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## The Problem of Having both a Body and a Name in the Work of Jean-Luc Marion: Names, Fathers and the Hopeful Possibilities of a Queer Phenomenology

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# The problem of having both a body and a name in the work of Jean-Luc Marion: Names, fathers and the hopeful possibilities of a queer phenomenology

## Abstract

In this essay, and following upon both Jacques Lacan's and Jacques Derrida's personal struggles with fatherhood and the naming of their children, I take up what I consider to be Jean-Luc Marion's failure to deal with the embodiment of fatherhood through an examination of patriarchal signification, or, specifically, the naming of one's children after the father—at least insofar as Marion's brief analysis of this symbolic act points toward his failure to think through the various potential *and* lived embodiments of the father. I aim to illuminate how his efforts to continue this naming of the child with the father's name speak more directly to an idealized ('theologized') vision of our world that need not be serviced, indeed, which we would benefit from not utilizing at all. I wish, in an autobiographical-phenomenological response to Marion, to point to *other* names, *other* relationships and *other* ways of perceiving how one might be situated within our world—what I follow Sara Ahmed in calling 'queer' ways in which a phenomenological account of the subject's identity is not a pretext for perpetuating a quasi-theological, patriarchal agenda.

## Keywords

Jean-Luc Marion, phenomenology, queer, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan

## Introduction

It has been noted that Jacques Lacan's articulation of his theory regarding the 'Name of the Father' perhaps stems directly from his inability to lend his name to a daughter born of a woman who was not his legally recognized wife.<sup>1</sup> After all, 'It is in the *name of the father* that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law'.<sup>2</sup> This 'absurd discrepancy' between 'the legal order' and 'everyday reality' is no doubt a theoretical paradox worthy of some reflection, though whether or not such a paradox should have been his focus instead of the actual life of the living child was seemingly, in many ways, a less significant question. Less significant to some perhaps, to focus on the actual person of the child, as well as the actual parenting of the father, is, in many ways, the purpose of my investigation in the present article and one that highlights, I feel, the often difficult relationship between the theoretical and the autobiographical. Hence I will introduce the major theme of this essay, and as it will be pursued through some of its contemporary manifestations, mainly in what follows in the work of the contemporary phenomenologist and theologian Jean-Luc Marion: The 'Name of the Father' contrasted with the care given (or at times

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<sup>1</sup> Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan: Outline of a Life, History of a System of Thought* (trans. Barbara Bray, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 163.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Lacan, 'Function and Field of Speech and Language', *Écrits: A Selection* (trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: W.W Norton, 1977), p. 67. See also the recent translation *On the Names-of-the-Father* (trans. Bruce Fink, Cambridge: Polity, 2013).

*avoided*) by the father, and specifically as such a tension continues to affect the manner in which male philosophers, psychoanalysts and theologians continue to speculate on being a—or perhaps better, *the*—‘father’. The fact that God has most typically in the west been invoked as ‘Father’ certainly complicates our conceptualizations a good deal more, but this fact also underscores the importance of detailing just how divergent from lived reality our speculations on the ‘Father’ often become.

To continue for a moment with the example of Lacan, though essentially to illuminate the path I wish to take elsewhere, it is doubly interesting that Lacan rarely (or ‘never’ according to some) spoke of his parents or family origins.<sup>3</sup> He would hardly even speak of his own ‘legitimate’ children, opting instead to shower his attention upon his youngest child, Judith, born ‘out of wedlock’ to him by Sylvia Bataille and prompting a divorce from his then wife Marie Louise.<sup>4</sup> As for this youngest child, however, as Elisabeth Roudinesco has put it in her biography of Lacan,

Judith returned her father’s devotion. She could never see him except through the eyes of a filial piety that soon became hagiographical. For her he was a living god of unshakable character and flawless magnanimity, forever being betrayed by unworthy disciples but always valiantly getting the better of those rash enough to oppose him. And Lacan encouraged a worship that satisfied his deepest desires.<sup>5</sup>

Though this may be nothing new to the many Lacanians who likewise revered their ‘master’ as a ‘god’ of sorts, Roudinesco, for one, recognizes the image of the jealous father *as* deity, a link utilized quite frequently within a western monotheistic landscape. Lacan, too, it would seem, had his own ‘chosen ones’ and their declared favoritism would be more than a scandal to his family. The uncomfortable distance which such favoritism for this ‘illegitimate’ child placed between Lacan and his other children was, for these children at least, unbearable.<sup>6</sup> Lacan’s cold stance with regard to his ‘other’ children continued to invade their every encounter, including this brief, but chilling and indicative moment:

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<sup>3</sup> Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, p. 242.

<sup>4</sup> Sylvia Bataille was also the wife of the author Georges Bataille, whose relationship to his own father merits a closer inspection, one that I am unable to treat in this context. See the account given in Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography* (trans. Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson, London: Verso, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, p. 185.

<sup>6</sup> ‘But such favoritism had its effects on the children of his first marriage, especially on Thibaut and Sibylle. They were unhappy at not being part of their father’s life, and the only thing they could take pride in was bearing his name. Judith on the other hand, though she knew she was the favorite, suffered because she had not been made legitimate, and was afraid of being called a “bastard”. All this gave rise to a growing rivalry between the two families’. Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, p. 185.

One Thursday Thibaut and Sibylle spent the afternoon [...] in the *Jardin d'acclimatation* (zoo). On their way home they saw a car stop at a pedestrian crossing. They immediately recognized their father, seated behind the wheel. A woman was sitting beside him, and there was a little girl in the backseat. Thibaut and Sibylle ran toward Lacan calling out “Dad! Dad!” Lacan glanced at them in surprise, then looked away as if he hadn’t seen them, started up the car, and vanished into the traffic. This was the Lacan children’s first “meeting” with Sylvia and Judith. When they told Malou about their misadventure she answered sharply that Lacan had obviously neither seen nor heard them. She was trying to excuse his behavior—the behavior of a father whom she wanted to go on living up to the image she had made of him.<sup>7</sup>

