

Article

The Call and Response in the French Phenomenology of Religion

Yanbo Zheng

École Pratique des Hautes Études, Patios Saint-Jacques, 4-14 rue Ferrus, 75014 Paris, France;
yanbo.zheng@etu.ephe.psl.eu

Abstract: Is it legitimate to talk about religion as a phenomenology of modern philosophy? Some French phenomenologists have argued that philosophical discourses can be used in phenomenology to describe religious phenomena, and doing so does not contradict the absolute and irreducible nature of phenomenology as a philosophy. Their purpose is to justify the legitimacy of the phenomenological possibilities of religion. This paper aims to describe the progress made by the phenomenon of the call and response as a French phenomenology of religion. Marion talks about *l'adonné* in the “call and response” structure in the phenomenology of religion. In his third reduction, *l'adonné*, due to boredom, nihilates the Being, leaving a possibility of the call in a pure form. When the call responds, it hears and then establishes a quasi-subject status, which serves as Marion’s reflection on the metaphysical subject. Focusing on prayer as one of the religious phenomena, Chrétien argues that vocal prayer reconciles the opposition of the soul and body, of spirit and matter. Through the description of such a religious act, Chrétien emphasizes an interactive-subjective relationship with the Absolute Other. Through the study of Marion and Chrétien, we find that when phenomenologists talk about religion, it does not make phenomenology lose its own principles but instead expands new fields for phenomenology.

Keywords: French philosophy; phenomenology of religion; the call and response; prayer



Citation: Zheng, Yanbo. 2022. The Call and Response in the French Phenomenology of Religion. *Religions* 13: 858. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13090858>

Academic Editor: Xin Leng

Received: 11 July 2022

Accepted: 9 September 2022

Published: 14 September 2022

Publisher’s Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction: The Origins of the French Phenomenology of Religion

In the 1980s, the French phenomenologist Dominique Janicaud, with his essay “The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology”, starts the debate in the circle of French philosophy on the phenomenology of religion. He argues that there has always been a “theological turn” among the French phenomenologists, a tendency that is evident in the thoughts of Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. This tendency, in Janicaud’s view, is due to the fact that Sartre and Merleau-Ponty have utilized Husserl’s ideas, but not in the totality thereof, thus causing a “shock” in French philosophy (Janicaud 2000, p. 20). This view, in reality, is not convincing because this view is, in fact, strongly biased. It is well known that Husserl’s thought per se is in a process of change. Moreover, a large number of his unpublished notes during his lifetime represent, to a large extent, the course of his thinking rather than giving results. It was from perusing Husserl’s posthumous manuscripts that Merleau-Ponty’s in-depth studies of phenomenology began. In his “Oneself as Another”, Paul Ricoeur holds that “at what stage of reduction does subjectivity identify itself as intersubjectivity . . .,” which, according to the comment of Janicaud, contains a theological turn, which is qualified by Ricoeur.

Ricoeur added a hermeneutical “precaution” to any link between phenomenology and theology (Janicaud 2000, p. 23). Levinas, as a “first generation” French phenomenologist, is challenged by Janicaud, who argues that Levinas’ thought was uniquely original, but his breakthroughs go beyond the scope of phenomenology. For example, *Désiré*, a key concept in Levinas’ thought, cannot be experienced and therefore belongs to the realm of metaphysics rather than phenomenology. In fact, Levinas’ thought does not go beyond

phenomenology proper, but beyond the phenomenology of Husserl. It is true that Levinas tries to overcome the structure of intentionality and makes phenomenology open to the invisible. But this does not mean that he betrays phenomenology, for the reason that a phenomenology of the invisible also emerged in Heidegger's latter thinking. If all these ideas are removed from the scope of phenomenology, then phenomenology is limited merely to the ideas of Husserl at a certain time, and what Marion says, "in our century, phenomenology assumes the very role of philosophy," is also impossible (Marion 1998b, p. 1).

