

Worshipping the God Who Sees

Revelatory Phenomena and Christian Liturgy

by Jesse Hill

In this paper, I argue that liturgy prepares worshippers for the possibility of revelation. Liturgical theology presumes that liturgy is oriented in some way to God's self-revelation, while Marion's phenomenology suggests that revelation is something that – if it should occur – forces itself upon a givee who is passive and incapable of adequately receiving such a revelation. Marion's construal of the givee about revelatory phenomena can open up new insights into the ways that liturgy is experienced by worshippers. Conversely, an application of liturgical experience to Marion's phenomenology suggests that Marion's construal of the givee may not give enough credit to the desire of the givee to put oneself into a position where revelation might occur. Liturgy thus suggests that the experience of the worshipper may be paradigmatic in some ways for the role of the givee concerning revelation.

1. Introduction

This paper is an attempt to engage phenomenologically with liturgical theology. My central argument is that Christian liturgy both depends upon and anticipates the possibility of revelation, and that a phenomenological approach can give insight into the ways that a given liturgical tradition provides a means for worshippers to encounter revelation, or at least its possibility. Making this argument will require three points of engagement: with phenomenology, with liturgical theology, and with *in situ* examples of liturgy.

Because there is no “view from nowhere,” it will be helpful to describe the particular vantage point from which I am writing about these issues.¹ My research here and elsewhere is in the field of liturgical theology, which is to say that I am interested in the kind of theology that emerges out of the ways that people worship together.² While there is a broad, ecumenical dimension to the liturgical theological endeavor, I am particularly interested in what are often called ‘low church’ liturgies, meaning the kind of informal worship that occurs in many Baptist, Pentecostal, or Free Church traditions (as well as many others).³

¹ *Joseph Rivera*, *Phenomenology and the Horizon of Experience: Spiritual Themes in Henry, Marion, and Lacoste* (Routledge New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies), New York 2022, 6.

² Defining liturgical theology is challenging and at times contentious; see *Joris Geldhof*, *Liturgical Theology as a Research Program*, Leiden 2020, 1.

³ There have been various attempts to describe a loosely held tradition of Christians who gather to worship in ways that are presented as relatively informal (in contrast to the kind of ‘high’ liturgies found in, for example, many Catholic or Orthodox churches). Some descriptors include, “frontier tradition” (*James F. White*, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition*, Louisville 1989, 171), “evangelical worship” (*Melanie C. Ross*, *Evangelical Versus Liturgical? Defying a Dichotomy*, Grand Rapids 2014, 4), or “Protestant revival/seeker service” and “Pente-

These liturgies tend to be conveyed as a collection of informal, communally-held practices and norms more than they are codified in texts and rubrics – even if a given congregation or tradition may not use the word ‘liturgy,’ they still have a particular way of gathering for worship.

This paper begins with the assumption (born out of my own experience and practice of pastoral ministry) that for many worshippers, the experience of gathering for worship on Sunday morning carries a profound theological weight.⁴ For many worshippers in low-church traditions, particularly those that lean toward the Charismatic or Pentecostal tradition, there is a sense that Sunday morning is an opportunity for a revelatory encounter with God. Whether anthropological or theological, scholarship must take seriously that many worshippers have had or hope to have spiritual experiences within the setting of the worship gathering, and these experiences are often seen as revelatory encounters. A worshipper might have an experience of belovedness, a sense of calling, a conviction of sin, an experience of awe and grandeur, and so on. These experiences, if and when they might occur, are phenomenological before they are theological – that is to say, it is only after the phenomenon itself has appeared that a person might subsequently interpret an experience as having been a revelatory encounter with God, with the truth, and so on. This means that phenomenology is a discipline, and perhaps *the* discipline that will allow for a pre-theological consideration of the experiences of worshippers, particularly in experience-oriented low-church traditions.⁵ As Marion writes, “The very concept of Revelation belongs by right to phenomenality.”⁶ The development of a constructive theology out of liturgical experience in this sense demands a consideration of the phenomenality of liturgy, and particularly of how a worshipper might receive (or fail to receive) a revelatory phenomenon.

2. Marion’s Givee

Revelation is only such if it is a revelation *to* someone. Marion’s phenomenology of givenness can help us to think of how a revelatory phenomenon (or any phenomenon) will

costal/praise and worship” (*Frank C. Senn*, *Embodied Liturgy: Lessons in Christian Ritual*, Minneapolis 2016, 354). ‘Low church’ seems at least no worse than any of the above, and effectively communicates something of the informality that characterizes what is otherwise a diverse collection of worship traditions.

⁴ This is a baseline assumption for liturgical theology in general, following Kavanagh’s assertion that liturgy is *theologia prima* and other theological disciplines (e.g., systematic theology) are *theologia secunda* in that they serve to interpret or develop the theology that first emerges out of the practice of liturgy. Cf. *Aidan Kavanagh*, *On Liturgical Theology*, Collegeville, MN 1992, 75.

⁵ Ross suggests that low church traditions require that the researcher adopt a first-person, “pedestrian” point of view; cf. *Ross*, *Evangelical Versus Liturgical* (see fn. 3), 135. But any liturgical theology demands personal experience: Schmemmann writes that liturgy can only be apprehended through “experience and prayer” (*Alexander Schmemmann*, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, translated by Asheleigh E. Moorehouse, London 1966, 19). Similarly, Fagerberg writes that the mystery of worship “is not a piece of information to be considered like a fact. [...] [I]t cannot be known in the abstract, by academic theology: it must be known by experience, by liturgical theology (*theologia prima*)” (*David W. Fagerberg*, *Consecrating the World. On Mundane Liturgical Theology*, Kettering 2016, 71).

