

## A Hermeneutical Application of the Iconic Gaze in Jean-Luc Marion's Postmodern Phenomenology to Galatian 3:28 A Template for an Expression of Christian Love

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### Abstract

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On the basis that the functionality of *love* cannot be abandoned in the world that needs such concept to face the variety of challenges that characterize the contemporary human society, the paper makes a cogent argument that relies, in part, on the 'face' as an icon in *Jean Luc-Marion's* works. The engagement is made to establish a basis for a call to a loving encounter with the 'Other' as per the example offered in Galatian 3:28. The paper recognizes the concept of love as central to Christianity and as the hub on which the religion functions. It presents Marion's concept of the face as a good point to begin a recapturing of the call to love the Other. It seeks to consider elements in Marion's phenomenology that may help recapture the concept as may be applicable in Christianity. It is proposed that, if the way we constitute people is not reconsidered and the offer of an 'iconic gaze' in the order that Marion presents it, is not taken seriously in Christian hermeneutics, Christians might continue to find it difficult to love in a manner devoid of categories that constitute people as Greek, Jew, Slave, freeman/woman, etc.*cf. Galatian 3:28.*

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**Keywords:** Jean-Luc Marion, Iconic Gaze, Postmodern Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Galatian 3:28, Christian Love

### Introduction

In the Gospel of John, Jesus Christ taught about love and demands it as an all-important definition of Christianity. In many Christian worship centers today, images and symbols that speak of the thought of love in Christianity are frequently set up to adorn such centers. These details are intended to remind the Christian of Jesus' call to love.

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For example, the crucifix is often intended to call to mind the optimal sacrifice in love as offered by Jesus. In fact, Christian liturgies are celebrated on a principle that commemorates Jesus' love act as a reenactment. In spite of all these, what is frequently seen in our contemporary society in the name of love is often a display of emotion and sentiments, at other times, infatuation. According to Rostislav Sheniloff, what is most often obtainable in modern times is "a worldly 'love' and 'peace' that are no more than a deceptive imitation and mockery of true Christian love and peace."<sup>2</sup> Similarly, for Marion, "[N]ot only we no longer have a concept of love, but we do not even have a word to say it. 'Love'? It resonates as the most prostituted word there is –strictly speaking, the word for prostitution."<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, Edward Vacek notes that love has remains "a staple of literature, religion, and life, [and, in fact, a basis on which, Max] Scheler pleaded for the rebuilding of Western culture."<sup>4</sup> The concern of Scheler, in spite of the misuse of the word and its conception in forms that makes a true Christian love, is what also underlies all that Marion is out to do in most of his writings. Marion wrote, "[T]his book has obsessed me since the publication of *The Idol and Distance* in 1977. All the books I have published since then bear the mark, explicit or hidden, of this concern... All of my books, above all the last three; have been just so many steps toward the question of the erotic phenomenon."<sup>5</sup> He is fully aware that philosophy no longer says anything about love or at best very little, not only because it no longer experiences love or fear to say anything about it, but also "for good reason, for they know, better than anyone, that we no longer have the word to speak of it, nor the concept to think about it, nor the strength to celebrate it."<sup>6</sup>

In spite of all that have been said above, the demand by Christ that Christians should practice and celebrate love, cannot be ignored. Thus, this paper seeks to consider elements in Marion's phenomenology that may help recapture the concept of love as may be applicable in Christianity.

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<sup>2</sup>RostislavSheniloff. "On meekness, humility and love: Two essays on Love" [http://www.holy-transfiguration.org/library\\_en/ct\\_love\\_about.html](http://www.holy-transfiguration.org/library_en/ct_love_about.html). Accessed March 15, 2014.

<sup>3</sup>Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, translated by Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Vacek, "Scheler's Phenomenology of Love" in *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 62, No. 2 (Apr., 1982), pp. 156-177.

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *Erotic Phenomenon*, 10

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, 1

It is proposed that, if the way we constitute people is not reconsidered and the offer of an 'iconic gaze' in the order that Marion presents it, is not taken seriously in Christian hermeneutics, Christians might continue to find it difficult to love in a manner devoid of categories that constitute people as Greek, Jew, Slave, freeman/woman, etc.<sup>7</sup>

### What is 'Christian Love'?

In a very simplistic term, Christian love is best described as *αγαπε* (agape), which is often translated as Charity. The kind of charity which Augustine says: "If you see charity, you see the Trinity,"<sup>8</sup> is in other words, the kind of charity by which we translate into action, our gift of love from God. A Greek translation of the word 'love' in some New Testament passages presents two basic forms of its usage. For instance, in John's Gospel, the interview of Peter by Jesus reveals an understanding that is not ordinarily given in an English translation. Jesus had asked Peter, *αγαπας με?* And Peter's responded, *φιλωσε*.<sup>9</sup> *The Easton's Bible Dictionary* says of this, "When our Lord says, "Lovest thou me?" he uses the Greek word *agapas*, and when Simon answers, he uses the Greek word *philo*, i.e., "I love."<sup>10</sup> The distinction between the two Greek forms borders on quality of expression; while "*agapan* has more of judgment and deliberate choice; *philein* has more of attachment and peculiar personal affection."<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, according to *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, *agape* is the main word used for love in the New Testament. It is used as noun and at other times as verb and like its Hebrew equivalent, it expresses desire, leading to quest; denoting "the highest, most perfect kind of love (Latin, *diligere*), implying a clear determination of will and judgment, and belonging particularly to the sphere of Divine revelation."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>See Galatian 3:28

<sup>8</sup> Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, Vatican, Rome, 2005. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20051225\\_deus-caritas-est\\_en.html#\\_ftnref11](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html#_ftnref11). (Accessed, March 16th, 2014).19.