In response to Janicaud's queries and criticism, some phenomenologists have come to defend the possibility of the phenomenology of religion, among which Jean-François Courtine gave an exposition of this issue at a seminar held at the Archives Husserl de Paris. According to Courtine, the significance of the phenomenology of religion is not to "reconstruct" theology but to serve two other purposes. One is that it is intended to explore the question of whether phenomenology can speak of religion in a particular form, with the aim of manifesting a distinctive phenomenological order of given appearances or determinations, which is about divinity, God, etc., even if the order may be considered dead or extinct. The other is that it seeks to explore whether there are specific forms of phenomena in religious experiences that can be used to broaden the subject matter, goals, concepts and methods of phenomenology. As for the specific scope of the phenomenology of religion, Courtine is reluctant to prescribe it, arguing that sacred experience, divine passage and the aesthetics, culture, prayer and praise in religion may all be the subject matter of the study of the phenomenology of religion. But the most central phenomenon of all is God's manifestation experienced by the apostles, which can serve as a vehicle for the relationship of the Self to the Other and to the world (Janicaud 2000, p. 121). Paul Ricoeur, as a phenomenological hermeneutist, focuses on the issues of experience and language in religious discourses. In his 1992 lecture at the Institut Catholique de Paris, Ricoeur directly pointed out that phenomenology can construct a structure of the call and response and that the disjuncture between the call and the response is a religious phenomenon (Janicaud 2000, p. 128). For the phenomenology of religion to develop in specific contexts, Ricoeur argues that the aim of religious phenomenologists is not to create a broadly universal phenomenology of religion, but to confine this to phenomenology in the Judeo-Christian religion, participated by the audience with the possibility of sympathy. Michel Henry argues that taking the development of phenomenology to its extreme, as a radical phenomenology, termed by him to be material phenomenology, touches on the relationship between human beings and God. In this "archi-phenomenality", it is possible to define at least the phenomena bearing on the relationship between human beings and God (Janicaud 2000, p. 225).

In summary, these French phenomenologists argue that philosophical discourse could be used in phenomenology to describe religious phenomena without violating the absoluteness and irreducibility of phenomenology as a philosophy.

This paper aims to describe the progress made by the phenomenon of the call and response in the French phenomenology of religion. In the phenomenology of religion, the call is the form in which the Absolute Other reveals itself. In the call, the Absolute Other reveals itself to the listener. Revelation, as a theological term of a long history, denotes the divine initiative in the spontaneous communication of God with human beings. In the Jewish-Christian tradition, revelation means the self-revelation of God in the history of Israel and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the revealing of God to human beings that makes it possible for them to recognize His mystery. It is important to stress that revelation cannot be understood as a "flash of light" in the consciousness of the individual or as a private experience of perception. The call in the phenomenology of religion refers to the possibility of giving, in which the Absolute Other gives revelation. In the Catholic context, revelation consists of the Bible and tradition; the phenomenon of the call is, therefore, an exploration of the possibility of describing and analyzing the Bible and tradition in a phenomenological context. The response to the call takes the form

of a discourse with the Absolute Other. In the context of religion, this active speaking towards the Absolute Other is called prayer. For Ricoeur, the feelings and emotions, such as absolute dependence, suffering, ultimate care, speech and love, cannot be unfolded within the intentional structure of consciousness. Therefore, such extreme feelings and absolute emotions should be subsumed under the heading of prayer. “Prayer actively turns to this Other, and consciousness is affected on the level of feeling. In turn, this Other who affects it is seen as the source of the call to which prayer responds.” (Janicaud 2000, p. 128) The response in religion expresses a submission, an acknowledgement of the “I hear” in relation to the call. In the response, the superiority of the call is acknowledged and made manifest.

2. *L'Adonné* in the Call

Jean-Luc Marion is a leading contemporary French philosopher and a mainstay of the “third generation” of French phenomenological thinkers who inherited Levinas’ Chair of Metaphysics at the Sorbonne. His idea: “the more reduction, the more givenness”, was regarded by the French phenomenologist Michael Henry as the fourth principle of phenomenology. In addition, he, as an avowed Catholic, has published a series of papers and books on theology and once served as the editor of *Communio*, the international journal of Catholicism. In 2008, he took the fourth seat in the Académie Française. Phenomenology and Catholic theology are two important themes in the scholarship of Marion, a thoroughgoing phenomenological researcher; thus, it is safe to say that his ‘theological turn’ is based on strictly adequate phenomenological premises.