It is sheer speculation of course as to what truly constituted Lacan’s notion of being a ‘good father’, and my introducing such a theme becomes—at a certain point—grist for a preemptive dismissal of the arguments that will follow. There were undoubtedly various factors involved in such a ‘fatherly’ response to his increasingly estranged children—a patriarchal French culture, professorial expectations, his own desire to be a ‘master’ in the field of psychology—and many more factors undoubtedly completely unknown to us. There is also, however, something of a certain ‘intellectual legacy’ of fatherhood and of the mastery associated with being the ‘father’ or ‘master’ of a scholarly field (e.g. psychoanalytic thought, deconstruction, phenomenology) that, I would argue, does permeate our understanding of their otherwise apparently ‘purely theoretical’ thoughts. The failure to see such a connection, I contend, is what not only condones but also perpetuates the very heightened, albeit undisclosed, tensions present in the life one lives as a father, and also as a man, and the philosophical (and even theological) thoughts one suggests in their writing. Though I am only at this point gesturing toward such a tension, I want to yet linger here a moment longer before moving closer to my intended point of analysis in the work of Marion. At this point, and with Lacan as exemplar, I simply wish to illustrate the casual proximity between being the father, a master and a deity that has routinely clouded the French intellectual legacy with which we still work.

We might consider in this vein as well the proximity which both Lacan and another French thinker, Jacques Derrida. In his recent biography of Derrida, Benoît Peeters chronicles Derrida’s longtime affair with Sylviane Agacinski, with whom Derrida also fathered an ‘illegitimate’ child. As Peeters unfolds the dramatic details of Derrida’s son’s birth: ‘Apparently, Derrida saw Daniel at least once, shortly after his birth. But he did all he could to keep the birth of his third son secret, especially from his mother, his brother, and his sister’.<sup>8</sup> In this secretive state of affairs, Derrida rode the tension

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<sup>7</sup> Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, p. 180-1.

<sup>8</sup> Benoît Peeters, *Derrida: A Biography* (trans. Andrew Brown, Cambridge: Polity, 2013), p. 357.

between actually fathering a son and *being* a father to his son, something that entered his philosophical speculations at several points throughout his life, though often in obscure or indirect ways. Though Derrida had developed a good share of his own philosophical critique through exposing the connections between a philosopher's private life and their more theoretical writings, he was often loathe to present such connections on his own life in his work.<sup>9</sup>

As Derrida described being a father to Elisabeth Roudinesco—the same person who chronicled Lacan's life for us above—for example, and leaving out his own personal complications of actually *being a father* to his living children, he said

Identifying a genitor is not the same as designating a father. The genitor is not the father! The father is someone who *recognizes* his child; the mother recognizes her child. And not only in a legal sense. The obscurity of the question lies entirely in this 'experience' that is so hastily called 'recognition'. Beyond or on this side of law, its modalities can be diverse, complex, convoluted; they can spread, become stabilized or destabilized in the course of a history whose end is never determinable. It is this 'experience' that will give rise to a very complex interweaving of symbolic possibilities – and that will found a bond (always more or less stable or fragile, never assured) between the 'moment of the genitor' and the 'symbolic moment'.<sup>10</sup>

Though Lacan would develop a notion of the 'Name-of-the-father' that would yet allow him to keep a certain personal distance from his lectures and writings, Derrida, though keeping a similar, formal distance, would also introduce a possible element of self-criticism into the semi-public eye, though not fully daring to enunciate such criticisms openly with regard to himself and his life choices and familial situations. He saw that the father was not simply a biological role, but one involving the recognition of the child, something he himself apparently struggled to do in his personal life.

In terms that would echo throughout his oeuvre with a powerful resonance, Derrida spoke of *his* child, and his desire for his child, as that which was 'desirable' but also 'impossible':

Jacques said that he felt paralysed, unable to face a child even though he had dreamed of it as an event both desirable and impossible. His bond with Marguerite was, in his view, indestructible, and paternity was a matter of too much significance for him to agree to it in a half-hearted way.

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<sup>9</sup> As evidence of this claim, one need only view Amy Ziering and Kirby Dick's documentary *Derrida* (2004), which demonstrates both his reticence to disclose details of his private, personal life alongside his desire to know the sex lives of the great philosophers. It is within such a tension as this that we begin to detect something of his, what I will call, unraveling of the distance between his personal and philosophical lives.

<sup>10</sup> Qtd. in Peeters, *Derrida*, p. 357.

He let Sylviane decide for herself, but assured her that he would accept whatever decision she came to.<sup>11</sup>

We are dealt here with the full weight of responsibility and recognition, but also of making choices or of letting others make them for us. The incredible interpretations that could be spun from such insights, not only within Derrida's autobiographical writings in *The Post Card*—which stem at least in part from a series of letters or exchanges between himself and Sylviane,<sup>12</sup> but also within his construal of the 'impossible possible' or the possibility of the impossible, as well as the indestructible nature of deconstructionism itself, its foundations, or, I might add (as an apparently whimsical aside, but also therefore with absolute seriousness), its *paternity*—seem to abound from suggestions such as these. From a theological viewpoint alone, it would be very interesting to discuss Derrida's conceptualization of the divine as the 'possible-impossible' and his own feelings of the possibility-impossibility of fatherhood—all contrasted with the historical legacy of seeing God as a 'Father' and with potentially seeing one's father *as* God.<sup>13</sup> Could an 'atheist'—at least from this perspective—be someone who simply has no father?<sup>14</sup>

There is no doubt that we are dealing here with God, a certain conceptualization of 'the father', the divide between the legitimate and the illegitimate, and the name, given *by* the father *to* the child, as it was once given *to* the father and who tries to bear it as best he can, eventually passing it along to his progeny, though perhaps failing to do so as well and thus losing one's faith, losing perhaps even one's name. For both Lacan and Derrida, these were painful personal topics. We can imagine—even if we do not share—Derrida's pain when, as Peeters tells us, he first learned of the decision of his son Pierre to publish his first book under the name of Pierre Alféri instead of Pierre Derrida, a decision which the father could not understand, and which he saw as 'almost a form of denial' of his heritage, of his actually being Pierre's father. Whether Derrida felt such tiny betrayals from his 'illegitimate' son's actions is

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<sup>11</sup> Peeters, *Derrida*, p. 356.

