**Introduction**

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The promise of phenomenology for scriptural studies and theology is immense. Classical phenomenology – for instance, in the works of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger – provides an intellectual point of origin for recent proponents of “the theological turn” in phenomenology.[[1]](#endnote-1) Examples of this are found in Jean-Luc Marion’s work on “saturation,” Jean-Louis Chrétien’s writing on “the call and response,” and Jean-Yves Lacoste’s work on “liturgy.”[[2]](#endnote-2)  Yet, where does the “theological turn” lead? Has phenomenology been colonized by Christianity? Can theology, scriptural studies, and philosophy engage in a truly dialectical exchange? Will some as-yet-undisclosed phenomenon have radical implications for theology, biblical studies, phenomenology, religious faith, and the greater academy?

While the enduring philosophical implications of the theological turn remain to be seen in full, a “theological turn” toward Scripture in particular is crucially important for the philosophical tradition of phemenology. After all, how can phenomenology analyze theological phenomena drawn out of Judeo-Christian traditions without also examining the canonical texts that animate, determine, and underlie those traditions?

The essays gathered in this Special Issue on Phenomenology and Scripture reveal a number of important practical considerations for a phenomenological approach to Scripture. First, because the phenomenological method is drawn from concrete analyses, a phenomenology of “Scripture” has the potential to introduce new methodological considerations into phenomenology. This is why Kevin Hart examines a mode of “reduction” intrinsic to Scripture, whereas Christopher Hackett proposes an eschatological mode of phenomenology drawn from a theology of revelation.

Second, because phenomenology must adapt its method to treat scripture, the methodological insights of past phenomenologists can be re-appraised. We find this approach in Crina Gschwandtner’s examination of Michel Henry’s notion of “phenomenality” – especially as it relates to Henry’s analysis of Christianity. Also, Adam Wells investigates Eugen Fink’s idea of “ontological experience” in order to assess the broader goals of a phenomenology.

Third, inasmuch as phenomenology strives to analyze phenomena as they give themselves – i.e., without imposing any pre-conditions on the truth, value, or objectivity of phenomena – a phenomenological approach to Scripture has the potential to either avoid or overcome certain methodological limitations found in current modes of biblical studies. Christopher Hackett treats revelation as an event whose significance cannot be entirely grasped by scientific methods drawn exclusively from the natural world. With this move, Hackett opens up new avenues for conversation between scholars in biblical studies and those in Continental Philosophy.

Fourth, the whole endeavor of “the theological turn” raises important questions about the secularity of phenomenology: is something lost in crossing the boundary between theology and philosophy? Jason Smick argues that secular philosophy is a tradition, in and of itself, that should not be casually abandoned by those thinkers in “the theological turn.” Also, Randy Friedman re-visits the relationship between Emmanuel Levinas’s Jewish moral reasoning and his philosophical ethics; Friedman finds that Levinas’s relationship with both Martin Buber and Edmund Husserl is more complicated than recent scholarship has settled upon.

The goal of this Special Issue on Phenomenology and Scripture is to explore how phenomenology might meaningfully engage Scripture as a phenomenon – and not simply as a methodological curiosity. There are many possibilities with the intersection of phenomenology, broadly speaking, and Scripture/revelation, broadly speaking. In our collaborative endeavors, we want to advance the work accomplished by “the theological turn” in phenomenology through turning toward the traditionally sacred texts of Judaism and Christianity while simultaneously remaining critical about the nature and implications of that turn.

1. For more on the “theological turn,” see Dominique Janicaud et al., *Phenomenology and the Theological Turn: The French Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Barraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002); Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, trans. Anne E. Davenport (New York: Fordham university Press, 2004); and Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute*, trans. Mark Raftery-Skehan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004).

   [↑](#endnote-ref-2)