According to Marion’s recapitulation, there are three reductions in the phenomenological movement. The first reduction is the “transcendental reduction”, carried out by Descartes, Kant and Husserl; the conclusion thereof is a return to the intentional structure of the transcendental self, a self that constitutes the object of thought. The second reduction is the “reduction of the Being”, represented by Heidegger, which opens up many meanings of the Being from the notion that the Being in the world is Dasein. The third reduction is a synthesis of the work done by Levinas, Ricoeur, Derrida, Marion and Henry, which return to the call for a pure form of the Being; Marion puts forward his phenomenological principle “as much reduction, as there is givenness” (Pa and Lin 2010, p. 80), often abbreviated to “the more reduction, the more givenness”. The phenomenon of the Being given eventually leads to an excess, that is, saturation. For Marion, the phenomenon of saturation implies a paradox. The phenomenon of saturation as a paradox goes beyond the possibility of objectifying intentionality in traditional phenomenology.

In Marion’s third reduction, he interprets what is “boredom” (Fang 2013, pp. 157–69): in deep boredom, everything and ourselves, including Dasein, are annihilated in the absence of distinction. The boredom’s aversion and abandonment of the Being make Dasein pretend not to hear the call by which the Being is demanded, and in this way, Dasein is not interested in the “existence of the Being”. The call and the surprise are made manifest, but boredom suspends them and also suspends the “phenomenon of the Being” in which they are made manifest (Marion 1998b, p. 194). At this point, in Heidegger’s phenomenology of the call, it is not convincing whether the call of conscience can emerge; therefore, Dasein, as the Being, is in a state of mediocrity and silence. Because of the symmetrical relation between Dasein and the being of Dasein, it is also impossible for the being of Dasein to make any appeal and thereby make any claim to Dasein when Dasein has lost its summative discourse (Fang 2013, pp. 157–69). “If boredom liberates the *there* from the call of Being, it sets it free only in order better to expose it to the wind of every other possible call; thus, the liberated *there* is exposed to the non-ontological possibility of another claim, which would qualify it to stand there in favor of another of another favor” (Marion 1998b, p. 196). If boredom delays the call of the Being, will Dasein have to face nihilism?

In the nihilation provoked by boredom, are all possibilities of the call abolished? In fact, Heidegger also acknowledges the possibility of a call distinct from the “claims of the Being”, namely the possibility of the “claims of the Father”, even though Heidegger does not identify the “claims of the Father” as preceding the “claims of the Being”. In *Letter*

on *Humanism*, Heidegger argues that in the history of salvation, the Christian is a person who is a “child of God”, who shall hear and accept the demands of the Father in Christ (Heidegger 2008, p. 224). Levinas finds in the faces of his neighbors a kind of call that is different from the demanding claim of the Being; the call in the faces of others assigns me, invites me, and implores me. For Marion, the difference between these two calls is important; what is more important, however, is to hear, for the reason that both of the calls come from this biblical calling: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.” (Deut 6:4). The manifestation of the call is not to show its authority, but to give itself to the call, *per se*. The call, *per se*, appears itself, appears as a vocative “Hear” to the amazement of the called, and gives revelation. “The model of the call exerts itself before the simple claim of the Being, and more fully.” (Marion 1998b, p. 197) In the call, the ‘I’ can no longer act as a transcendental self in self-enclosure. Because of its inability to understand and of its fear and dread, the “I”, as a subject of rational thinking, is unable to organize the experience of the call and give meaning to it. The ‘I’ as the subject breaks down in the call, dazzled by the gaze of the Other.