<sup>12</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* (trans. Alan Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>13</sup> As Peeters relates, it was in an interview with Maurizio Ferraris that Derrida remarked: '[T]here is always an inadequacy in the very idea of paternity: [...] one can sign neither a child nor a work. Being a father means having the extremely joyful and painful experience of the fact that one is not the father. [...] Paternity is neither a state nor a property'. Qtd. in Peeters, *Derrida*, p. 406-7. On Derrida's views in conjunction with any theological resonance they might have, see John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> I am playing here, of course, on Derrida's own comments on his 'rightly passing for an atheist', as well as his commitment to being 'the last of the Jews', a 'secret Jew' and a self-proclaimed 'marrano'. See, for example, Jacques Derrida, 'Abraham, the Other', *Judeities: Questions for Jacques Derrida* (eds. Bergo, Bettina, Joseph Cohen and Raphael Zagury-Orly, trans. Bettina Bergo and Michael B. Smith, New York: Fordham University Press, 2007).

unknown to us; whether he would have even cared about, or perhaps even ‘taken pride’ in, this ‘other’ son’s use of his own name is also unknown. Peeters suspects such a backstory is what lingers in Derrida’s ruminations in his book *Passions* upon the giving of one’s name to something that one desires (‘narcissistically’) to possess, but also to lose oneself in:

Suppose that X, something or someone (a trace, a work, an institution, a child) bears your name, in other words your title. A naïve translation or a common fantasy: you have given your name to X, so everything that belongs to X, directly or by a circuitous route, in a straight or an oblique line, belongs to *you*, like a surplus for your narcissism. [...] Conversely, suppose that X does not want your name or your title; suppose that, for one reason or another, X frees himself from it and chooses another name, effecting a sort of repeated weaning from the originary weaning; then your narcissism, doubly wounded, will *ipso facto* find itself all the more enriched: what bears, has borne, will bear your name appears sufficiently, powerful, creative, and autonomous to live alone and dispense radically with you and your name. He returns to your name, to the secret of your name, so as to be able to disappear *in your name*.<sup>15</sup>

Is this passage a sort of coming-to-terms with his son’s act? It seems to suggest as much, though obliquely. It certainly, however, might help to explain his ‘secret’ relationship to Judaism, a tradition that claimed him, that *named* him, and which he dispensed with without really dispensing with it either.<sup>16</sup>

At any rate, the name which the father Derrida tried to give to his son, and which lingers still within his own philosophical legacy, is a difficult one to trace, as it was also undoubtedly construed along a path that has been traversed over many centuries and by many men. What exactly Derrida sought for his son, *beyond* his own name, was also less than clear at times, an indicator, in many ways, of a certain obscurity wherein the father’s priorities are often made to lie—within vague gestures, or names given without the giving of one’s self. It is precisely against such an obscuring of relations that we must continue to press against this subtle, but pervasive notion of fatherhood, probing deeper into the connections between the father, fatherhood, God and the many subtle (‘secret’) relations bound up within these names.

## **The legacy of fatherhood in the phenomenology of Jean-Luc Marion**

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<sup>15</sup> Qtd. in Peeters, *Derrida*, p. 407.

<sup>16</sup> See, among others, the commentary on Derrida and religious belief offered by Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*.

John Caputo has offered a critique of the contemporary French phenomenologist Jean-Luc Marion that runs essentially along these lines: the bodies that Marion attempts to depict in his work are glorious, ethereal bodies, not the actual, lived bodies we inhabit on an everyday basis.<sup>17</sup> They are ‘light’, ephemeral and not really an account at all of the embodied beings that we truly are. The autobiographical has been torn away from the phenomenological and it is time that we learn to take it more seriously. To my mind such a critique as Caputo registers shares in Giorgio Agamben’s parallel efforts to demonstrate how our historical-theological talk about glorious, resurrected bodies is likewise little more than an ineffectual attempt to talk about our lived bodies, one that is projected onto an idealized plane and which seeks to maintain its own invested interests rather than to take up the lived bodily realities in which we dwell.<sup>18</sup> My concern is with what such speculations that deviate from our lived reality are really up to, what theological positions they (consciously *or* unconsciously) seek to legitimate and how a critique of such viewpoints might possibly lead us in a more productive direction.

In what follows, and riding fast on the heels of both Lacan’s and Derrida’s struggles with fatherhood and the naming and raising of their children, I wish to take up Marion’s failure to deal with the embodiment of fatherhood through an examination of what may appear at first to be its opposite: the patriarchal act of signification, or, specifically, the naming of one’s children after the father—at least insofar as Marion’s brief analysis of this symbolic act might point toward what I will contemplate as his failure to think through the various potential *and* lived embodiments of the father. What I am aiming at in the end is to illuminate how his efforts to continue this naming of the child with the father’s name speak more directly to an idealized (even ‘*theologized*’) vision of our world that need not be serviced—indeed, which we would benefit from not utilizing at all. I wish then to point to *other* names, *other* relationships and *other* ways of perceiving how one might be situated within our world—what I will call ‘queer’ ways in which a phenomenological account of the subject’s identity is not a pretext for perpetuating a quasi-theological, patriarchal agenda.

The question Marion raises in his ‘magnum opus’ *Being Given* is certainly straight-forward enough: ‘Why does he [the father] give him [the apparently masculine child] a name?’<sup>19</sup> The father, we are told, should know of his paternity ‘from his own deeds, from his own wife, [from what he sees] in his house, in front of him, etc.’, but he has his doubts—at this point no more than abstract doubts to match an abstract father—as to whether or not this child is actually his.<sup>20</sup> Barring any actual context of a father in

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<sup>17</sup> These remarks were delivered as a lecture entitled ‘God Without Being, Life without Death, Bodies without Flesh: The Fate of all Flesh in Jean-Luc Marion’ at the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium, on 18 March 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Giorgio Agamben, ‘The Glorious Body’, *Nudities* (trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

<sup>19</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* (trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 300.

