists that the Messiah had to suffer (v. 26), and “interpret[s] to them

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Shane Mackinlay: EYES WIDE SHUT

[diérmenēusen autois] the things about himself in all the scriptures” (v. 27). At the end of the journey, the disciples press Jesus to stay with them and, “when he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised him; and he vanished from their sight” (vv. 30-31). The text ends with the two disciples hurrying back to Jerusalem, where the apostles confirm that Jesus has indeed risen.

Marion focuses on the obtuseness of the disciples – their incapacity to understand what has happened. In his view, their problem is not a lack of evidence: they know what has happened in Jerusalem; they were with Jesus during his ministry; they are familiar with the scriptures. They have, insists Marion, an abundance of intuition. However, they do not understand the intuition they have received. Their concepts are not sufficient to contain the intuition and grasp its meaning (TRH 146/136). Thus, they do not recognise Jesus when he comes beside them because they are unable to conceive of him being raised from the dead. He does not lack visibility; rather, they lack the capacity to understand what they see. Marion compares them to Peter, who is so overcome with the manifestation of Christ’s glory at the Transfiguration that, according to the account in Mark’s gospel, “he did not know what to say” (Mk 9:6). Marion concludes:

Standing before the Christ in glory, in agony, or resurrected, it is always words (and therefore concepts) that we lack in order to say what we see, in short to see that with which intuition floods our eyes [crève les yeux]. ... we do not offer concepts capable of handling a gift without measure and, overwhelmed, dazzled, and submerged by his glory, we no longer see anything. (TRH 148*/138)

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5 Marion quotes this phrase in a misleading and anachronistic translation: “He made the hermeneutic to them [ils leur fit l’herméneutique]” (TRH 149/139).

6 “They do not recognise him because they cannot even imagine that this is really him, Him.” (TRH 147/136)

7 “They see nothing – in the sense that one sees nothing in a game of chess if one does not know how to play; they hear nothing – in the sense that one hears nothing (except noise) in a conversation if one does not know the language in which it takes place.” (TRH 147*/137)
According to Marion, by interpreting the scriptures to the disciples on the road, Jesus provides them with new concepts that are adequate to the intuition they have received: “And then, when the concept at last matches the intuition, the phenomenon bursts forth with its superabundant glory” (TRH 149/139). This seeing of the phenomenon is reflected for Marion in the disciples’ later admission: “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” (v. 32). On arriving at Emmaus, the disciples ask Jesus to stay with them – a request which Marion connects to other gospel passages, and interprets as a crucial profession of faith. Finally, as Jesus breaks the bread, the disciples recognise him. In Marion’s reading, this action of Jesus should be understood conceptually: it gives the disciples “the signification that will at last give meaning to all the intuitions that up to then had remained scattered and absurd” (TRH 150*/140). According to Marion, the disciples recognise Jesus “because the signification was making [rendait] visible his phenomenon” (TRH 150*/141).

Marion ends by comparing an inability to believe with an inability to see when there is too much light: “Faith … allows one to receive understanding of the phenomenon and the strength to bear its bursting forth [éclat]. Faith does not deal with the deficit of evidence – it alone renders the look [regard] apt to see the excess of the saturated phenomenon par excellence: Revelation” (TRH 150*/141). By receiving Jesus’ “own significations and concepts,” the disciples are able “to constitute the intuition … into a complete phenomenon [phénomène plénier; fully a phenomenon]” (TRH 151/142). Because of their faith, their concepts are now adequate to the intuition that previously exceeded them; what was previously invisible because of its excess can

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8 “Indeed, the whole question of the coming of Christ and of faith in him comes down to this: ‘to have his logos abiding in us, or not’ (Jn 5:38). For the first time since ‘the events’, the disciples ask Christ, and thus in fact the Logos himself and in person, to stay with them and they with him – that is, they ask to receive his logos, his interpretation of what has come to pass in intuition and which they have nevertheless neither seen, nor caught, nor understood. They at last ask him his meaning, his concept, his interpretation.” (TRH 150*/140; Marion’s emphasis)
now be constituted and seen as what it is. However, as soon as they understand, Jesus disappears. Marion suggests two reasons for this: first, “because the issue now is not, or is not only, to see him, but to make him seen;” second, “because such a phenomenon, saturated par excellence, cannot be touched (Jn 20:17), nor even contemplated in this world” (TRH 151f*/142f; Marion’s emphasis).