<sup>9</sup> John 21:16: whereas Jesus question was *αγαπας με?* "Do you love me?" Peter's response was *φιλωσε*, "I have affection for you."

<sup>10</sup>"Love" in *Easton's Bible Dictionary*. PC Study Bible: Biblesoft, Inc. 2006.

<sup>11</sup>See "Love" in *Easton's Bible Dictionary*. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Revised edition, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1979, further identified agape as a kind of love that is discriminating and involves choice, while phileo like eros denotes a spontaneous affection. The former is more divine and used in speaking about spiritual meaning."

<sup>12</sup> William Evans, "Love" in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*.

From the above statements, the word 'love' as used in the New Testament connotes a relationship that is free towards the other and is expressive of response to God's love. This is well captured and articulated by St. Paul, who sees love in the New Testament sense and as such, a Christian sense, as an act. To him, love is "patient and kind. Love does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. Love never fails."<sup>13</sup>

As an act, it defies being made by a person. Thus, it will be absurd to speak of 'making' Christian 'love.' Statements, such as making Christian love entails, inherently, a turning of love on itself whereby, as Marion notes, "[t]o declare 'I love you' sounds, in the best of cases, like an obscenity or a derision, to the point where, in polite society (that of educated), no one dares *seriously* to utter such nonsense."<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, from Matthew 22:39, 'love' as understood by Christ, is something that already happens to oneself from which one reaches out to the other; "love your neighbor as yourself." Thus, it may be conceived as an act and as a duty to which everyone is called in response to God's gift of love to human beings. Thus, Daryl J. Wennemann commenting on Kierkegaard's understanding of Christian love in *works of love*, observes "the lover is in the debt of love because s/he has already received the love of God."<sup>15</sup>

Generally, and from the preceding considerations, one may safely say that a Christian love entails loving God whole heartedly and ones neighbor as oneself because he/she has first been loved by God. Love is that which propels us to action in the other person irrespective of what a look at the person connotes. Thus, the Galatian passage for consideration in this paper says, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."<sup>16</sup> This is well captured by Wennemann, "[I]n the *relationship* of love we find equality among all persons because in love the individual must be willing to give up their own self for the other.

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<sup>13</sup> I Corinthians 13:4-8

<sup>14</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 3

<sup>15</sup> See Daryl J. Wennemann. "The Role of Love in the Thought of Kant and Kierkegaard" *Paideia Project On-Line*. Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy. Boston, Massachusetts. 10-15 August 1998. <https://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Reli/ReliWenn.htm>

<sup>16</sup> Galatian 3:28

Love has a role to play in every human act, whether it be a great act or the smallest gesture."<sup>17</sup> In a similar sense, Marion said that "love alone puts all infinity, all wisdom, and all power to work;"<sup>18</sup>when I love, I do what God does, except that "God surpasses us as the best lover."<sup>19</sup>Therefore, it makes sense to say that if a Christian is to take seriously the command of Jesus, he must love as God does.To facilitate this kind of love as a Christian, we must acknowledge barriers that potentially 'arrest our human gaze and bounce it back to us,' to use Marion's expression, and put to work that which has been received from God in actualizing the command of Jesus. In subsequent sections, Marion's concept of love shall be explored and are attempt at utilizing his iconic gaze shall be employed in an attempt to recover the Christian concept of love and its applicability.

### **Jean-Luc Marion's Phenomenology**

This section does not pretend to be a synopsis of Marion's phenomenology, as that would require a work of its own; rather, it is an attempt to highlight what I perceive him to be doing in his phenomenology with an idea at linking his project to the theme of this paper. From a couple of Marion's works read in the course of this paper, one clear thing that he attempts to do is to make a departure from classical philosophy wherein an established concept of the intellect is required for an acknowledgment of phenomena. Although he "argues for the legitimacy of the claim that phenomenology is first philosophy,"<sup>20</sup> he does reckons with the failure of metaphysics as first philosophy, especially where it is "defined as the 'divine science.'<sup>21</sup> According to Robyn Horner and Vincent Berrand in their introductory notes to *In Excess*, Marion perceives metaphysics to have failed in this category whether understood "on the basis of *ousia* (read either as substance or essence), ontology, or cause, since none of these meanings adequately enables a thinking of God or sustains primacy;"<sup>22</sup>hence, his efforts at overcoming metaphysics.

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<sup>17</sup>See Wennemann, "The Role of Love"

<sup>18</sup>Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 22

<sup>19</sup>ibid

<sup>20</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, translated by Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), x.

<sup>21</sup> ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Marion, *In Excess*, x.