<sup>20</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, p. 300.



doubt, and reducing the particularities of any given father's lived experience of such situations, Marion aims for a general sensibility concerning the experience of being a father. 'These excellent reasons nevertheless suffer from a well-known weakness', as he puts it, though this is not apparently the fact that not all fathers have a 'wife', that not all children take the father's name or that not every birth has a discernible father figure (as in the case of lesbian households, for example). The weakness, for Marion, is rather that 'by definition, in fact on account of the temporal delay of birth's initial belatedness to conception, biological paternity remains without immediate and direct proof, always doubtful (and technologically it will become more and more so in the near future)'.<sup>21</sup>

Though I am not sure what future Marion envisages when he speculates that paternity tests might suddenly become more difficult to utilize, rather than, as current evidence points to, more common, efficient and reliable (or perhaps he is referring to artificial insemination, to which one can only speculate whether he would see this as a severe blow to the necessary act of paternal signification), his point seems to hinge on the father's ability to doubt his biological paternity, an inherent state of paternal anxiety, one might suggest. The core of his concern focuses on whether or not the father is convinced of his being the father—that is, convinced, I would suggest practically-speaking, of his own need *to be responsible* for the child in some sense—a situation that, by its very nature, implicates the very existence of language (and, hence, naming) itself. Marion does not draw a distinction between genitor and recognition of the child, as Derrida had done, but focuses solely on the name given to the child as that which bestows fatherhood.

The implication seems to be that the father becomes involved with the child not through raising the child *as* his child, but through an act of naming—as if such an act were enough in itself to convey the father's responsibility to the child, though it is a responsibility without having to actually engage the child, that is, not really an embodied responsibility at all. Though it is certainly the case that many 'fathers' are not actually the biological fathers of their children (e.g. through re-marriage, adoption, etc.), it is the process of performing the role of the father to a child, of taking up the responsibilities of the father as such, wherein one *becomes* the father, if it may be put that way. This is, however, *not* a condition of fatherhood that Marion seems eager to take up, and this is presumably why the language of responsibility and of recognition is not one that he chooses in this context. What intrigues me at this point is what he *does* choose to take up, and exactly *how* he chooses to discuss it, especially as his approach contains an overtly theological perspective.

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<sup>21</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, p. 300. In his essay 'The Reason of the Gift', trans. Shane Mackinlay and Nicolas de Warren, *Givenness and God: Questions of Jean-Luc Marion*, eds. Ian Leask and Eoin Cassidy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), Marion goes on to speculate that the absent father is not only absent through the insecurity of not knowing if the child is truly theirs, but also because fathers 'remain united with the child only by taking leave—precisely so as then to pass on his help: as extroverted provider, hunter, warrior, or traveler; in short, as one who constantly returns, coming back to the hearth from which he must distance himself if he wants to maintain it. In order to live there, the father must be missing, and thus shine by his absence' (p. 119).

In many ways, his remarks should be read, I think, as an effort to determine the fundamental location of the father. What results from this seems to be nothing short of a certain paternal anxiety about whether or not the father can claim the child before him *as his own*—one that, I would suppose, will never go away because it does not enter into the domain of taking-responsibility for the child *as* a father (or simply parent) to the child. Another way to frame this, though one that may be beyond Marion's vision of such a relationship, is whether or not the father is entitled to claim this child—and perhaps this, I would suggest, is the real anxiety the father faces according to Marion: whether or not they have contributed enough to the birth of this child and therefore whether they are to have any stake in the child's coming into this world. But this is an anxiety unstated by Marion—indeed, it is one that remains completely foreign to Marion in this context, and for possible reasons that I will explore in a moment. In many ways, I would suggest that it is a possibility that *must* remain foreign to the vision of fatherhood that Marion describes, if such a notion of fatherhood is to be maintained throughout subsequent generations.

As we see in Marion's analysis, it is as if symbolic language itself were given to us in order to allow fathers to accept a responsibility they might otherwise flee from, or perhaps, following my reading, in order for fathers to lay claim over that which they are fundamentally anxious about—whether or not they have any stake in the identity of the child. Moreover, the child's sense of being 'received' (a point not insignificant in a book that tries to establish the ontological priority of *givenness*) is dependent upon the father's always anonymous donation: 'the father appears as the giver who is perfectly reduced to givenness'.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, it is an act of juridical recognition (the act of naming through language) that gives the child a sense of 'being received' by the father—which is apparently the more significant act either of the two (male-female) parents can bestow upon the child: 'The father becomes one, in all cases and not only in adoption, only by his decision to recognize, ask for, and claim as his own the foundling and natural child'.<sup>23</sup> Here, however, the sense of recognition seems to differ from Derrida's sense, as there is no responsibility implied within such a recognition—unless the courts perhaps would deem it so.

So, why does the father claim the child? Why give the child his name? As Marion seeks to establish, 'The child silently calls the father to call him with his name—with the name of the father, with the name that he does not have, which is not and never will be his own'.<sup>24</sup> Hence, we are faced with the

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<sup>22</sup> Marion, 'The Reason of the Gift', p. 120. As he continues, 'Fatherhood thus lays out, in fact and by right, the whole phenomenality of a gift reduced to pure givenness' (p. 121). It should be noted here, as Christina Gschwandtner has pointed out, 'Exceeding metaphysics through and because of the givenness of charity—this characterizes all of Marion's thought from his early writings on Descartes to his most recent statements about the erotic phenomena. And in the final count this is what Marion's work is all about: the generous givenness that pours itself out in abandon for the other [...]'. Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion: Exceeding Metaphysics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), p. 250.

<sup>23</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, p. 300.