3 Difficulties with Marion’s Account

The primary difficulty with Marion’s account of this gospel episode is his restriction of the disciples’ faith to their concepts and understanding of Jesus. Undoubtedly, the disciples’ concepts of Jesus (as prophet or redeemer of Israel) are inadequate, particularly because their understanding of him does not include suffering and death. However, the gospel text does not point to this as the fundamental problem. Contrary to the translation quoted by Marion, Jesus does not accuse them of being “slow to understand;” rather, he rebukes them for being “slow of heart to believe [bradeis tēi kardiai tou pisteuein]” (v. 25; emphasis added). Marion compares the disciples’ condition when Jesus first comes alongside them to the overwhelming experience of hearing or seeing “nothing” because one does not understand a foreign language or the rules of chess. However, there is no indication that the disciples are at all overwhelmed or dazzled by what they have seen and heard. On the contrary, they ‘see nothing’ in the very straightforward sense of believing that there is nothing more to

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9 “Why do they not understand? Because they do not recompose these significations starting from the Passion as revelation of the charity of God, and thus also from the Resurrection as the fulfilment of this very charity.” (TRH 148*/138)

10 This mistranslation is particularly surprising because Marion’s quotation includes the Greek original for an earlier word in this verse (TRH 146*/136). Furthermore, he quotes an accurate translation of the whole verse in God Without Being, p. 147/208 (Jean-Luc Marion, God Without Being: Hors-Texte, trans. Thomas A. Carlson, Religion and Postmodernism [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991]; translation of Dieu sans l’être: Hors-texte, Quadrige [Paris: PUF, 1982]).
be seen. They are completely unaware of their inadequacy, and believe that they have seen Jesus and his death all too clearly.\textsuperscript{11}

Marion is right to describe Jesus’ interpretation of the scriptures as giving the disciples new concepts. However, contrary to Marion’s suggestion, these concepts are not on their own sufficient for the disciples to grasp the excess of the phenomenon that is manifesting itself. While they are listening to Jesus on the road, the disciples may realise that they have not seen the whole phenomenon of his revelation, and their burning hearts may indicate that they are dazzled by his excess. However, there is no evidence that the new concepts Jesus gives them are adequate to make sense of this;\textsuperscript{12} they do not actually recognise him until much later, when he breaks the bread.

The disciples’ lack of faith is not simply a lack of concepts to understand the excess of Jesus’ revelation, but rather a lack of openness to his revelation as such, which prevents them from seeing it as either revelatory or excessive. When the disciples finally recognise Jesus, it is not because his action of breaking the bread gives them a signification, as Marion claims, or at least not because they receive a signification in the conceptual sense that Marion has been using. On the contrary, far from this revelation making Jesus conceptually clear to them, he now disappears entirely. The action of breaking the bread manifests the presence of the risen Jesus to them because of its connection with the Last Supper. There, Jesus’ actions of self-giving love (in washing the disciples’ feet and giving himself with the bread and wine) both anticipate his self-giving on the cross, and demand that his disciples give of themselves in the same way (Lk 22:19; Jn 13:14; 1 Cor 11:24-25). The disciples at Emmaus received the concept

\textsuperscript{11} Thus, Marion’s comparison between this scene and the Transfiguration is quite misplaced, because the disciples on Mount Tabor are clearly overawed by the dazzling phenomenon they witness, and very aware of their own inadequacy before it. In contrast, while the disciples on the road to Emmaus may well be frightened, disappointed and confused, there is no sense in which they are dazzled.

\textsuperscript{12} Marion may be aware of the weakness of his argument at this point, because he explicitly adds interpolations to the biblical text in order to make it consistent with his interpretation. In these additions, the disciples describe their minds burning within them as well as their hearts, and refer to Jesus as opening the concepts of the scriptures, rather than the scriptures per se (TRH 149/139, quoting v. 32).
that Jesus had to suffer while they listened to him on the road, but now they receive again the personal offer of love and preparedness to suffer that Jesus made at the Last Supper. It is possible for Jesus to be revealed to them now because they are open to the love he offers them, and to his demand that they too give themselves in love.\textsuperscript{13} Their faith is not constituted by a \textit{conceptual understanding} of Jesus’ claims, but rather by the \textit{acceptance} of those claims – both the ones that he makes about himself, and also the ones that he makes on them. By their acceptance of him in faith, a space is opened in which his revelation can be manifested to them, and so their eyes are opened to recognise him in his glory.