Nevertheless, it is significant to note that his attempt to overcome metaphysics in this form does not trap him in grounding philosophy on the transcendental *I*, a reduction that he considers as also problematic.<sup>23</sup> Rather, he emphasizes that which “surpasses my objectifying rationality and points to a “greater reason.”<sup>24</sup>

Commenting on the efforts of Marion in attempting to overcome metaphysics, Compaan Auke said it is an effort at unmasking “the proud ego of modern metaphysics and the limits of what the ‘I’ can know.”<sup>25</sup>In that effort, what emerges, and relevant to this paper, is what Horner and Berraud consider as Marion’s distinctive contribution to the debate on the overcoming of metaphysics, namely, “the formula that emphasizes the importance of the phenomenological reduction: As much reduction, as much givenness.”<sup>26</sup>To Mikkel Tin, what Marion rejects in Classical philosophy which “has acknowledged phenomena only in so far as they can be sanctioned by the concepts of the intellect, holds good also of Husserl’s constitutive ego.”<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, and of significance to this paper is the observation by Mikkel that the distinction of Marion between “intuitively ‘poor phenomena’ and the ‘saturated phenomena’ that exceed the intentional consciousness,” are “given not by the consciousness but to the consciousness in an excess of intuition.” They are gifts - the gift of appearance.<sup>28</sup>This distinction and the concept of the gift as that which is a product of givenness forms the bedrock of Marion discussion of the visible in *In Excess*.<sup>29</sup> In the section of Marion’s work dealing with this theme, especially chapters two and three of *In Excess*, much seems to be captured by the phrase ‘there is more to what the eyes see.’

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Auke Compaan, A 2011, ‘Icon, love and the possibility of the other’, Dutch Reformed Theological Journal, vol. 52, no. 3 & 4, pp. 355-363.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 262

<sup>26</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, x.

<sup>27</sup> Mikkel B. Tin, “Saturated Phenomena: From Picture to Revelation in Jean-Luc Marion’s Phenomenology” in *FILozOFIA* 65, 2010, No 9, p.860.

<sup>28</sup> This conclusion is reached from the idea of Mikkel B. Tin, (“Saturated Phenomena: From Picture to Revelation in Jean-Luc Marion’s Phenomenology” in *FILozOFIA* 65, 2010, No 9, p.860) who considered, at length, what Marion attempts to do in his phenomenology. The paragraph basically highlights the key points in Marion’s phenomenology as perceived by Mikkel. Mikkel’s interpretation of Marion does represent my understanding of Marion’s position and presents them in clearer terms.

<sup>29</sup> See especially Chapters 2 and 3.

To buttress this claim, and in establishing the distinction between what is 'seen, as looked at' and 'what is given,' I make recourse to Mikkel's observation expressed in the distinction between the idol and the icon, to Mikkel, whereas in Marion's thought, "idols only reflect our own desire to see and to be seen, icons surprise us by the gaze the saint directs on us."<sup>30</sup>

I should think that the thoughts of Marion could be helpful in understanding the love requirement of Jesus Christ, especially when one sees Christianity as a faith that is "most fully itself and most fully life-giving when it opens our eyes and uncovers a world larger than we thought."<sup>31</sup> The other person who Jesus requires the Christian to love must not be considered constitutively in molds such as Jew, Gentile, slave, free-born, even as male and female, for that does not subsist in Christ. To practice love at such frequency will require an exercise in patterns symbolic of Marion's iconic gaze; because, again for Marion, the first principle of phenomenology is "[A]s much reduction, as much givenness."<sup>32</sup> Simply stated, it is, the more I limit my constitution of external horizons and conditions, through reduction the more I dispose myself to that which is revealed in givenness.

### Marion's Concept of 'Love'

Marion considers the theme of love as the rallying point of his literary project.<sup>33</sup> And as Horner would say, essentially, Marion's complete theological manifesto focuses on the theme of God's love: "God's first name is love (not being), love is the content of revelation, and revelation is only to be known by loving."<sup>34</sup> While Marion does not see the task of an engagement with love as an easy one, he recognizes such difficulty as being imposed by the theme itself upon "whomever were to approach it."<sup>35</sup> The reason is for the fact that approaching 'love' is to participate in it.

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<sup>30</sup> Tin, "Saturated Phenomena: From Picture to Revelation," 860.

<sup>31</sup> Compaan, "Icon, love and the possibility of the other," 355

<sup>32</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, 17

<sup>33</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 10

<sup>34</sup> Robyn Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*, (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), 66

<sup>35</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 8

Loving puts in play my identity, my ipseity, those resources of mine that are more inward to me than myself. In love I put myself on stage and implicate myself, because in loving I make a decision about myself like nowhere else. Each act of love is inscribed forever in me and outlines me definitely. I do not love by proxy, nor through a go between, but in the flesh, and this flesh is one only with me.<sup>36</sup>

In *Prolegomena to Charity*, Marion make this point in a more direct and concise way. Therein, he defines love as “the act of a gaze that renders itself back to another gaze in a common unsubstitutability.”<sup>37</sup> He went further to claim that to love is to “see the definitively invisible aim of my gaze nonetheless exposed by the aim of another invisible gaze.”<sup>38</sup> I must note that these ideas about love are not strange in the Christian tradition where one cannot love outside identifying and participating in love, and engrossed in it. However, there is no doubt that much of that seems to be long gone in modern times and needs a recovery. It is in this recovery task that the refreshing approach of Marion to the theme recaptures the idea, not only in philosophical terms and as theologically possible, but as would seem to be the right understanding of 1 John 4:19-21.<sup>39</sup>

Attaining the specified ideal identified above is not likely to be an easy task as Marion stated, nevertheless, he goes ahead to chart a course of its navigation. He proceeded by deducing from what such efforts at approaching it will not entail,<sup>40</sup> to an “attempt at the impossible: to produce what we will show starting from itself.”<sup>41</sup> He says that the task of an engagement with love is not carried out in telling stories, to speak of love, is also to love in the first person.<sup>42</sup> The reason for such claim is that “loving is only properly spoken of and made in its own right – first and foremost, without any possible substitution.”<sup>43</sup> Thus I can only speak of love because I love.