<sup>24</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, p. 301.

unknown or ultimately unknowable father—it matters little which one—who yet names the child with his alienating claim made upon the child. Rather than steer such a discussion toward the many fathers *who in reality are unknown to their children*, not through their inability to name them (and as many such children do in fact bear the absent father's name), but through their literal absence, Marion tries to establish a phenomenological sketch of why such absences are inherent to the role of the father in the child's life—something which, practically speaking, can only appear as a most dangerous legitimization of a father's absence, perhaps indirectly justifying the choices and anxieties of many truly absent fathers. As he puts it in an earlier essay on the subject, 'To start with, the father is missing because he procreates in only a moment and, having become useless, withdraws immediately—in contrast to the mother, who remains, and in whom the child remains. The mother's immanence to the child stigmatizes the father's unfortunate transcendence'.<sup>25</sup> Besides introducing a troubling displacement of the burden of transcendence upon the mother's own immanence—a disturbing suggestion in many regards as it appears to blame the mother's closeness to the child for the father's absence, and that also has significant theological implications for understanding a 'distant' fatherly God—Marion likewise assumes the mother's desire to remain (and which is certainly not true of all mothers) as well as the father's apparent inability to 'remain' with the child (and which is not necessarily true of many father's experiences). With no link being made between 'remaining', responsibility and recognition, we are left to infer that the mother, who remains and recognizes her child *is* inherently also responsible for the child ('immanent'), while the father is forced (by nature as it were) to be absent, recognizing the child in name only and therefore not responsible in the same way as a mother ('transcendent'). This treatment of the father's relationship to the child is rife with theological implications, not least of which is the conceptualization of an absent (transcendent) God from our world.

Despite the fact that he does not clarify in this context what is meant exactly by 'remaining' with the child (i.e. is this the one who feeds the child, who changes the diapers, who rocks them gently to sleep, who wakes at night to hold them, etc.?), he does proceed in *Being Given* to elaborate upon the consequence of such an inherently 'missing' father:

The anonymity of the call (and of the child) neither contradicts nor interdicts paternity, but constitutes its terrain, stakes, and condition of possibility. The father will therefore be born into his own paternity to the extent that he responds to the child's anonymous call with a naming response. This nomination is laid out in a history: first, the father gives his own name (last

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<sup>25</sup> Marion, 'The Reason of the Gift', p. 119.

name), then the first name (Christian name), both borrowed; next he gives real identity, through word, speech, and language, then through the community, religion, “*Weltanschauung*,” etc..<sup>26</sup>

Central to the act of introducing the child to the social world around them, according to Marion, fathers provide a symbolic birth to the child, and therefore claim their right to name the child *with their name*, to offer the child a piece of the fundamentally alienating experience of entering language, that is, of entering our world. Rather than understand such acts as essential to the practices and maintenance of masculine domination—as Pierre Bourdieu has done, for example<sup>27</sup>—Marion seeks to further elucidate their universal applicability to all acts of naming, and to subsume such acts as phenomenologically ‘natural’ to a father’s experience:

[...] for as the father has no biological certainty of his paternity, the child has no immediate and direct proof of his filiation; he must accept it, on the faith of the father, following the symbolic argument of his being recognized by him. This is in fact translated by adopting the father’s name as collateral for his own adoption by the father. Therefore, the child bears—as a heavy burden and a tiresome yoke—a name that is not his. That name [...] comes upon him as a *fait accompli* always already done for and without him, indeed counter to him.<sup>28</sup>

Concerning this proper name given by the father—and which is received in ‘faith’, he tells us—it is, we are told, always ‘improper’ and ‘alienating’. These are merely the inherent characteristics of what the father brings through the anonymous names it has been given and which traverse his own body as a field of symbolically constituted tensions, and which he now brings to bear upon his child. Rather than describe such a state as the very fabric by which patriarchy constitutes itself, and *the* site of historical-theological speculations on the role of God the Father in our world, and therefore critique it as something not intrinsically ‘natural’ to the state of being a father, but rather as an unnecessary inscription made upon the body of the child, Marion, however, unfolds what I would argue constitutes the very powerful hold of the patriarchal father:

It matters little that I love or hate him, that I admire or condemn him, since in every case I can identify with myself only by referring myself to him. Before me, more within me than myself, this name calls me and thus calls me to him. My historicity is declared to the degree that I add

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<sup>26</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, p. 301.

<sup>27</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* (trans. Richard Nice, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

<sup>28</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, p. 302.

varying responses to the name's singular unique call, ranging from acceptance to refusal, adherence to forgetting. But this name that calls thus still remains strangely anonymous.<sup>29</sup>

Though Marion perhaps did not intend it, this sketch is, in my opinion, a fine and detailed explanation of patriarchal psychic inscription, of how one, almost unconsciously, enters into the power of patriarchy, and of how one is in fact named by it completely beyond one's will. It is as anonymous as it is directly linked to the Name-of-the-Father, which the children bear. It can be rejected or fought against, but its efforts are intended precisely to inscribe itself more definitively upon the subject the more one struggles against it. It is also a poignant and chilling description of what has gone wrong with certain western conceptions of God and their ability to turn people off to their 'powerful' hold upon humanity.

What Marion does not consider within this schema of fatherhood are those who reject such processes altogether, and who refuse to continue the legacy of the father's name in such a manner—selected feminists and atheists alike. Such sentiments, as I see it, actually remain foreign to his explication of naming the child, for the ability to live *otherwise* than this—in ways I will in a moment refer to as 'queer'—is almost wholly unknown to such fathers.

Theologically speaking, it is at this precise juncture within Marion's exposition that patriarchal power finds what may be its ultimate justification, one that obviously finds no room for the example of the mother. The call for a form of pure giving-in-excess—and without expectation of return—is what characterizes for him both the giving of the father and the giving of God, as father, *and* as a transcendent force that is also, we may presume, occasionally 'stigmatized' by the immanence of the mother who remains with us. The true recognition of transcendence, then, is at the cost of the immanent-mother—its symbolic opposite—who stigmatizes the 'unfortunate' transcendence that must go out, be absent and yet return to give life to all that remains. In his words,

The father appears without contest as he for whom I, as the child, can do nothing, as he to whom I can render nothing, as he whom I will allow to die alone. However, the neglect in which I must finally abandon him, regardless of what may happen and what my filial sentiments may be, has nothing to do with a bitter impotence or a harsh injustice. For, before all else, it marks the sole indisputable transcendence that all human life can and must recognize in its own immanence; with the result that if we ever have to name God with a name, it is very appropriate to call Him "Father"—and Him alone: "Call no one on earth your father, for you have only one Father, and He is in heaven" (Matthew 23:0).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, p. 302.

<sup>30</sup> Marion, 'The Reason of the Gift', p. 122.

Again offering as patriarchal stalwart to name what lies before him—though in this case, attempting to name God as a father names his child—Marion signals the necessary recognition of transcendence within the immanence that remains with us.<sup>31</sup> Yet this connection becomes highly problematic when he explicitly links fatherhood with the Christian God, and, while doing so, perpetuates the claims made by the absent father who is God, and who is liable to remain as absent as he is able to be.