In the wave of thinking to remove the metaphysics of the subject, Marion, as a phenomenologist following Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Derrida, seeks to propose the term *l’adonné* to reverse the subject of rational thinking that has been the subject matter of modern philosophy. In the structure of the call and the response (*l’appel et le répons*), *l’adonné* is existent as a vehicle (Marion 1998a, p. 390). *L’adonné* hears the call and responds to it. Marion uses Caravaggio’s sacred art painting, *The Calling of Saint Mathew*¹, to analyze the phenomenon of *l’adonné*, revealing the call in its response. In the silence of the painting, the call is invisible. It is doubly invisible in that, firstly, as a calling, it is not visible in itself through sight but through hearing; secondly, Matthew’s calling is, in essence, a call to his mission, that is, the choice of Matthew’s own spirit, soul and life, which is also by definition, invisible. In the scene of the painting, a beam of light shines slantingly across the whole space; at the top of the right-hand side of the scene, a man (Jesus) shows his outstretching hand and vaguely visible eyes pointing towards the left. On the left of the painting, a group of people are seated around a table, busily counting the coins. In this phenomenon described by Caravaggio, Jesus’ hand is not pointing out toward the group of people in total, but only towards Matthew. Even though three out of the five people notice Christ’s outstretched finger, this silent call is directed only at Matthew. When called, Matthew recognizes it and confirms his mission. Christ’s gaze on Matthew makes His figure not a scene to be viewed in Matthew’s sight but a weight to be pressed upon himself. Enticed by this call, Matthew extends his finger to point at himself, responding to the call with a gesture that is both a question and a declaration of “Me?” (Marion 1998a, p. 392). In Marion’s view, what makes Matthew’s mission present does not come from the visible sign but from the response, *per se*. The visible sign is given to three men at the table (the rest of them are so engaged in the coins on the table that they do not even see the visible sign), but only Matthew responds to it. Thus, Christ calls only to him (Marion 1998a, p. 393). The call reveals itself only in the response, for only when the receiver is aware of and acknowledges hearing the call will he acknowledge that it is calling him. If the receiver ignores or is unwilling to believe that the call is targeted at him, then the act of calling remains in vain, and the call is reduced to noise. Like the voice Samuel hears in his sleep, the call is not a call until he responds to it. Since Samuel is unaware that the call comes from God, God’s revelation does not take place. It is only when Samuel responds to God that His call reveals. “It is only when the response allows itself to be heard that the *a priori* cry is uttered and phenomenalized.” (Marion 1998a, p. 394) The call is unheard and unseen; no antecedent exists for its reference, and no protention can be had. As an original phenomenon, it is unclear even in terms of the horizon of its manifestation. As a phenomenon of saturation and a paradox, it is different from any possibility, but it broadens the scope of manifestation through the influence that it has received from *l’adonné* and which it has retained. Rendered visible, the response offers words in the call and turns it into a phenomenon. “When the call phenomenalizes, the response appears; when it puts a place where it can be fixed, the

first “I am here!” (*me voici!*) appears, the call is manifested.” (Marion 1998a, p. 397) Samuel responds, “Here I am,” confirming a sphere of manifestation, and thus begins God’s call to him. The plan for the History of Salvation was thus revealed to him (1 Sam 3:12–14).

The response makes the call complete, but as a delay in time, the response delays the manifestation of the call. In other words, the response delays the call. Paradoxically, although the response comes after the call, the response reveals itself before the call. This is the paradox of the saturation phenomenon. Therefore, the call and response is not a clearly visible phenomenology but comes from a dimension distinct from the rational Self. As a phenomenon, the call and response may hardly hit with Husserl’s idea of phenomenology as a ‘strict science’. Above all else, if the “I” of rational thinking is complacent and forgets the otherness of language, then language will always fail to lead us towards the possibility of hearing the call. In their own desire to chase after their own selves, human beings, like the crowd after the fall of the Tower of Babel, are scattered and wandering in a variety of languages where they cannot understand one another.

3. The Phenomenon of Prayer as a Response

Jean-Louis Chrétien is a French phenomenologist, poet and Catholic theologian. A professor of philosophy at the Sorbonne, Chrétien’s academic interests focus on the phenomenological accounts of transcendental experience. He holds that the phenomenology of language is the theme throughout his academic career. Catherine Chaliier, a contemporary French philosopher and professor of philosophy at the University of Paris-X, takes Chrétien’s concern as to listening to the inner problems that give meaning to life. She appreciates Chrétien’s indifference to the fancy ideologies pursued by the intellectuals of the past and present. According to Chaliier, Chrétien, when he was writing, was not seduced by the preoccupations of the moment, thus his works are not limited by those satisfying but, more often than not, fleeting recognitions (Chaliier 1991, p. 148). In his article “*Phenomenology and the Theological Turn*,” Janicaud accuses Chrétien of being one of the pushing hands of the theological turn; at the same time, however, he also acknowledges that Chrétien’s challenge to the metaphysics of transparency, as well as to the idea of pure promise, makes it a type of phenomenology (Janicaud 2000, p. 68). With his paper, “*The Wounded Word: Phenomenology of Prayer*,” Chrétien engages in the debate on the phenomenology of religion initiated by French academics. From a phenomenological point of view, the relationship between the call and response is more original and puissant than the relationship between the question and the answer: “Only the answer to a call opens the possibility of a true questioning.” (Chrétien 2007, p. 11) In the mode of the call and response, Chrétien focuses on the analysis of the phenomenology of speech towards the divine Other—the phenomenology of prayer.