⁶ *Jean-Luc Marion*, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, translated by Jeffrey L. Kosky, Stanford, CA 2012, 5.

be experienced by the person who encounters the revelation. Marion's reduction to givenness redefines the phenomenon "no longer as object or being, but as given."⁷ This way of returning to the things themselves consists in letting the phenomenon manifest itself, by giving itself in its own manner of givenness prior to any attempt by an *ego* to constitute the phenomenon as an object.⁸ Consequently, Marion suggests that "the staging of the phenomenon is played out as the handing over of a gift," meaning that how a phenomenon appears is analogous to the way that a person might give someone else a birthday present.⁹ The phenomenon is the gift itself, and phenomenality is in the manner in which the gift is given. It should be mentioned here that although 'gift' has a positive connotation in English, this is not necessarily the case when it comes to the phenomenological 'gift'; we might think of birthday or Christmas presents, or of *charisms* or talents, but in the framework of givenness, the gift can be anything.¹⁰ In Marion's phenomenology, the gift is simply the phenomenon itself, which might be positive, negative, mundane, or otherworldly: Death is given, light is given, the color blue is given, and so on. Marion summarizes: "No being, no actuality, no appearance, no concept, and no sensation could reach us, or even concern us, if it did not first give [itself] to us."¹¹

If we accept that phenomenality can be compared to the handing over of a gift, then a new question arises: Who or what gives, and who or what receives the gift? Marion describes the phenomenological exchange in terms of three parties: the gift, the giver, and the givee.¹² I want to focus on the part played by the givee, which we might think of here as being the person who witnesses – or fails to witness – the revelatory phenomenon. It matters that we are using the term *givee* instead of the more natural word, *recipient*.¹³ The givee is the one to whom the gift is given, and thus it is possible that the givee might receive the gift just as a person might receive a birthday present – that is, that the givee might be thought of as a *recipient*. But it is also possible that the givee might somehow fail to receive the gift – either by deliberately rejecting it, or by receiving it inadequately, or perhaps even

⁷ Marion, *Being Given* (see fn. 6), 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁰ It might be tempting here to look for a term other than gift in order to avoid the connotative difficulty inherent to the term, but it must be noted that Marion objects to the efforts of some English translators to define new terms, contending that it is essential that the duality of meaning is essential to "the whole Husserlian project"; cf. *ibid.*, 66 f.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 54. The brackets around "itself" are original.

¹² *Ibid.*, 75.

¹³ The difficulty surrounding the English givenness, French donation, and German Gegebenheit is already acknowledged by Marion in *ibid.*, 61 f. This same difficulty extends to the idea of the English gifted, the French l'adonné (see Horner's translator's introduction to *id.*, In *Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, translated by Robyn Horner and Vincent Berrand (Perspectives in Continental Philosophy), New York 2002, xv. See also *Shane Mackinlay*, *Interpreting Excess: Jean-Luc Marion, Saturated Phenomena, and Hermeneutics*, New York 2010, 240, fn. 27). I am using Kosky's translation of donataire as "givee" because it seems to preserve the technical way in which Marion uses the term, while also fitting in with other English language writings on Marion's ideas of gift, givenness, etc.

failing to notice the gift whatsoever. Already we notice that the givee may take an active or passive role, and in either case might fail to adequately receive the gift.¹⁴

At this point, a problem becomes apparent, which is that the givee might receive a phenomenon, or might fail to receive it. If the gift can remain unknown by the givee, then we must concede that the givee is not at all a reliable witness. For this reason, Marion introduces a “triple *epochē*,” in which the givee, the giver, and the given object must be bracketed in order to allow pure givenness to appear.¹⁵ But without any of these three things, how can givenness ever appear? That is to say, who will witness the phenomenon as it is given if the givee is bracketed from the exchange? Marion writes that it is necessary for either the givee or the giver to make an exception to the reduction, to remain as a “consciousness” that is able to observe the phenomenon.¹⁶ This means that the reduction to givenness is not a single act, but an ongoing act that moves back and forth between the bracketing of the giver and givee in a constant state of motion. Phenomenology, in Marion’s view, is an ongoing and dynamic practice of always reducing in search of the phenomenon, not a single, fixed vantage point or perspective on the world. This is particularly relevant when it comes to the possibility of revelatory phenomena. If something is going to be revealed, it must be revealed *to* someone, but this someone will inevitably play the part of the givee in a faltering, inadequate manner. As observers, we are often (though not always) in the role of the givee that receives the phenomenon, and so we (possibly in error) take exception to the bracketing of our own privileged position as the transcendent consciousness that receives (or fails to receive) what appears as given.¹⁷

As above, the givee may take an active or passive role in the phenomenological exchange and may in either case fail. Marion writes that the givee might function within this exchange in ways that are inadequate to givenness: The givee might encounter what is given *anonymously* (one who is indifferent to what is given), as an *enemy* (one who rejects, opposes, or declines what is given), or as an *ingrate* (one who is somehow unable to accept what is given).¹⁸ In short, if what is given is somehow too great, too strange, or too subtle for the givee, the givee will fail to receive what is given. The givee cannot be relied upon, particularly when it comes to phenomena that are in some way unusual or that somehow exceed the receptive capacity of the givee.

¹⁴ Marion is quite interested in playing with active and passive roles, often inverting what Husserlian phenomenology has viewed as active, and casting it as strictly passive instead, i. e. the subject who once constituted an object is acted upon, in Marion’s framework, by a phenomenon that reconstitutes the subject as object. There has been reasonable criticism of Marion on this point (e.g. see Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess* [see fn. 13], 12), but the duality of the active/passive in the face of revelation opens up a kind of dialectic back and forth that can be productive for thinking not only of phenomenology, but also of how theology develops out of experience by people who are acted upon even as they also act themselves. This is exemplified by a phenomenological view of liturgical experience, which leads Gschwandtner to write, “Liturgy operates in the constant, dynamic tension between both mimetic and transformative dimensions” (*Christina M. Gschwandtner, Welcoming Finitude: Toward a Phenomenology of Orthodox Liturgy*, New York 2019, 199).