Marion's presentation of fatherhood in relation to divine transcendence hence appears in many ways as a justification for the absentee and irresponsible father, an upholding of patriarchal normativity and its generational legitimacy, an unfair 'stigmatizing' of the mother's lived responsibility for her child and the presentation of traditional theological claims in the guise of a rigorous phenomenology that does not actually progress our theological reflection very far. The fact that his analysis of fatherhood and the naming of the child with the father's name are a paradigmatic example of his definition of 'givenness' makes this critique that much more problematic, in my eyes, as well as significant to note.

What Marion simply does not account for, among other things, are those persons who do not want to take part in this process of naming and absenteeism, who wish to live outside this scope of masculine domination and who seek another way toward understanding the giving of one's identity. He does not therefore take account of those who envision alternative theological viewpoints, or who see God beyond such limited characterizations. Rather than assume a given phenomena and consequently seek to legitimate it through a particular phenomenological exposition—and which has immediate religious undertones as the 'revealed' phenomena that is simply given to us, as Christiana Gschwandtner describes Marion's methodology<sup>32</sup>—perhaps we could proceed from the experience of the phenomena itself and let such experiences dictate altogether new terms. Would not such methods actually be a better form of phenomenological inquiry? Specifically, rather than have one's identity be given by an anonymous call that 'results directly from the alienation that it imposes', and that gives its name at the same moment as it

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<sup>31</sup> Such an act of naming (God) is the opposite of recognizing the (Derridean) inherent 'undecidability' of naming, something which sharply contrasts Marion's work with that of Caputo, for example. See John D. Caputo, 'Hospitality and the Trouble with God', *Phenomenologies of the Stranger: Between Hostility and Hospitality* (eds. Richard Kearney and Kascha Semonovitch, New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), pp. 83-97. I am here leaving to the side the related connection he assumes between giving and reason, which Marion unfolds as a process of the gift *alone* giving reason to itself: 'The gift gives reason, and gives it to reason itself; in other words, it renders to reason its full validity, because it gives itself reason, without any condition or exception' (Marion, 'The Reason of the Gift', p. 133). Beyond positing a very problematic relationship between a male (fatherly) patriarchy and the 'gift of reason', Marion also assures us of its sovereign power: 'In fact, the characteristic of a gift consists in its never being wrong and always being right (literally, having reason): it depends on no due or duty, hence it never appears owing or in debt' (p. 133). My contention throughout is that such a linkage of fatherhood, reason, givenness and sovereignty is also to be linked, for Marion, to God, the ultimate father who 'loves to perfection, without a fault, without an error, from beginning to end'. Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon* (trans. Stephen E. Lewis, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 222.

<sup>32</sup> Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Postmodern Apologetics? Arguments for God in Contemporary Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), pp. 120-1.

withdraws it and ‘says nothing besides a name’, we might benefit from another approach to understanding our relational identities, one that opens us up to the multiple configurations of fatherhood beyond its inscription in patriarchal norms.

My contention is that Marion, through averting our gaze to an abstraction and legitimation of certain given societal norms—for what else is the eternally anonymous father who becomes a god and who justifies patrilineal descent?—actually avoids having to contend with the phenomena that should most concern the relationship of parent to child, the one he neglects when he takes up the father as opposed to the mother, but also as established in the father himself: the body, or even the bodies, before him. As Gayle Salamon has put it, ‘Perhaps the most vital aspect of phenomenology is its insistence that the body is crucial for understanding subjectivity’.<sup>33</sup> Yet this is exactly what, I will contend—and as Caputo had already indicated to us—Marion neglects when he decides to speak to the manner in which we are called by the processes of naming.

### **Toward an embodied (‘queer’) phenomenology**

We would do well to recall at this point the words of Judith Butler in her early work on creating *Gender Trouble*: ‘The masculine linguistic position undergoes individuation and heterosexualization required by the founding prohibitions of the Symbolic law, the law of the Father. The incest taboo that bars the son from the mother and thereby instates the kinship relation between them is a law enacted “in the name of the Father”’.<sup>34</sup> The feminine in some sense, by this reading, has served for many years to disrupt this hegemonic account of symbolic structures, mainly as it is left out of them altogether—‘disrupt’ in Butler’s words, ‘stigmatize’ in Marion’s. The shift in perspective is subtle, but crucial. And, of course, Marion has no account to give—or simply *allow*—of the maternal claim made upon the child, no description of just how the mother ‘remains’ with the child while the father apparently does not.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps this is so because it is simply assumed, or perhaps because he assumes it poses no anxiety or doubt for the mother (and which is undoubtedly not true of a good many mother’s experiences).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Gayle Salamon, *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 44.

<sup>34</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 37.

<sup>35</sup> For an alternate account of the mother’s relationship to the child through her body, see, among others, Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (Margaret Waller, New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

<sup>36</sup> In general, such assumptions, I feel, pose a genuine problem to his phenomenological methods, a point that I am hoping to underscore in this essay. What he is pursuing, however, is consistent with what Gschwandtner has described as follows: ‘Marion does not explicitly argue for religious phenomena; rather he assumes these phenomena and allows them to appear through his analysis and phenomenological description’. Gschwandtner, *Postmodern Apologetics?*, p. 121.