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<sup>36</sup> *ibid*, 9

<sup>37</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, translated by Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 100.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid*, 87.

<sup>39</sup> We love, because he first loved us. If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also. For Marion’s take on this See Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*, 66ff

<sup>40</sup> It will neither entail leaning on “the attainments of the tradition, metaphysics of love,” “the citation of any author at all” nor the use of “lexicon.” See, Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 8

<sup>41</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 9

<sup>42</sup> *ibid*, 9

<sup>43</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 9

It is “only those who love [that] see the phenomenon of love.”<sup>44</sup> It would be right to claim that those who claim to be Christian must therefore abide in love, as that seems to be the identity of the person who abides in God.<sup>45</sup> One has to love in the way he/she is loved by God, that is, without conditions. This is the content of the gospel, “the revelation that Christ brings, that ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:18).”<sup>46</sup> It “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.”<sup>47</sup> It is for us the measure of our faith, anything outside that will be ‘idolatry.’

### The Idol and the Icon

The *icon* and the *idol* are basically concepts employed by Marion as ways of thinking of God “beyond being.” Both concepts have been part of Marion’s phenomenological enterprise and have been rehearsed in earlier publications preceding *In Excess*.<sup>48</sup> The featuring of these concepts however must be understood from his project of overcoming metaphysics and the being of God. Thus, in *God Without Being*, a book in which Marion’s masterful tack on traditional metaphysics clips so well, the ways in which God has been conceived and the way in which God ought be thought came up. His take is that God must be thought outside the traditional ontological difference and the question of being. The advantage of this thought pattern is that it frees God from our conceptual frames. If we are to love the way God loves, the distinction between the two concepts must be made.

### The Idol

In the words of Marion, “[T]he *idol* is constituted by the thrust of an aim anterior to any possible spectacle, but also by a first visible, where, settling, it attains, without seeing, its invisible mirror, low-water mark of its rise.”<sup>49</sup> Explaining this further, he notes, “[I]n other words, the proposition ‘God is a being’ itself appears as an *idol* because it only returns the aim that, in advance, decides that every possible ‘God,’ present or absent, in one way or another, has to be.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*, 68

<sup>45</sup> 1 John 4:7-18

<sup>46</sup> Horner, *ibid*, 66

<sup>47</sup> *ibid*

<sup>48</sup> *ibid*, 61.

<sup>49</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, translated by Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 43.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid*, 44

The *idol* is thus a reflection of what one conceives of God by human categorization. It is a reflection of that which corresponds to human will. Such 'God' which could result from 'a gaze that is both pious and blasphemous,' has to be, and in *being* it falls short of Marion's phenomenology. Such a 'God,' by Marion's explanation does not correspond to the biblical God, who does not have to be.<sup>51</sup>

Robyn Horner offers a further explanation of Marion's *idol* in perspective. According to her, it is, for Marion, "idolatrous that which saturates the gaze with visibility and dazzles it, acting as an invisible mirror to the one who gazes upon it."<sup>52</sup> By this designation, an image or an object does not necessarily constitute an *idol*, but such can function as an *idol* depending on the gaze of the beholder. Therefore, idolatry "does not occur so much because an image has reference to a god, but principally because it makes a god of the idolater."<sup>53</sup> Our gaze upon the *idol* is what makes an *idol* visible. It is that which also traps God in our gaze and confines God to our understanding. The identity of God is thus conceded to our imposed concepts. One dare say here, therefore, that a justification of our relationship with the other person's as dependent on our ideas can therefore be pretty wrong. In that case, my idea of love, Christian love, could be very wrong since the foundation is faulty.

## The Icon

Contrary to the idea of the *idol* where our gaze on the *idol* makes it visible, the *icon* gazes upon us. The *icon* gives that which essentially is not presentable; in other words, it makes visible that which is invisible. It "refers not to the viewer, but beyond itself; the *icon* is a visible reference to the invisible."<sup>54</sup>

There are two dimensions in which the *icon* functions in Marion's phenomenology. On the one hand, *icons* "bring the invisibility to visibility, not by representing it *as such*, but by opening onto it."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 44

<sup>52</sup> Robyn Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A theological Introduction*, 61.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid*, 61-62

<sup>54</sup> Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A theological Introduction*, 62

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 63

On the other hand, it functions in prayer by bringing “the believer explicitly into that transformed realm and to visually articulate his or her prayer.”<sup>56</sup> In both senses, an appropriation of visually articulating that which we receive of God’s givenness as love finds expression in not reducing our neighbors to categories that confine them to our determinant categories. The concrete answer to the question, what do I see when I look at the *face* of the visible other? captures the basis for such categorization. Often, as a human being, I see what I have reduced the other to be and it is that which subsequently determines my treatment of and relationship with that other. However, if we take a leaf from what the *icon* does, we find out that it “summons the gaze to surpass itself by never freezing on a visible, since the visible only presents itself here in view of the invisible.”<sup>57</sup> The *icon* overflows and exceeds my gaze, thereby opening me to myself and beyond conceptual understanding unto a feeling of divine presence. Such experience opens me to an understanding of love that could be reflective of what Jesus, the *icon* of the Father, demands of Christians in Galatian 3:28.

