

Marion, Jean-Luc. God Without Being. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991.

I've finally been able to set the time apart to finish the first chapter of God Without Being of Jean-Luc Marion tonight. In this first chapter his focus is on the idol and the icon as indicating "a manner of beings for beings", or "a conflict between two phenomenologies" (7). As an all too brief summary, the chapter focuses upon the idol as that which stops, delimits, arrests the gaze (*le regard*,) and in so doing imposes a demarcation within the person with that which is seen (the idol) and that which it is not possible to see (*l'invisible*, a French neologism coined by Marion,) as the idol impedes seeing beyond itself, bounded by the limit of the gaze of the observer. In contrast the icon is the manifestation of an intention of the infinite, hence invisible, to render itself visible, not only that it be seen but that the infinite might regard the viewer through the manifest icon. Where the idol arrests and demarcates the gaze of the viewer, the icon opens the gaze of the infinite upon the viewer. Marion notes the reference from St. Paul, "We all, with face unveiled and revealed, serving as optical mirror to reflect the glory of the Lord, we are transformed in and according to is icon [eikona], passing from glory to glory, according to the spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18) (21.) I thought to comment briefly upon one particular phrase:

What characterizes the material idol is precisely that the artist can consign to it the subjugating brilliance of a first visible; on the contrary, what characterizes the icon painted on wood does not come from the hand of a man but from the infinite depth that crosses it—or better, orients it following the intention of a gaze. (21)

I found that last phrase "orients it following the intention of a gaze" (the gaze of the infinite) underdeveloped (I do not know if it will be further developed later,) for if the infinite is to render itself visible in an icon through the agency of an artist, the artist is necessarily the prime locus where the infinite, in some manner, is first made comprehensible into the finite. It is that "infinite depth that crosses" the hand of the artist that I find as the critical focus in the creation process; the artist is the living bridge who must first, by the Spirit, have apprehended the infinite into the finite such that his or her hand might be directed by that intention. This is not to say that the aperture of the icon is limited to the comprehension of the artist; if the infinite truly does open up through it, that dimension is dynamic with each viewer. Yet, if the divine intention is not first known in the artist, it seems to me that it cannot happen in the icon.

That noted, I think Marion will develop this contrast of idol and icon later in the book in some important ways that I will discover as I am able to read further.

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