¹⁵ *Marion*, *Being Given* (see fn. 6), 84. This is the spelling used throughout *Being Given*, though other authors and translators often render the word as *epochē*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁷ We might at other times be in the position of the giver, particularly when it comes to our relationships with others; cf. *ibid.*, 94.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 88–90.

3. Revelation

This failure to receive is particularly relevant when it comes to the possibility of revelation. Marion describes revelation as being what happens when “an authority that is transcendent to experience nevertheless manifests itself experientially.”¹⁹ The givee cannot sufficiently apprehend what is transcendent to experience, but also cannot bracket him or herself from the phenomenological exchange (that is, from the experience), and so is left with no choice but to try to grasp falteringly at the experience itself. This means that the givee will inevitably apprehend revelation inadequately, in direct proportion to the degree to which the phenomenon itself lies outside of or saturates the intuitive capacity of the givee. “Phenomenality is indexed according to intuition,” but the intuition cannot sufficiently apprehend a phenomenon that is in some way excessive or unexpected.²⁰ It is possible in some cases for the intuition to constitute abstract or unusual phenomena as the “immanent presence of an object of insight (such as a mathematical truth),” but only to the degree to which the intuition coincides with intentionality.²¹

Of course, there are limitations to this. The first is that intuition may not coincide with intentionality at all. In the case of saturated phenomena, intuition precedes intentionality altogether – the object leads the subject. Saturated phenomena are most often recognized not as they are, but by the emotive reaction of the givee to the excess of intuition as the intuition races ahead of intentionality. An exemplar response to such a saturated phenomenon is the emotion of amazement, which Marion describes as a “passion that strikes us before we even know the thing, or rather, precisely because we know it only partially.”²² Further still, intuition may fail to coincide with intention when the intuition is simply overwhelmed or saturated by a phenomenon that is in some way excessive. If one considers the possibility of revelatory phenomena, especially phenomena relating to divine revelation, one must face the problem of how a finite intuition might encounter the infinite, a task that demands what Marion calls a “nonfinite intuition.”²³ This leads back to the earlier descriptors of the givee as *anonymous*, *enemy*, or *ingrate*: The givee lacks the kind of receptive capacity that would allow for the apprehension of what is transcendent to experience, and so ought to be bracketed from the exchange.

As above, however, the givee often cannot be bracketed from the exchange. People often have experiences of things they cannot explain and cannot remove themselves from their accounts of these experiences. The history of religion, of Christianity, and of Christian liturgy is a history of attempts to apprehend revelation. These attempts are faltering and incomplete – “We know in part and we prophecy in part.” (1 Cor 13:9, NIV). And yet, the givee cannot retreat from the possibility that what is transcendent to experience might be revealed experientially. The givee enters into the experience, perhaps with some degree of naivety or inadequacy, and yet is nevertheless there to bear some kind of witness to the

¹⁹ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed*, translated by Christina M. Gschwandtner (Perspectives in Continental Philosophy), New York 2008, 2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

²¹ Robyn Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theological Introduction*, New York 2016, 28.

²² Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed* (see fn. 19), 35.

²³ *Ibid.*, 30 f.

experience itself. I want to suggest at this point that Marion's descriptors of the givee as anonymous, enemy, or ingrate may fail to describe something important about the role of the givee in relation to the possibility of revelatory phenomena, particularly those phenomena that might be encountered in overtly religious settings.

4. The ἰδιώτης

In addition to Marion's descriptors of the givee as anonymous, enemy, or ingrate, I want to introduce a new (or very old) descriptor: I want to think of the givee as ἰδιώτης. While we might think at first of negative connotations of the crass modern English cognate, *idiot*, the first-century Greek word ἰδιώτης was used in a much more neutral way. Ἰδιώτης is used in the New Testament to describe a person who is inexperienced, a newcomer, or an outsider. The word was used in the first century to describe a lay person in contrast to an expert practitioner in some particular discipline.²⁴ One might find an ἰδιώτης listening in on a philosophical debate, or watching a surgeon at work, or sitting in the back row of a religious gathering. In each setting, the ἰδιώτης lacks the kind of knowledge or experience that would allow an expert to engage fully with the subject at hand. The ἰδιώτης is a person who lacks some kind of crucial preparation: The ἰδιώτης is uneducated as a philosopher, untrained as a surgeon, or uninitiated in the religious order. The crucial thing about this is that not only is the ἰδιώτης limited in significant ways, but also that the ἰδιώτης may be aware of these limitations. For example, the ἰδιώτης observing a surgeon at work is unlikely to assume that he or she has the necessary skills to perform a surgery; to the contrary, the act of observation is predicated on limitation and is itself an attempt to gain insight or experience that the ἰδιώτης does not yet have. Similarly, the ἰδιώτης in the religious gathering may observe for the sake of learning the rites and customs of the religious order, as in the example of a catechumen who is preparing for baptism by learning the creeds.