Stepping a bit aside from the icon, and going a step further in understanding Galatian 3:28, the *face* presents another good basis to do a hermeneutic of a Christian love of the other. Although, the theme shall be further discussed below, it is good to note that in Marion’s phenomenological analysis of the *face*, one could infer a healthy hermeneutical tool from the link between icon, the iconic gaze and the *face*. In a manner in which St. Paul considers Jesus as the *icon* of the Father and in which the cross is an *icon*,<sup>58</sup> the *face*, as an *icon* calls. ‘The *face* is “not seen as much as it sees,”<sup>59</sup> thereby allowing the possibility of an iconic gaze that calls me, to be possible. What is meant here is better articulated by Levinas, to whom Marion owes much of his discourse on the *face*. For Levinas, the *face* “comes enigmatically from the Infinite and its immemorial past” and in the “force with which my fellowman is imposed for my responsibility before all engagements on my part.”<sup>60</sup> The beauty of this analysis is its facilitation of the face saturation and what it calls us to do as reflective of the “Infinite and its immemorial past.”

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<sup>56</sup> *ibid*

<sup>57</sup> Marion, *God Without Being*, 18

<sup>58</sup> by which God gazes and calls us.

<sup>59</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, 114

<sup>60</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre-nous*, translated by Michael B. Smith and Babara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 57.

The connection of the face and iconic gaze in relation to doing a hermeneutic of a Christian love will be the outcome of the next section. In the section, this paper will take a brief look at what Levinas says of the *face* and what Marion makes of that. The idea is to attempt a hermeneutics of Galatian 3:28 by Marion's iconic gaze, working with the idea that the *face*, for Marion, has a privilege of consideration among saturated phenomena.<sup>61</sup>

### The Face: Marion and Levinas

Bringing in Levinas in conversation with Marion in this section is imperative as Marion owe much of his analysis of the *face* to Levinas.<sup>62</sup> Marion has always acknowledged his indebtedness to Emmanuel Levinas' contribution of the *face* to phenomenology.

In Marion's categorization, he calls certain phenomena saturated among which he privileged the *face*. These are phenomena "where the excess of intuition over signification censures the constitution of an object and, more radically, the visibility of unified and defined spectacle."<sup>63</sup> In *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God: Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (Perspectives in Continental Philosophy)*, Marion identifies the *face* as the second of two radical revolutions introduced by Levinas into phenomenology. "First was a reversal of centrifugal intentionality, which moves from the ego to the object, into a counter-intentionality moving back towards the ego. Next was a replacement of the existing object with a face which is the origin of this counter intentionality, and which thus, strictly speaking, does not have to exist."<sup>64</sup>

Although, Marion recognizes the "exemplary phenomenological status"<sup>65</sup> of the *face* through the work of Emmanuel Levinas, he considered himself advancing "one step further, in thinking the face as icon addressing a call,"<sup>66</sup> that is, a call that 'envisages'. The point of departure of Marion from Levinasian ethics is basically in presenting the subject as the one who takes the initiative without any expectation of reciprocation.

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<sup>61</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, 119

<sup>62</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, 115

<sup>63</sup> *ibid*, 119

<sup>64</sup> *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God: Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (Perspectives in Continental Philosophy)*, Edited by Jeffrey Bloechl (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 1st Edition, p.224.

<sup>65</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, 115

<sup>66</sup> *ibid*

This contribution is significant to the extent that it allows one to reach the individuation of the other as the other gives himself/ herself from himself or herself.

In *Being Given*, Marion explains that ethics cannot attain the individuation of the other, "for I neither want nor should only face up to him as the universal and abstract pole of counter-intentionality where each and everyone can take up the face of the face. I instead reach him in his unsubstitutable particularity, where he shows himself like no other Other can. This individuation has a name: love."<sup>67</sup> Marion's example of the prodigal son in *God Without Being* buttresses this point.<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, the concept of 'envisaging' will constitute a key factor in an iconic hermeneutics of loving the other, whereby the *face* of the other envisages me, but I cannot, in my turn envisage it. The reason for this non possibility of reversal is because, my 'envisaging' the other's *face* puts it at risk of either "lowering it to the rank of a constituted and collectivized visible, [not] respecting its invisibility and saluting its own phenomenality, or [not] envisaging it as it envisages me."<sup>69</sup>

It is significant that like Levinas, Marion recognizes the *face* as exceptionally distinguished by its counter intentionality among "the swarming mass of phenomena on which is exercised my intentionality."<sup>70</sup> The *face* does not give itself to be seen directly. Marion followed Levinas closely in stating of the *face* as that which "do not merely offer this or that particular spectacle among others, but breaks into the middle of the field of visibility accessible as such, bright flashes from a luminous source, dazzling me, fixing my gaze, throwing it back on itself."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Towards a Phenomenology of Givenness*, translated by Jeffrey L. Kosky (California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 324.

<sup>68</sup> The prodigal son's father acted in complete indifference to being. Notably, "under the idolatrous charged gaze of the sons, currency obfuscates exchange; to the profoundly iconic gaze of the father, *ousianever* stops the aim of the exchange of circulation of the gift." See *God Without Being*, 95-102.

<sup>69</sup> Marion raised these issues in question form and spent about five pages of the chapter on *The 'icon' or the endless hermeneutic* in *In Excess*, answering it. He went through Husserl's presentation of the flesh as expression of the spirit as well as the organ of the spirit and Aristotle's conception of the flesh as beyond the limitation of poor of common phenomena. See pp. 119-123.