Marion’s insistence on the conceptual nature of the disciples’ faith is particularly surprising because it leads him to a conclusion that is contrary not only to the gospel account, but also to his own descriptions of saturated phenomena. He claims that the disciples finally recognise Jesus because they have received his own concepts and significations, which enable them to “constitute” their intuition as a “complete phenomenon \textit{[phénomène plénier]}” (TRH 151/142). In Marion’s description, since their inadequate concepts have been replaced, they now have “the strength to bear the bursting forth” of his revelation, which had previously blinded them by its excessive brilliance (TRH 150*/141). That is, the phenomenon that was initially excessive and saturated is now seen as an ordinary constituted object – as something that is in fact \textit{no longer} excessive or saturated. However, the dynamic of the Emmaus story is quite the reverse of this; it moves from a clearly grasped object to an excessive phenomenon, which is so ungraspable that it disappears from sight. At the beginning, the disciples see clearly, and experience their concepts of prophet and redeemer as fully adequate for constituting their intuition of Jesus as a complete phenomenon. Only when they begin

\textsuperscript{13} Eugene LaVerdiere arrives at a similar conclusion in his commentary on Luke; “In sharing Jesus’ meal, the two disciples accept the attitude which was his as he entered into the passion.” (Eugene LaVerdiere, \textit{Luke}, New Testament Message, no. 5 [Dublin: Veritas, 1980], p. 287)
to appreciate that their concepts are inadequate, and that there is an excess beyond what they have been seeing, do they become dazzled and blinded by the brilliance of Jesus’ revelation. It is only at this point that they see the excess as excessive, dazzling, and blinding – Jesus is revealed to them in his excessive manifestation as the risen one, and therefore disappears from ordinary visibility. Contrary to Marion’s account, the journey to Emmaus is not a story of the previously invisible and dazzling becoming visible. Rather, it is a story of that which was visible only because it was misunderstood being revealed in its dazzling and saturated excess, which is beyond the disciples’ capacity to grasp as a visible, constituted phenomenon.

4 Faith, Beliefs and Concepts

I agree with Marion that a faith commitment to an ultimate or transcendent reality has a conceptual component, or cognitional content, which is expressed in beliefs. However, this conceptual dimension is 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. In this respect, Marion’s understanding of faith has the same deficiency as his understanding of hermeneutics. Heidegger established an ontological (or existential) sense of hermeneutics, referring to the network of relations

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14 At least in the Christian tradition, faith is both the response of the believer and the result of God’s initiative. Therefore, it can never be understood in isolation from revelation. Thus, in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992), the first two headings in the section on “The Characteristics of Faith” are “Faith is a grace” (§153) and “Faith is a human act” (§§154-55). Roger Haight elaborates this interrelation between faith and revelation at the beginning of his recent christological study:

Although formally distinct, authentic religious faith and revelation are two aspects of the complex phenomenon of religious experience. Revelation is faith being met by, or even stimulated and initiated by, the ultimate. Revelation is the encounter in faith with the transcendent. In Christian terms, revelation is the presence of God encountered in faith, always in such a way that God takes the initiative in freedom: revelation is God’s self-presence, self-communication, and self-gift. (Roger Haight, *Jesus, Symbol of God* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999], pp. 5-6)

15 Heidegger contends that human existence is hermeneutic in its very happening, and not just in the epistemic acts of interpretation with which we recount it. This “primary sense” of hermeneutics as
and significations that makes it possible for phenomena to appear to Dasein as part of a meaning-filled world. In Heidegger’s understanding, hermeneutics is intrinsic to the actual appearing of phenomena. In contrast to this, Marion confines hermeneutics to a marginal and derivative sense of ‘subsequent interpretation’ – after phenomena have already appeared. In exactly the same way as he restricts hermeneutics to conceptual interpretation, Marion restricts faith to concepts and understandings after revelation has already happened, and excludes any sense of faith as an ontological or existential comportment that defines a relationship of openness, acceptance and trust before God, which is the condition for revelation to happen in the first place. 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 meaningful relationships and significations in which a person situates himself or herself. It is because they lack this existential faith that the disciples on their way to Emmaus are unable to accept

the “interpretation of Dasein’s Being [Auslegung des Seins des Daseins]” (Being and Time, §7, p. 62/38; Heidegger’s emphasis) can be seen in Heidegger’s analysis of the “as-structure” of understanding and interpretation (Being and Time, §§32-33). An assertion that interprets an entity by describing it as something does not add signification to the entity, but rather discloses that entity as already embedded in a network of relations and significations.