I am using the term ἰδιώτης here to describe the person who is in some sense 'uninitiated' or unprepared with regard to revelatory phenomena. Similar to Marion's idea that the givee might function as anonymous, as enemy, or as ingrate, the ἰδιώτης is unable to fully receive the phenomenon as it is given. But, in the case of the ἰδιώτης, this inability is not due to a lack of will. The ἰδιώτης may desire to encounter the revelatory phenomenon fully, and yet lack the kind of knowledge, experience, or skill that would allow them to adequately receive what is given. So, the ἰδιώτης observes and participates despite perhaps having some awareness that he or she will be unable to fully apprehend whatever might be revealed. People often find themselves longing for something to be revealed, even as they do not know what exactly will be revealed or whether they will be able sufficiently to receive a revelation. Religious and non-religious examples of this abound: We think of the explorer who sets out into unknown territory, uncertain of what will be found. Or the astronomer who aims a telescope at a dark corner of the sky, wondering if something might be found there. Even the act of writing can be an exploratory act in which the writer may be searching for

²⁴ Walter Bauer et al., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Chicago 2000, s.v. ἰδιώτης, 468.

thoughts and ideas without knowing where these ideas will lead or whether the writer is up to the task of articulating them. These are acts that are done in the hope for some kind of revelation, but with the awareness that one does not know what might be revealed, and thus that one cannot be certain of the ability to apprehend whatever kind of revelation might occur. In a religious setting, a person may hope to have a spiritual experience, even as they are uncertain as to what effect a real spiritual experience might have on them; we might think here of Moses asking to see God's glory, before learning that no one can see God and live (Ex 33:18–19).²⁵ Moses longs for a revelation, without knowing what will be revealed or what the consequences of that revelation might be.

These are all examples of what I am calling the *ιδιώτης* in relation to revelatory phenomena. A person might seek the possibility of revelation and yet will be unable to plan for what might be revealed or how this revelation might affect the *ιδιώτης*. This is because the very nature of revelation is such that no one knows it or controls it. What is revealed is something that is previously unknown and thus cannot be accounted for or planned for in any way. But it can still be sought after as an abstract possibility. The *ιδιώτης* may set out in search of understanding, beauty, hope, transcendence, etc., without knowing exactly what such a search might lead to, and in this sense of searching or longing, the *ιδιώτης* is subtly different (though no less finite) than Marion's anonymous, enemy, or ingrate.

5. The *Ιδιώτης* in Liturgical Theology

I want to suggest here that Christian liturgy is conscious of the plight of the *ιδιώτης*, and moreover that liturgy accommodates the givee as *ιδιώτης* more than it does as anonymous, enemy, or ingrate. Liturgy is theanthropic, meaning it has both a theological and an anthropological dimension. Theologically, liturgy presumes upon God's past, present, and future self-revelation and presents itself as an experiential engagement with this revelation by means of prayer, scripture, the Eucharist, baptism, and so on. Anthropologically, liturgy is a means by which ordinary, finite people can more meaningfully enter into this experience. Liturgy accommodates the limitations of the *ιδιώτης*. It initiates the uninitiated in providing words and gestures by which the *ιδιώτης* might participate in what is otherwise out of reach.²⁶ Liturgy is experiential, revelatory, and phenomenological in nature, and in its anthropological dimension, it is concerned with how the ordinary worshipper will be able to enter into this experience of revelation meaningfully. Marion's above definition of revelation as being what happens when what is "transcendent to experience nevertheless manifests itself experientially," can be read as an apt description of what liturgy claims to do. As Fagerberg puts it, "Liturgy is the perichoresis of the Trinity kenotically extended to

²⁵ Marion alludes to this passage, writing, "He whom no one can see without dying blinds first by his holiness, even if his coming is announced by a simple gust of wind" (*Marion, The Visible and the Revealed* [see fn. 19], 36).

²⁶ Gschwandtner writes: "The postures, gestures, and affects of liturgy open us out beyond ourselves; they invite us to exposure and disclosure of ourselves" (*Gschwandtner, Welcoming Finitude* [see fn. 14], 195). Similarly, Lacoste argues that we learn something about who and where we are by "paying close attention to the gestures of liturgy" (*Jean-Yves Lacoste, Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man*, Translated by Mark Raftery-Skehan [Perspectives in Continental Philosophy 40], New York 2004, 21).

invite our synergistic ascent into deification.”²⁷ That is to say, we are invited to participate experientially (by our synergistic ascent made manifest in various liturgical acts) in what is otherwise transcendent to experience (that is, the perichoretic community of the Trinity.) Liturgy is in this way characterized by liminality, or a kind of porousness between God and humanity.²⁸ This liminality means that there must be some way for an ordinary human being to somehow speak to and hear from the one “whom no one can see without dying,” as Marion puts it.²⁹ By definition, revelation is uncontrollable and unknowable prior to the act of revelation itself, and this remains true in liturgy, as well.³⁰ The givee is ill-equipped to deal with the limitlessness of what could possibly be revealed, let alone with the sheer possibility of revelation itself. But liturgy is in many ways a concession to the finitude of the givee who seeks revelation prior to the revelatory encounter itself, a point that becomes evident in a phenomenological consideration of ancient and modern liturgies.³¹

6. The Ἰδιώτης in 1 Corinthians 14

The above has been necessarily abstract, but the function of the givee as ἰδιώτης becomes quite clear when it is applied to practical examples. One of the earliest texts of liturgical theology is Paul’s description of the symposium-cum-worship service in 1 Corinthians 14. This text helps to advance my argument in two ways. First, it demonstrates how the ἰδιώτης might encounter and recognize a revelatory phenomenon, and second, it demonstrates something about the way that liturgy caters to our limitations.