What circulates on the periphery would seem to be the feminine, or if not simply the feminine, then at least what is ‘queer’ to the patriarchal inheritance. As Sara Ahmed describes it in the context of formulating a ‘queer phenomenology’, ‘The threat of queer is a “death threat”: *queer desires threaten to discontinue the father’s line*’.<sup>37</sup> What is ‘queer’ is a deviation from the ‘naturalized’ lines of descent, and despite such lines being a cultural construction for the privilege of a few.<sup>38</sup> What is ‘queer’ therefore is what will be opposed to Marion’s lines of patriarchal inscription.<sup>39</sup>

What I want to take a look at briefly in this section—though I will not be able to develop these intuitions here in any great depth—is the necessarily difficult work of realigning one’s orientation in social terms, the movement one can make in many ways, from gender to gender, from sexual to paternal, among others—a line of deviation from Marion’s normativity and from what arises within even *my* own experience of the body, *my* body, not an abstraction to a ‘father’s body’ even, but *my* body so particular that its experience must be listened to as much as one’s conscience. What such gestures point toward, contrary to the ethereal bodies and abstracted (and alienated) selves Marion deals with, is a ‘reinhabiting’ of one’s bodily being, ‘given that one’s body no longer extends the space or even the skin of the social’. As Ahmed continues, ‘These differences in how one directs desire, as well as how one is faced by others, can “move” us and hence affect even the most deeply ingrained patterns of relating to others’.<sup>40</sup>

What I am trying to sketch an introduction toward—and I do so happily acknowledging a host of feminist and queer theorists who have gone before me, but which have not yet apparently had an impact upon phenomenologically-minded theologians such as Marion—is a more productive look at embodiment that would involve a mixture of methodologies and a jettisoning of assumptions. What I want to develop is little more than what has *already been developed* within my own horizon of experience, and which, if critically reflected upon without any prior assumptions, becomes a methodology that is critically attentive to our tendencies to ‘idealize’ phenomenological accounts of our experiences. What I am arguing for is that there must be a self-critical methodology that allows us to examine our phenomenological descriptions, one that takes account of our individual, embodied lives and that does not seek to abstract (‘phenomenologically’ or otherwise) from them.<sup>41</sup> What I wish to gesture toward is also a call for the

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<sup>37</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 77, emphasis in the original.

<sup>38</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 85.

<sup>39</sup> For alternative accounts of kinship, as well as challenges to patriarchal lineages of naming, see Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (London: Routledge, 1993), and David Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>40</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 101.

<sup>41</sup> What one notes in this move is emphasized in Salamon’s use of Merleau-Ponty on the body, which, I would argue, provides a much more rigorous and full-bodied account of our embodiment than what Marion describes in this context. See Salamon, *Assuming a Body*.



necessity of a carefully attentive autobiographical element within our given phenomenological descriptions.

Hence, I want to make a preliminary confession, but one that has—through its very existence—a right, I feel, to critically address Marion’s claims: I have a (‘biological’, ‘legitimate’) son who does *not* have my last name, whose name was not given to him by an abstract, abstracted or (hopefully not) abstracting ‘father’. What I give to him through my attempts to ‘remain’ with him and not to transcend my relations with him is in fact what I ultimately give to him: a givenness that need not rely upon certain absences in order to establish its relations ‘to the child’. What I have discovered through this experience of parenting—*my* experience of parenting to *my* son—are a number of things that might be surprising to Marion, for my phenomenological experience has been quite different than the one he depicts concerning the paternity doubts suffered by, apparently, many a man—though, I confess, not by me, not once.

Firstly, I do not think it worthwhile to begin a discussion of parenting from the standpoint of a father’s questionable paternity, and not simply because such claims prove less than helpful in the contexts of adoption or same-sex marriages. And I will not begin either from the place of the mother who does not feel attached to her child despite giving birth to her child, nor from the experiences of those children separated from their mothers at birth, reunited after many years and yet utterly lacking in any sense of maternal bond with them. I could begin with examples such as these, and I believe that each poses a serious challenge to Marion’s supposed phenomenological account of fatherhood, yet I will begin elsewhere, with a place I consider to be more of a challenge phenomenologically speaking.

Rather, I begin from my experience as a parent, one that I feel Marion also gets wrong: I felt not like a father when I was naming—an experience I have not had, and frankly do not wish to have; rather, I felt like a parent *when I was parenting*, and thus responsible for my child, not their name—engaged in a form of recognition of my child that is connected to ‘remaining’ with my child and entering ‘fatherhood’ from such a place. These are the moments, for example, when I am solidly grounded in my child’s dependence upon me as the primary caregiver, and which had often resulted in people’s remarks, especially during the first years of his life, that I was ‘mothering’ him—that is, when I ‘remained’ with him when my wife was away at work or when I was the only one to watch over him for long periods of time. From my perspective—and despite its almost reductionistic simplicity—it was and is a simple exercise of recognizing myself as a father: to engage parenting the child as the primary caregiver means that you simply may not have to deal with any inherent feelings of alienation said to be inevitably connected to the father’s name. I knew I was my son’s father *because I acted like his father*, I performed being his father every day, at the park, in the bathroom, in the kitchen and on the sidewalk. What was given to my son was *me, not my name*; what I gave him was *my body*, not an abstracted self—not even the tempting abstraction of the life of a professor.

I recall, for example, the shock of certain parents when noting how our son moved fluidly between parents whenever his need arose, such as when he fell down while playing and sought comfort, his first choice of parent often reflecting whom he had spent more time with that particular day, and sometimes oscillating each day in turn. Such experiences are still relatively new to our era, as it is traditionally the mother who engages the child at this level of everyday needs, and I suspect some traditional retooling is much needed in Marion's language in this regard. I recall too my experiences of another form of 'alienation', that which I felt in relation to other men when I chose to be the primary parent, when I had to be in the kitchen cooking while the other men were free to move about the home, neglecting, I would say, their parental duties, which were mainly left to their wives. What I noticed in fact was that the closer I moved toward caring for my child, the further I would be from those other men whose primary orientation toward the world was one of, following Marion on this (as I believe he very accurately depicts this), a fundamental alienation from other men, from their fathers, from their children and even from their wives. The more I unreservedly offered myself and my body to my child, the less alienation would have to chance to enter into our relationship.

I recall too the shared sensibility between my feelings toward my child and other (mainly) mothers, who often commented that they had never heard a man say such things before about their child, and in a number of different contexts (e.g. such as when I confessed that I sometimes did not want my son to play with other kids on the playground because that meant he had to detach from me and his need for me at that moment, among others—and this feeling would of course linger despite my being perfectly fine with, indeed encouraging, his desire to go play with other children). Reflections such as these were ones that were, at times, easily shared with other women who had a basis to understand my feelings, but were nearly impossible for me to share with other men, who were often unable to absorb my sentiments.