<sup>70</sup> *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God*, 224

<sup>71</sup> *ibid*

An overflow of this is a responsibility for the Other, which Marion quoting Levinas is, "going against intentionality and the will which intentionally does not succeed in dissimulating – signifies not the disclosure of a given and its reception, but the exposition of me to the Other, prior to all decision."<sup>72</sup>

Marion goes further to clarify this reversal of intentionality and phenomenality, which he identified as "Levinasian," as "passing from the object which is visible and aimed at, to the *face* which aims and is thus non-visible."<sup>73</sup> Although, he conceives this step as that which "radically alters the entire horizon of phenomenological analysis,"<sup>74</sup> he believes that such conclusion is prone to a considerable difficulty; namely, "if the *face* does not properly give itself to be seen in the same sense as does an object or a being, how does it come to me or reach me at all?"<sup>75</sup> He believes, therefore, that there is a need to differ from that conclusion. In his offer of a hypothesis in response, he argues that "no phenomenon can show itself in itself and from itself unless it first gives itself in itself and from itself (a givenness): it is this givenness – *donation* – which assures the original self, and which permits 'showingness' (*monstration*)."<sup>76</sup> According to him, "Self-giving permits *self-showing*" and the question of how the face shows itself "is a matter of determining how it gives itself."<sup>77</sup>

In the light of a hermeneutics of Galatian 3:28 and seeing the other person beyond confining categories, what the *face* does in helping me see the other person as God would, becomes paramount. To Marion, the *face* does not only serve as an *icon* which makes me hear (understand) its call,<sup>78</sup> but as a saturated phenomenon, it "accomplishes the phenomenological operation of the call more, perhaps, than any other phenomenon (saturated or not)."<sup>79</sup> On the other hand, for Levinas, the givenness of the *face* is in the appeal "don't kill me," wherein the *face* of the other accuses me and call me to responsibility.

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<sup>72</sup>ibid, 225

<sup>73</sup>ibid

<sup>74</sup>ibid

<sup>75</sup>ibid

<sup>76</sup>See The Face of the Other and the Trace of God, 225. The italicized words are as in the original. Note that the point of convergence and divergence in Levinas and Marion analyzes of the face as been played out here is later developed in In Excess, particularly in chapter five.

<sup>77</sup> The Face of the Other and the Trace of God, 226

<sup>78</sup> Marion, In Excess, 119

<sup>79</sup> Ibid

Levinas states, “the face is precisely that through which the exceptional event of the *facing* [*en-face*] is produced, which the façade of the building and of things can only imitate.”<sup>80</sup>

The strength of the concept of the *face* in both Marion and Levinas signals its relevance to how our perception of the other person should call us to responsibility. The *face* reflects what we have received from God. Hence Marion says of the *face*'s operation of the call, “what imposes its call must be defined not only as the other person of ethics (Levinas), but more radically as the *icon*.”<sup>81</sup> This plays out more clearly in Levinas' expression, “for if the *face* is *facing per se*, ... it is because it comes enigmatically from the Infinite and its immemorial past, and because this covenant between the poverty of the *face* and the Infinite is inscribed in the force with which my fellowman is imposed for my responsibility before all engagement on my part – the covenant between God and the pauper is inscribed within our brotherhood.”<sup>82</sup>

### **The Iconic Gaze and Galatian 3:28 Relational Injunctions**

It is not my intention in this section to either affirm or deny the claim that Marion's “emphasis on givenness implies a divine Giver and that his saturated phenomenon allows him to smuggle theological objects into phenomenology.”<sup>83</sup> It is rather an attempt at a possible application of his phenomenological efforts and contributions to an understanding of Galatian 3:28 in such a way that what a Christian love constitutes might be made clearer and more practicable from other perceptions of ‘love;’ that is, as Marion says, love “without measure.”<sup>84</sup>

### **The Injunctions of Galatians 3:28**

The contents of Galatian 3:28 resonate in Romans 10:12; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Colossians 3:11. In all these passages, the call is clearly that, in the practice of Christian love, segregation and the practice of relation based on delimiting categorization need be avoided; hence “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Levinas, *Entre-nous*, 57

<sup>81</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, 118

<sup>82</sup> Levinas, *Entre-nous*, 57

<sup>83</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, ix-x

<sup>84</sup> *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 10

<sup>85</sup> Galatian 3:28

Jesus' demand of love from Christians is a demand of a love unconditioned by the lover's intent. A reverse of this kind of love is a rejection or an unloving act towards a person, arising from what one constitutes that other person to be. What the injunction demands of Christians is to go beyond what one constitutes the other person to be. In this respect, what I see that looks at me as male, female, slave, freeborn, etc, should not be the determinant basis for my action. When I look at the other and see a Jew, a Gentile, a Slave, a freeborn, male or female, etc, the verse under examination would tend to say that I am being held down by categories that do not exist in the kind of loving that Jesus requires of Christians.

The above analysis syncs well with Marion's concept of an iconic gaze. Beginning with the idea of the *face* in Marion's work which presents, attractively, what I ought not to see of the other person, the reduction of the other to color, status, etc, express what I impose or project on the other. When I look at the other person and see Jew, Gentile, slave or freeman/woman, I have constituted the *face* of that other to a Jew or Gentile, etc, and thereby do violence to his/her person. How can a Christian avoid this 'violence' to the other and in place of such bracketing, love the other person in the manner of God's love to us and in the order directed by Christ? In an attempt to address this question more concretely, this paper shall now present Marion's iconic gaze as a hermeneutical tool to understanding the demand of Christ that Christians should love without restrictions. The essence of the demand is to bring the Christian to a full communion with God.