Throughout 1 Corinthians, Paul describes several saturated phenomena that seem to occur regularly in the Corinthian worship service. These are phenomena that are in some way ‘seen,’ but only in a way that is unbearable to the gaze of the observer.³² Paul describes phenomena of what Marion terms *flesh*, including eating and drinking, hunger, drunkenness, and sickness (1 Cor 11:20–30).³³ There are also complex phenomena involving intersubjectivity, most notably in the famous love discourse of 1 Corinthians 13 that concludes with the idea of knowing in part while holding onto the hope of being fully known (1 Cor 13:12).³⁴ This evokes the idea of what Marion describes as the saturated phenomenon of

²⁷ Fagerberg, *Consecrating the World* (see fn. 5), 6.

²⁸ Hughes writes that the liturgical experience of the alterity of God is radically different from other types of “boundary” or “edge” experiences in the Western world, in that when we worship God, we are saying “yes” to the call of the completely Other; cf. *Graham Hughes, Worship as Meaning: A Liturgical Theology for Late Modernity*, Cambridge 2003, 284.

²⁹ *Marion, The Visible and the Revealed* (see fn. 19), 36.

³⁰ “The liturgical assembly’s stance in faith is vertiginous, on the edge of chaos. Only grace and favor allow it to stand there” (*Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology* [see fn. 4], 75).

³¹ Gschwandtner argues that Orthodox liturgy (and not only Orthodox) “enables us to grapple honestly with our finitude” (*Gschwandtner, Welcoming Finitude* [see fn. 14], 198).

³² *Marion, Being Given* (see fn. 6), 203.

³³ *Ibid.*, 231.

³⁴ There is a potential ambiguity here: Is Paul writing about loving and being known by God or by others? Horner writes that there has been criticism of Marion relating to the difficulty of distinguishing between an experience of God and an experience of another person, but concludes that, “Theologically, this must remain so,” as the

the *icon*, wherein I gaze into the face of the other only to find that another gaze looks into me, and that the object of my gaze is itself a subject engaged in constituting me as an object.³⁵ And then there is the phenomenon of speaking in tongues (1 Cor 14:2) in which a person speaks or prays in a language that is not understood by others; this is a phenomenon of the type Marion terms the *idol*, in that it is like a painting that is highly visible (or in this case, highly audible) and yet remains imperceptible – in the painting as in tongues, “intuition is lacking the concept.”³⁶

Each of these phenomena, as they are found in the Corinthian house church liturgy, can be accurately described as saturated. They are in some way excessive to the intuition, whether in quantity, quality, relation, or modality.³⁷ But are these phenomena revelatory? More pointedly, can any of these phenomena open onto the possibility of divine revelation? I contend that none of the above phenomena functions as a clear phenomenon of divine revelation, though any of these could be interpreted as divine revelation under certain hermeneutic approaches. Even the phenomenon of the Eucharist is difficult to categorize as a phenomenon of revelation. Paul himself writes of the need to “discern the body of Christ” in the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:29) – the implication being that it is possible to participate in the Supper without having discerned anything beyond bread and wine. Horner contends that a person who is not involved in the life of the church might interpret the Eucharist as being mere food, or as an anthropological ritual of some kind, missing the spirituality of the meal entirely.³⁸ More pointedly, Paul writes of tongues as being inaccessible to others, asking, “If come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation?” (1 Cor 14:6). Whereas phenomena of revelation are characterized simultaneously by the saturation of the intuition and some kind of openness to the gaze, tongues are opaque to anyone aside from God and perhaps the speaker or an interpreter, revealing nothing. Without a subsequent hermeneutic act of some kind, tongues do not function as a revelation of anything other than the utter otherness of God to the one who listens.

But there is another saturated phenomenon in 1 Corinthians 14, and that is the phenomenon of prophecy. The kind of prophecy that is found in the Corinthian gathering involves various people speaking aloud about the secret, inner lives of others in the room. Paul writes in 1 Cor 14:24 f.: “If an unbeliever or an inquirer [ἰδιώτης] comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgement by all, as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare. So, they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, ‘God is really among you!’” Here we have a clear phenomenon of revelation, where what is transcendent to experience – that is, the presence of God – is nonetheless manifested experientially. Whereas the earlier phenomenon of tongues was inaccessible to adherents and newcomers alike, prophecy proves to be a revelatory phenomenon for all, including for ἰδιώτης, or the inquirer.

experience of another is necessarily entangled with the experience of God (*Robyn Horner, The Experience of God: A Phenomenology of Revelation*, Cambridge, UK 2022, 122).

³⁵ *Marion*, *Being Given* (see fn. 6), 232. See also, *id.*, *In Excess* (see fn. 16), 116.

³⁶ *Id.*, *Being Given* (see fn. 6), 231.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 228.

³⁸ *Horner, The Experience of God* (see fn. 34), 121.

Prophecy is a saturated phenomenon, meaning it is outside the bounds of what would ordinarily be intuited. It exceeds the grasp of intuition and precedes intentionality. The givee must take in more than seems possible. It may seem impossible that God is real, that God is near, or that God knows the secrets of the heart. And yet, this is the reality that is revealed experientially. The presence of God is not experienced here as Isaiah's experience of the blinding radiance of holiness, nor as John's awareness of a voice sounding like many waters, but is rather made manifest in the plurality of ordinary human voices within the congregation. It is the transcendent made immanent, experiential. Here we could note two things. The first is that the voices of the congregants, in some sense, do not speak the whole truth about God – we might say theologically that God only seems to speak with the voice of a fellow congregant or to be present in a relatively non-threatening way. That the transcendent is made manifest as an immanent phenomenon should not be taken to mean that the transcendent is ontologically immanent or finite – it only means that we have access to the limited immanence of the phenomenon at hand. The second thing for us to note is that whether or not the voices of the prophets can be thought to present the full reality of God, they nevertheless do succeed in revealing something. And what they reveal is not at first the transcendent God, but is rather the secret thoughts, memories, and desires of the ιδιώτης. Put another way, the prophecies do not at first tell the ιδιώτης about God but rather reveal the ιδιώτης for what he or she is.