What I find powerfully moving in this series of my own reflections is, as Ahmed puts it, 'Queer orientations are those that put within reach bodies that have been made unreachable by the lines of conventional genealogy'.<sup>42</sup> Paradoxically, as well, for me, this meant having to reframe my social bodily orientation in order to actually reach *my own* child—to break down the notion of fatherhood that had been *given* (in Marion's sense of the word) to me in order to parent my child without an accompanying sense of alienation. I had to work past a patriarchal notion of alienation in order to claim my child as my own—not through my bestowing a name or legacy upon him, or trying to possess him in any sense—but through my bodily activity in relation to him, playing games with him, caring for him, holding him, loving him. This re-alignment of bodily orientation, to be more specific, was nothing extra-ordinary; in fact, it was extremely 'ordinary' in many ways, and made up the stuff of going to supermarkets, playgrounds, running errands, etc. It was in the way in which these moments were structured as a relationship between the two

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<sup>42</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 107.

of us—the casual closeness of our bodies, our engaged looks at each other, the willingness to ‘waste’ time doing what matters to the child, etc.—that differed from the ways in which other fathers related to their children. This was a difference I felt then, and still feel now.

In this I find Ahmed’s words to be very true, and true of a place that reaches far beyond the space that Marion describes. Such a queering of relations: ‘[...] is not about the romance of being off line or the joy of radical politics (though it can be), but rather the everyday work of dealing with the perceptions of others, with the “straightening devices” and the violence that might follow when such perceptions congeal into social forms’.<sup>43</sup> Contrary to Marion’s offering of fatherhood as exemplary of the phenomenological notion of givenness, I would rather offer the example of parenting itself as the givenness we should be searching for, and as perhaps the most *non-romantic* romance one could undergo—the everydayness of wiping a nose, cleaning up a mess, feeding a screaming child or of putting one’s work to one side in order to play with toy cars once again. Such forms of giving oneself to one’s child are absent in Marion’s account, and, I suspect, for good reason: they are the basis of ‘remaining’ with the child, a task that many fathers simply do not embody and which Marion himself does not consider.

Rather than offer my experience as merely an exception to a norm, I offer it as a call for a political ‘disorientation’ from the fundamental alienation that Marion speaks of and which affects many fathers.<sup>44</sup> We can and do live in other ways than the one he depicts, and I see no reason to accept his account of fatherhood as either appealing or as phenomenological. But I should also clarify this statement: When I read Marion’s description of fatherhood and givenness, my problem with his account, then, is not that I do not recognize it in my own experience, or as my own experience; rather, I *do* recognize it, all-too-well—I simply reject it. His account of fatherhood is and remains that obstacle to genuine parenting that I have sought very hard in my life to overcome and which continues to alienate fathers from their children, fathers from other fathers (and mothers!), and fathers from themselves, as they seek to ‘make a name’ for themselves out in the world, but fail to make those relationships that are crucial to being a more fully responsible human being. In short, this is the problematic which I sense underlying a good many (very often patriarchal) philosophical and theological accounts of identity formation, and which do not have to continue to exist as such. Again, borrowing from Marion, but distancing myself from Marion’s linkages of terms, there is a certain *excess* within this *givenness*, but not necessarily one that Marion himself might recognize—it is an excess that we might rather do without.

## Conclusion

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<sup>43</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 107.

<sup>44</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 177.

What remains of the theological in all of this? How are we to take such reflections and challenges as ones that affect the ways in which we perform theological reflections? How are we to look at God as Father and not feel abandoned or alienated by his inherent ‘transcendence’ of our world and our lives? My answer at this point to all of these questions is that we have not yet truly begun to see what theology might look like once such considerations are taken more fully into account. We are still, indeed, a long way from discovering what theology is truly capable of providing humanity.

It is perhaps somewhat commonplace to hear of certain contextual theologians talk about the ways in which various historical understandings of God have been confused with a white, male, western perspective.<sup>45</sup> It is also somewhat common to hear of a woman’s conflation of her search for a husband with her desire for God.<sup>46</sup> What is sadly still rather uncommon is to hear a man admit his own desire to confuse *himself* with God, to illuminate the error of his thinking that *he* in some way is God. In all my years of taking theology classes—three masters degrees, a doctorate and all three Catholic canonical degrees—I never encountered a male professor who began to talk about sovereignty, transcendence, universality, abstraction, absence, alienation or a host of related terms with a confession that these terms were difficult to talk about or to define because he had trouble in discerning where these terms applied to God and where they applied to himself, *as* a man, as one taught to reflect the fundamental alienation that men *are* in very practical terms named by. Theology is utterly clouded with such overlaps and confusions, ones that are rarely understood for what they are and far less distinguished and renounced. Realistically, perhaps I have not heard such talk because most men do not have an alternative paradigm at hand to express such a divergence from these patriarchal norms. And theology, in many forms and in ways we have yet to fully uncover, continues to suffer as a result.

It is my contention in this essay that a more robust account of our alternative experiences as men, and in this case specifically as fathers, one that is phenomenologically more genuine to the alternative experiences of living relationships that are in fact possible, can yield new and productive ways through which to envision and engage those networks of relations (beyond gendered norms, beyond sexual norms) that we are already immersed in, but constantly seeking to transcend in many ways. It can also offer us completely new ways to perceive ourselves as theologians as well, and maybe then to find a variety of

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<sup>45</sup> One thinks here of such ‘contextual’ theologians as the many that occupy the spaces of feminist, liberation, black, latino/a, mujerista, queer and postcolonial theologies. The potential list of examples that could be cited here is so large as to be unwieldy.

<sup>46</sup> I am thinking here, in particular, of the recent memoirs such as Sarah Sentilles, *Breaking Up With God: A Love Story* (New York: Harper, 2011) and Lauren F. Winner, *Girl Meets God: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 2002).

‘contextual theologies’ as not that removed from us (mainly white) men after all.<sup>47</sup> I offer here therefore my all-too-brief suggestions toward an alternative ‘queering’ of phenomenology in the hopes that they might spur other men, other fathers, toward providing *other* expressions of their relationships, and the hopes that genuinely accompany them.

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<sup>47</sup> My contention in fact is not that we must redo theology tout court, but that male theologians, father’s even, might see the amazing theological work already being done, by mothers, others, etc., for example.

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