### **The Face as an "Icon" Addressing a Call'**

As stated earlier in this paper, Marion had explained that certain phenomena are "saturated" or are in "excess" of intuition. Among those phenomena he called saturated, "where the excess of intuition over signification censures the constitution of an object and more radically, the visibility of a unified and defined spectacle,"<sup>86</sup> is the *face*. He singles the *face* as an "*icon* addressing a call."<sup>87</sup>

The *face*, as a phenomenon renders possible an understanding that allows for a glimpse at proceeding in the direction of being a better Christian who ought to love beyond binary categorization. It provides a tangential point from which God's love for the world could be made to elicit a similar response from us for others.

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<sup>86</sup> Marion, In Excess, 119

<sup>87</sup> *ibid*

God's mode of loving can be a paradigm for the way we ought to express love because, as Marion says, "God loves like we love, with the same love as us."<sup>88</sup>

The call to which the *face* as an icon addresses, envisages me even though it remains invisible. In envisaging me and expressing infinity of meaning, "what the *face* says remains, in the best of cases, an approximation of what is expressed there"<sup>89</sup> In other words, there is a depth of the other, which remains unfathomed and which must remain un-constituted by me. Considered in the mold of an *icon*, the *face* of the other traverses "the depth that surfaces in the visibility of the *face*."<sup>90</sup> This translates into an avoidance of reducing the other to one's own categories.

The task of not reducing the other to one's renditions is a tough one, because the other person is often constituted by the one relating with him/her. It is in such instance that the idea of what is seen is regarded and related to as Jew, Gentile, Slave, freeman/woman, etc. What the call to love beyond such categories entails therefore, would be to contemplate the *face* of the other as an *icon*, whereby I see the "visible in the very manner by which the invisible that imparts itself therein envisages the visible."<sup>91</sup>

The above manner of understanding the *face* in relation to the other does not permit, in any way, a bracketing that will facilitate demarcation, segregation or whatsoever impedes a love beyond conditions. Marion says, in respect of this and in reference to St. Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:18, "we all, with face unveiled and revealed [*anakekalummeno prosopo*], serving as optical mirror to reflect [*katoptrizomenoi*] the glory of the Lord, we are transformed in and according to his icon [*eikonia*], passing from glory to glory, according to the spirit of the Lord."<sup>92</sup> Thus, "as opposed to the *idol* that is offered in an invisible mirror... here, our gaze becomes the optical mirror of that at which it looks only by finding itself more radically looked at."<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 221

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 120

<sup>90</sup> Marion, *God Without Being*, 21

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

<sup>92</sup> *ibid*

<sup>93</sup> *ibid*, 22

It would seem then, that since one cannot truly envisage the other without a pretension to absolute knowledge, the bottom line of conditional love is often from what we constitute of the other. Such expression of love as arose from some form of 'pretentious knowledge is also bound to falter, because such knowledge "belongs to the domain of the idol."<sup>94</sup> However, since the *icon* has a theological status from which point "the reference of the Christ to the Father" is established,<sup>95</sup> one may safely say that the *icon* gives us a reference point of contact between the visible and the invisible, that is, a contact between the visible world and the invisible God. Whereas this inference is justified, the *face* of the other becomes a contact point through which God is experienced in the other person.

What the *icon as face* does, therefore, is to unbalance "human sight in order to engulf it in infinite depth, marks such an advance of God that even in times of the worst distress indifference cannot ruin it. For, to give itself to be seen, the icon needs only itself. This is why it indeed can demand, patiently, that one receives its abandon."<sup>96</sup>

Ultimately, an *iconic* rendering of Galatian 3:28 hermeneutics will amount to an understanding of love in which we give or abandon ourselves to that which is given to us and towards that which advances towards us.

### **In Christ there is no Jew or Greek**

An upholding of social conditions and political/cultural identifiers in interpersonal relationship, which tends to be conventional to modern society in which the Christian is not insulated, implies a relationship saturated by contingencies. The contrary will be the ideal to which Marion and the call in Galatian 3:28 subscribes. In other words, an iconic gaze in connection with what goes into an encounter between me and the other must neither be constituted by what I 'see' of the other person nor be predicated by accidents of birth, social or political conditions. Everyone is entitled to the same right and privileges. Thus to Albert Barnes,<sup>97</sup> the verse under consideration must be understood in its context and relevance.

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<sup>94</sup> *ibid*, 23

<sup>95</sup> *ibid*

<sup>96</sup> *ibid*, 24

<sup>97</sup> Albert Barnes, *II Corinthians and Galatians: Notes on the New Testament, Explanatory and Practical*, Edited by Robert Frew (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1949).