7. Theophany

What Paul describes here is a revelatory phenomenon of the type that Marion calls the *theophany*. A theophany, in Marion's usage, is a saturated phenomenon that blends together the characteristics of all other saturated phenomena – it is excessive in quantity, quality, relation, and modality. Revelation is itself “a variation of saturation.”³⁹ Like staring into the eyes of a loved one, it involves the perception of a gaze that looks back into us (as in the *icon*). Except that in the theophany, it is no mere human gaze that stares into us, but rather it is an invisible divine gaze that sees, exposes, and constitutes the viewer, subsuming the viewer's gaze into its own. Marion writes of the theophany as a phenomenon “where the excess of intuition leads to the paradox that an invisible gaze visibly envisages me and loves me.”⁴⁰

This notion of love in the divine gaze is an important idea in Marion's thought. Robyn Horner writes that for Marion, “Love is the content of revelation and revelation is only to be known by loving.”⁴¹ It is important to note that the kind of love Marion is describing is one that often blends terror and joy in equal measures. Love is not a feeling in Marion's thought – that is, it is not a response to saturation in the way that amazement or bedazzlement might be – love is an active, penetrating experience. Theophany in this sense is not

³⁹ Marion, *Being Given* (see fn. 6), 235.

⁴⁰ Id., *The Visible and the Revealed* (see fn. 19), 47 f.

⁴¹ Horner, *Marion, a Theo-Logical Introduction* (see fn. 21), 66. Note that the kind of love that Marion is describing is one that blends terror and joy in often equal measures; Marion, *Being Given* (see fn. 6), 238.

merely an encounter with something/anything that saturates the intuition or falls outside the normal boundaries of what is expected. Theophany is an encounter with something or someone that actively reaches out toward, sees, penetrates, and changes us in the means of its apparition and its mutually reciprocated loving gaze.

The ἰδιώτης of 1 Corinthians 14 has encountered exactly this kind of phenomenon and experiences a blend of terror, surprise, and perhaps joy at this revelation. Paul writes that the ἰδιώτης “will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, ‘God is really among you!’” (1 Cor 14:25). This leads to an important question: How is it that the revelation of one’s own secrets might result in the exclamation that “God is really among you”? The answer lies in the idea that the revelation of the secrets of the heart is itself a revelation that there is a divine Revealer. What is revealed is not only the secrets of the heart, but also that there is Someone, namely God, who can see and know these secrets.

8. Preparing for Revelation

The ἰδιώτης in 1 Corinthians 14 has had an experience that is in many ways exceptional. It seems reasonable to speculate that the majority of worshippers today do not ordinarily have the secrets of their hearts revealed by a group of prophets in the midst of the worship gathering. And yet, there is a sense in which the experience of the ἰδιώτης is paradigmatic not only for the role of the givee concerning revelatory phenomena, but also for the role of the ordinary worshipper. The nature of phenomena of revelation is such that every givee functions in this way – the givee encounters something to which they have not yet been initiated in exactly the same way that the ἰδιώτης encounters the strangeness of the worship gathering. In this way, the experience of a newcomer in a strange liturgy is paradigmatic for all human experiences of revelation.⁴²

At the same time, liturgical practice demonstrates something about how revelation might be received even by a finite givee. Worshippers gather on Sunday morning in hope that something has been or will be revealed – in prayer, in song, in silence, in sermon, in bread and wine, in bath, and so on.⁴³ To engage in some variety of liturgical practice is to enact a belief that revelation is possible.⁴⁴ But liturgy also presumes that the people who participate in the liturgy are, like Paul’s ἰδιώτης, longing for a revelation for which they are ill-prepared. If we think of the ἰδιώτης as an uninitiated, novice participant, then we might say that the anthropological side of liturgy serves in part to initiate the ἰδιώτης, preparing the ἰδιώτης for the possibility of receiving revelation. In this sense, all worshippers are ἰδιῶται in the presence of God. The human condition is characterized by finitude, and this means that faithful and inquirers alike find themselves unable to adequately receive and constitute

⁴² See *Lacoste*, *Experience and the Absolute* (see fn. 26), 29.

⁴³ Marion writes that revelation is communicated experientially, but this may be through first-hand experience, communal tradition, or sacred texts. Many of the elements of a given liturgy can be seen as being some experiential reference to (past, present or future) revelation; cf. *Marion*, *The Visible and the Revealed* (see fn. 19), 2.

⁴⁴ Note that such a belief perhaps goes beyond Marion’s project, which treats revelation as “a mere possibility [...] without presupposing its actuality” (id., *Being Given* [see fn. 6], 235).

God's self-revelation to varying degrees. Liturgical practices are, at least in one very narrowly reductive sense, initiations or preparations for the possibility of revelation.

This leads to the idea of liturgy as a kind of *hermeneutic preparation* – a term I am borrowing from Christina Gschwandtner.⁴⁵ Gschwandtner argues that Marion's account of saturated phenomena hurries too quickly toward saturation and then from saturation to revelation without considering the need for some kind of hermeneutic preparation to make this jump.⁴⁶ For example, one might experience a revelatory phenomenon in the act of prayer, but, as Gschwandtner points out, there are many preparatory acts involved in prayer within any tradition – we might think of things like bowing or kneeling, fasting, reading scripture, contemplating icons, and more.⁴⁷ Such practices give shape to the experience of the person who prays – perhaps intensifying the experience, or giving access to new layers of meaning. Gschwandtner writes: "If proper training, preparation, and context are provided, a phenomenon may be experienced as saturated when it would not be experienced as such without such preparation or context."⁴⁸

In the same way that things like bowing, fasting, etc., might apply to prayer, we can also consider the full range of phenomena that are present in liturgy. A given liturgical tradition can be considered as a kind of hermeneutic preparation in and of itself. Within the order of a service, prayers, songs, and other elements are juxtaposed and presented in such a way as to allow worshippers to access their meaning, in ways that would not be possible in a different context. Consider the communal aspect of the gathering: The experience of hearing a sermon or reciting a creed is qualitatively different in a gathered congregation than it is at home in one's bedroom. The presence and attention of other worshippers prepare the individual worshipper for the possibility of revelation.