Thus, in this essay, Marion speaks of the concepts that Jesus gives the disciples to interpret his revelation as “a hermeneutic” (TRH 148/138, 149/139). Similarly, in Being Given, Marion’s “hermeneutic without an end in time” is a future series of epistemic acts that interpret an event subsequent to its happening (BG 229/319; cf., In Excess, p. 33/39 [Jean-Luc Marion, In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud, Perspectives in Continental Philosophy, no. 27 (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002); translation of De surcroît: Études sur les phénomènes saturés, Perspective critiques (Paris: PUF, 2001)]).

The idea of faith as primarily existential is central to John Macquarrie’s theology, which is strongly influenced by Heidegger: “Faith is not a mere belief, but an existential attitude. We have already seen that this attitude includes acceptance and commitment, … Such faith obviously implies a belief, but this belief is clearly no speculative or academic world view but a belief arising out of an existential attitude, a self-understanding that is born in acceptance and commitment” (John Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology, The Library of Philosophy and Theology [London: SCM, 1966], p. 70). Interestingly, the understanding of faith evident in one of Marion’s earlier essays (written in 1978) is much closer to Macquarrie’s view; Marion insists that only one who loves and believes can receive the dazzling revelation of Jesus Christ without being blinded by it. (Jean-Luc Marion, ‘Evidence and Bedazzlement’, in Prolegomena to Charity, trans. Stephen E. Lewis, Perspectives in Continental Philosophy, no. 24 [New York: Fordham University Press, 2002], pp. 66-67; translation of ‘L’évidence et l’éblouissement’, in Prolégomenes à la charité [Paris: La Différence, 1986], pp. 84-86)

This complex of relationships is never private, but belongs at least in part to a community. The disciples’ response to recognising Jesus is consistent with seeing themselves as sharing in the faith of a community. They immediately return to Jerusalem, where their personal experience is verified by the apostles: “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” (v. 34).
Jesus’ resurrection, and unable to recognise him. They are finally opened to accepting him (and his claims) when he repeats the actions of the Last Supper. Their new openness provides a hermeneutic space in which Jesus’ revelation can be manifested to them – a revelation so dazzling that he disappears from ordinary visibility.

5 Conclusion

The account of faith Marion develops in his essay on the journey to Emmaus is strongly shaped by his contention that revelation is a saturated phenomenon (which exceeds our capacity to understand), rather than an impoverished phenomenon (which fails to provide sufficient evidence for itself). However, because he only draws on the derivative sense of faith as a conceptual understanding, Marion is forced to describe the disciples as fully grasping Jesus’ revelation in the breaking of the bread – that is, he is forced to describe Jesus’ revelation as precisely not being saturated. Ironically, the discrepancy between Marion’s account and the gospel text arises because the gospel text supports his initial contention – that revelation is saturated rather than conceptually graspable. The price for gaining this support is an interpretation in which faith is conceived of in the primary, existential sense that I have proposed.

The relation between faith and revelation that I have outlined here can also be seen in other gospel texts, and even in Marion’s own account of apophatic (negative/mystical) theology. Contrary to his claims, revelation is not simply imposed on a passive recipient, who then interprets it by means of particular concepts or beliefs.

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19 See especially Being Given, §24.2, and In Excess, chap. 5, §4 and chap. 6. In the fifth study of In Excess, Marion describes faith or confidence as a form of envisaging which allows the face of the other to manifest itself in its counter-intentionality. The face of the other appears as saturated, excessive and undetermined only if it is approached with this confidence, rather than aimed at as an object with a determinate significature (In Excess, pp. 121-22/145-47). That is, faith/confidence/envisaging opens a space in which the other can appear in their excessive and saturated alterity. In the final study of In Excess, Marion emphasises that apophatic theology is pragmatic rather than conceptual. Its non-significative denomination is a way of envisaging God without aiming at a determinate signification. As such, it requires “exposing oneself” with openness to an excessive and indeterminable revelation of God as God (In Excess, p. 148/178). Though Marion does not mention faith in this study, what he describes is a personal, pragmatic and existential commitment that is clearly recognisable as faith.
Instead, revelation is only manifested as revelation in the hermeneutic space that is opened by faith, understood as an existential commitment that already accepts the claims of revelation. Due to the paradigmatic role Marion assigns to revelation in his phenomenology, this hermeneutic role of the recipient should also be emphasised when considering his accounts of the appearing of other saturated phenomena, and of phenomena in general.