To him, the meaning of 'there is neither Jew or Greek' connotes, "that whatever was the birth, or rank, or nation, or color, or complexion, all under the gospel were on a level... all are entitled to the same privileges. There is no favoritism on account of birth, beauty, or blood... all are admitted to the same privileges as children of God."<sup>98</sup>

The negation of social, biological and cultural *cum* political contingencies does not necessarily deny variance in opportunities and disposition reflective of social and economic status; such that, 'there is neither Jew or Gentile' in the definition of membership in Christianity does not mean a denial of social stratification, civil distinctions or biological differences between sexes. It does however mean that, Christianity does not admit the one to favor because he is free, or exclude the other because he is a slave. Nor, when they are admitted to favor, does it give the one a right to lord it over the other, or to feel that he is of any more value in the eye of the redeemer. The essential idea is, that they are on a level, and that they are admitted to the favor of God without respect to their external condition in society.<sup>99</sup>

An iconic gaze, like that of the father of the prodigal son in Luke's gospel (also cited by Marion),<sup>100</sup> seems to get at what is going on above. The call to live beyond the confines of binary dictates in relating in love does not remove in practice the existence of such reality. For example, the passage being considered (Galatians 3:28) doesn't seem to be making a case for cultural or political dissolution, it does not even seem to deny that there are biological distinctions between male and female, nevertheless it does speak to demeaning categorizations that play out in the interpretations which breed disaffections and devalue the other person. To Barnes, 'there is neither male nor female' connotes, "neither the male nor the female has any peculiar advantages for salvation. There are no favors shown on account of sex. Both sexes are, in this respect, on a level."<sup>101</sup> In fact, Barnes goes further to state that the passage has significant meaning for Christianity "elevates the female sex to an equality with the male, on the most important of all interests."<sup>102</sup> This concept of love in the Christian sense seems to have been lost, else, why does various monumental violent expressions of lack of love characterize many Christian dominated countries?

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<sup>98</sup> Barnes, II Corinthians and Galatians, 353

<sup>99</sup> *ibid*

<sup>100</sup> See Page 15 above and Marion, *God Without Being*, 65f.

<sup>101</sup> Barnes, II Corinthians and Galatians, 354

<sup>102</sup> *ibid*

One consequence of a loss of the concept of love, like in any other instance of not being able to give what one does not possess, is the fact that the loss of the concept of love is the loss of what it means to love. As Marion notes, “without a concept, each time we pronounce the word ‘love’ or reel off ‘words of love’ we literally no longer know what we are saying, and in fact, we say nothing.”<sup>103</sup> For Barnes, the implication of living according to the injunction of the passage being considered, for the church of God, is oneness, irrespective of “the complexities, the country, the habits or the rank of its members.”<sup>104</sup> The expected outcome of such expression of love for the other is not lost on Barnes who notes, “What an influence would be excited in the breaking up of the distinctions of rank and caste among men; what an effect in abolishing the prejudice on account of colour and country, if this were universally believed and felt!”<sup>105</sup> A practical way to address this issue is to attempt to go beyond barriers that potentially ‘arrests our human gaze and bounces it back to us’ so as to move towards the ‘*icon* that gives itself to be seen’ and makes me ‘hear [understand] its call.’<sup>106</sup>

## Conclusion

A key formula in Marion’s phenomenology is “as much reduction, as much givenness” where givenness is that which shows itself outside preconceived antecedents. As argued above, what gives itself is without pre-condition on the part of the beholder. It is free from conditions and ascriptions, free from all constitutive limitations such as categorization of a fellow human being as slave, freed, Greek, Jew, male and female. In Christ there is no such classification (Galatian 3:28). What is key in a relationship is love, such as that which characterizes the relationship of Jesus with the Father in which the former is the *icon* of the latter or between the prodigal son and the father. We are encouraged by Marion’s treatment of love, to love as God loves, and this is only possible where we do not allow our measure of the other to “arrest our human gaze and bounce it back to us.”

The scenario that makes the response of Pope Francis on whether he approves of homosexuality, to go viral on the media in 2013, is not an isolated case of stigmatization of people.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 4

<sup>104</sup> Barnes, *II Corinthians and Galatian*, 355

<sup>105</sup> *ibid*

<sup>106</sup> Marion, *In Excess*, 119

<sup>107</sup> A report of this incident is found in <http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/some-catholic-leaders-need-follow-pope-francis-lead>. A highlight of the report reads, according to the Pope: “A person once

Classifications of people in molds that are derogatory or in that which confine people to being looked down upon abound in our modern society. This paper believes that an understanding of human interpersonal relationship that debases persons cannot represent the mind of God who loves us first. There is therefore a need to move in the direction of God's way of loving. The injunction of Jesus Christ that Christians should love the other person irrespective of any kind of restriction finds expression in Paul's letter to Galatian 3:28 and serves as a model in advancing towards God's way of loving. For Marion, "God loves like we love, with the same love as us."<sup>108</sup> If the practice of Christianity is to impact positively on the society in which we live, and we are to be "perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect,"<sup>109</sup> we must wonder, like Pope Francis, at 'what God sees when God looks at people.' We must also try to see what God sees when God looks at people and love them the way God would love them. It is thus argued in this paper that the iconic gaze conceived by Marion, provides a good platform to embark on a hermeneutic that facilitates seeing the other in the way God would. Since the *icon* establishes the relation between the divine and the human, an iconic gaze will help facilitate actualizing our Christian practice where there is neither Jew, Gentile, slave, free, male nor female. Where considered otherwise, the call to go beyond restricted and limited conception of the other will presuppose a 'starting with the *idol* where the aim no longer progresses, but returns upon itself, reflects itself, and by this reflex, abandons as unbearable to live the invisible.'<sup>110</sup>

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asked me in a provocative manner if I approved of homosexuality," "I replied with another question. Tell me: when God looks at a gay person, does he endorse the existence of this person with love, or reject and condemn this person? We must always consider the person." "If someone is gay and he searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge?" he told reporters on the papal plane after World Youth Day in Brazil.

<sup>108</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 221

<sup>109</sup> Matthew 5:48

<sup>110</sup> Marion, *God Without Being*, 26

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