The ἰδιώτης at the Corinthian gathering is hermeneutically prepared for the possibility of revelation first by the complex phenomenon of self-knowledge – the ἰδιώτης is aware that he or she contains secrets that are not known to anyone else. But the ἰδιώτης is also prepared by the phenomena of the gathering itself, including the collective attention and voices of the believers there and the knowledge that this gathering is devoted to the Christian God. Were any of these preparations lacking, the phenomenon might have been misapprehended, meaning that the message of the prophets would have been seen as something other than revelatory. In the same way, a person who enters into the time and space of worship today is, functionally, an ἰδιώτης who is prepared or unprepared to varying degrees in part by the spatial, temporal, corporeal, and affective phenomena of the liturgy. Liturgy is seldom seen as user-friendly and yet is generally oriented on its anthropological side toward the needs of those who are in some sense unprepared for revelation.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Degrees of Givenness: On Saturation in Jean-Luc Marion*, Bloomington, IN 2014, 91.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 188. See also Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess* (see fn. 13), 2.

⁴⁷ Gschwandtner, *Degrees of Givenness* (see fn. 45), 161.

⁴⁸ Gschwandtner, *Degrees of Givenness* (see fn. 45), 91.

⁴⁹ Fagerberg describes participation in liturgy as having an effect analogous to vision correction surgery, allowing the worshipper to re-see the world in a liturgical (we might say revelatory) light: "The liturgical person sees a dawn instead of a twilight, a pathway to life instead of a dead end, his neighbor as Christ knocking, and his daily life filled with moments of providence to be obeyed instead of strikes of fate to be endured" (*Fagerberg, Consecrating the World* [see fn. 5], 75).

9. Liturgies Today

I want to return to the idea with which I began, which is that liturgy prepares worshippers for the possibility of revelation. To participate in liturgy is not a way of manufacturing or guaranteeing a revelatory encounter, but it is an act that presumes and hopes that revelation (past, present, and future) is possible. Possibility matters in phenomenality, particularly when it comes to the question of whether something beyond the horizon of experience might be revealed experientially to finite beings. Marion writes that his “entire project has been directed to liberating possibility in phenomenality,” and that in phenomenology, “possibility remains the norm.”⁵⁰ Possibility is also a norm in liturgy, where what seems strange in everyday life is presented as possible, if not normative or inevitable. Liturgy presents the presence of God amid the congregation as a basic fact, presumes that God speaks in the Scripture, and that God hears and answers the prayers and praises of the congregation. Liturgy presumes that the divine gaze of love in Marion’s *theophany* is present wherever two or three are gathered, and this presumption is made apparent in several ways in any liturgical tradition. Whereas the Corinthian ἰδῶτης first encountered the penetrating power of this divine gaze via the exposing words of the prophet, many liturgical traditions provide a number of other means by which to prepare the modern ἰδῶτης for the possibility of revelation. These means of preparation can be identified by looking at the kinds of phenomena that are present in the enactment of liturgy.

Some hermeneutic preparations are verbal. A particularly accessible instance is the Anglican Collect for Purity that is prayed near the beginning of the Eucharistic service. The prayer begins: “Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hidden.”⁵¹ These words prepare worshippers for the possibility that in the prayers, readings, and homily to come, something might be revealed about the invisible God who already sees and knows each person. We might also think of verbal/auditory elements like songs, sermons, readings, and in some traditions, testimonies.⁵²

Taking an opposite approach, many liturgies make use of silence. Silence in some cases is a kind of focusing, an ascetic setting aside or bracketing of the noise of our ordinary lives.⁵³ The *Roman Missal* makes use of silence in the Penitential Act, after prayer, readings, the homily, and Communion.⁵⁴ Consider also the Orthodox liturgy for Holy Saturday (a day characterized by multiple layers of silence), in which the priest says: “Let all mortal flesh keep silent, and in fear and trembling stand, pondering nothing earthly-minded. For the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords comes to be slain, to give Himself as food to the

⁵⁰ Marion, *Being Given* (see fn. 6), 234, 236.

⁵¹ *Anglican Church of Canada*, *The Book of Common Prayer*, Toronto 1962, 67.

⁵² Ellis writes that testimony functions liturgically “in the leading of others to open themselves to [God’s] gracious encounter,” building up a “shared spirituality” (*Christopher J. Ellis*, *Gathering: A Theology and Spirituality of Worship in the Free Church Tradition*, London 2004, 166).

⁵³ *Juliet J. Day*, *Reading the Liturgy: An Exploration of Texts in Christian Worship*, London 2014, 51 f.

⁵⁴ The nature of silence “depends on the moment when it occurs in the different parts of the celebration. For in the Penitential Act and again after the invitation to pray, individuals recollect themselves; whereas after a reading or after the Homily, all meditate briefly on what they have heard; then after Communion, they praise God in their hearts and pray to him” (*The General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, Canadian edition, Ottawa 2011, 22).

faithful.”⁵⁵ Silence here is a bracketing of the world around, but also an act of reverence in response to the belief that God is really present. These and other silent moments create space for people to reflect on what they have heard, but also to pray, and perhaps, to be open and aware of God’s holy gaze. The ἰδιώτης does not know what to say or how to act in a holy place, but these prescribed moments of silence open up the uninitiated to the idea that God may be listening and watching just as we are waiting and watching ourselves.⁵⁶

Liturgies of all kinds also make use of corporeal hermeneutic preparations.⁵⁷ Standing, kneeling, prostrating, singing, raising hands, eating and drinking, embracing, are all means of positioning one’s body in ways that enact a theology of our position before God.⁵⁸ Even the most reserved of liturgies involve corporeality. Imagine the Baptist pastor introducing her congregation to the practice of contemplative prayer, asking them to close their eyes as she reads from Psalm 139: “Search me, O God, and know my heart.” The scripture is a verbal preparation, but the subtle and risky act of eye closing is a physiologically involved means of bracketing the visible world to allow for the possibility that the invisible might be made apparent. It is a way of putting each congregant in the position of being alone with God, who searches and knows.

Liturgies of all kinds also make use of spatiality as a hermeneutic preparation. Paul’s ἰδιώτης enters a house that is being used to worship the God of the Christians. In the same way, worshippers today often enter into a space that is explicitly marked in various ways as a place for worship.⁵⁹ Most obviously, the aesthetics and configuration of such places can alert the ἰδιώτης to the possibility of beauty, holiness, grandeur, and so on. But spatiality goes further still in those liturgies that ask worshippers to move about the space in different ways. A ‘high’ example of this kind of movement can be found in many Orthodox liturgies that ask congregants to move to different parts of the room, perhaps even bowing or prostrating along the way. A very ‘low’ but very physical example of this kind of movement is found in Pentecostal liturgy, which in many cases involves concluding the worship service with an ‘altar call’ in which congregants are invited to move forward to the front of the worship space. The pastor or worship leader may ask congregants to come to the front to pray, to confess and repent, to commit their lives to God, or simply to praise God.⁶⁰ That this is known as an ‘altar call’ is significant. Whereas many traditions make use of an ‘altar’ on which bread and wine are offered recalling the once and for all sacrifice of Christ, the Pentecostal ‘altar’ is the place where the congregants offer themselves as living sacrifices. For a congregant to leave his or her seat and to come to the altar in this way is in part a

⁵⁵ *Service Books of the Orthodox Church*, South Canaan, PA 2010, 128.

⁵⁶ See also the Anglican penitential rite, in which the priest offers the prompt, “Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor,” after which silence is kept so that congregants can privately confess their sins to God (*The Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada*, Toronto 1985, 46).

⁵⁷ “There is no liturgical experience apart from our real, physical, corporeal participation in it” (Gschwandtner, *Welcoming Finitude* [see fn. 14], 89).

⁵⁸ *Senn*, *Embodied Liturgy* (see fn. 3), xii.

⁵⁹ Even the basic idea of entering involves the act of crossing a threshold; cf. Gschwandtner, *Welcoming Finitude* [see fn. 14], 74.

⁶⁰ Vondey, “Pentecostal Sacramentality and the Theology of the Altar”, in: Mark J. Cartledge; A. J. Swoboda (eds.), *Scripting Pentecost: A Study of Pentecostals, Worship, and Liturgy* (Explorations in Practical, Pastoral, and Empirical Theology), New York 2017, 94–107, here 99.

hermeneutic preparation for the idea that God will see, know, love, and accept them. It is an act that presumes and hopes for revelation.

10. Conclusion

I will conclude with a few simple thoughts. First, Marion's depiction of the role of the givee in relation to revelatory phenomena can be helpful as we consider what liturgy means to ordinary worshippers. Liturgy involves a range of phenomena, and Marion helps us to understand how these phenomena might or might not function in a revelatory way, and how a person might encounter these phenomena as a finite givee. Second, we might consider that in addition to Marion's construals of the givee as anonymous, enemy, or ingrate, the givee may also function as *ιδιώτης* by seeking revelation and yet being unprepared for what might be revealed. A phenomenological consideration of the givee as *ιδιώτης* suggests something of a normative role for those who participate in liturgy, suggesting that liturgical participation might be seen as paradigmatic for the more general human experience in the face of (possible) revelation. Finally, liturgies of all kinds serve as preparations or initiations for the *ιδιώτης*. A consideration of the phenomenality of these preparations can give insight into the experience of the faithful who long for revelation, even as they acknowledge their inadequacy to receive it.

Dieser Beitrag argumentiert dafür, dass Liturgie die Gläubigen auf die Möglichkeit von Offenbarung vorbereitet. Die liturgische Theologie geht davon aus, dass die Liturgie in gewisser Weise auf die Selbstoffenbarung Gottes ausgerichtet ist, während Marions Phänomenologie nahelegt, dass die Offenbarung etwas ist, das sich – wenn sie denn eintreten sollte – einem Gebenden aufdrängt, der passiv und unfähig ist, eine solche Offenbarung angemessen zu empfangen. Marions Konstruktion des Empfängers in Bezug auf Offenbarungsphänomene kann neue Einsichten in die Art und Weise eröffnen, wie Liturgie von den Gottesdienstbesuchern erlebt wird. Umgekehrt deutet eine Anwendung der liturgischen Erfahrung auf Marions Phänomenologie darauf hin, dass Marions Konstruktion des Empfängers eben dessen Wunsch, sich in eine Position zu versetzen, in der eine Offenbarung stattfinden könnte, möglicherweise nicht ausreichend berücksichtigt. Das liturgische Geschehen legt also nahe, dass die Erfahrung des Gottesdienstbesuchers in gewisser Weise paradigmatisch für die Rolle des Empfängers in Bezug auf Offenbarung sein kann.