The response, which responds to the call, strikes up a dialogical relationship with transcendence, that is, prayer. The reason why prayer is the most fundamental religious act is that it can broaden the horizon of religion. Chrétien agrees with Novalis, the German Romantic poet, who is of the opinion that prayer in religion is the equivalent of reflection in philosophy, which follows that to pray is to practice a religion. Religion began with prayer, just as philosophy stemmed from reflection. Although prayer is not the only phenomenon in religion, Chrétien calls it “the religious phenomenon par excellence” (Chrétien 2004, p. 17). Considering that prayer is a condition for other religious phenomena to be possible, if we cannot speak towards God or a deity, other religious acts would be reduced to mere performances without any participation in divinity. Chrétien illustrates that “although sacrifice is an act that appears to be distinct from prayer, we cannot imagine how sacrifice would be possible if it were not accompanied by prayer, which together constituted the sacrifice proper, then how is sacrifice possible?” Preaching should also be included in prayer. If the involvement of divinity in prayer is lacking, then the sermon will be reduced to an intellectual talk.

According to the Christian tradition, the act of prayer is divided into vocal prayer and mental prayer. But Chrétien believes that the two cannot be separated when describing the phenomenon of prayer. He quotes St. Teresa of Avila, the Medieval Spanish Virgin: “Prayer

is a spiritual matter and not just a question of whether to keep one's mouth shut. True vocal prayer and mental prayer are always combined." (Chrétien 2004, p. 24) The voice is an integral part of prayer, which is a spiritual matter. "There is nothing else that makes us naked but the sound." (Chrétien 1990, p. 45) The first prayer was uttered by Adam, who spoke naked to God in the Garden of Eden. Man cannot give anything higher than his words, so he gives himself in his prayer. In his article "*Between Call and Voice: The Antiphonal Thought of Jean-Louis Chrétien*," Ballan, a scholar of the University of Chicago, holds that "rather than offering in speech and song nothing but its own act of speaking and singing (self-expression of auto-affectivity), the naked voice offers the world, which is to say, it gives what it does not have, what it has only received." (Benson and Wirzba 2010, p. 206) After violating the commandments, Adam and Eve refuse to be exposed to the gaze of the Other, reject to know any secret about themselves rather than the secret of their origin, and refuse the light on the pretext that it is not their home; in doing so, they fail to know the sufficiency in human beings. Instead, they are stranded on the shores of solitude, where they will never reach their own selves. Their words are then extinguished, and their prayers terminate (Chalier 1991, p. 151).

Chrétien argues that, due to the prejudice of metaphysics, it may be assumed that the spiritual dimension does not utter voices. However, in the spiritual activity of prayer, the voice has a unique role. The vocalization in the act of praying is not for the invisible Other (towards which the prayer is directed) to hear the message sent out by the one who prays, but for the voice of prayer to play a pedagogical role. In praying, he who prays addresses the Other by calling out and turning towards it, but the words in the prayer, in the first place, act on him and inform him. The words of the prayer affect and change the giver, not the receiver. The Other is silently drawn into the relationship of dialogue between the "I" and the Self by the prayer, thus bridging the unreachable and infinite gap between the Other and the Self. Chrétien uses the *Summa Theologica*, written by St. Thomas Aquinas, the medieval Dominican, to argue that the effect of prayer is not to send a message about the Self to the Omniscient One, but to establish, or to arouse, a relationship with the Absolute Other, engaging the one who prays in the relationship of intersubjectivity with the divine Other, as shown in this line: "We must pray to God, not in order that He may know our needs or desires; but in order that we ourselves may remember that in these things we should look to God for help." (Chrétien 2004, p. 23) The inner coherence of vocal prayer and mental prayer is also reflected in the *Breviloquium* by St. Bonaventure, the medieval Franciscan scholar (Chrétien 2004, p. 24). Chrétien argues that St. Bonaventure does not separate the gift of vocalization from the spoken words, for the first function of the words in prayer is to present the Self to the invisible Other, a presentation that is the Other's own manifestation of Itself. Thus, the presence of the Self to the Other cannot be separated from the presence of the Other to the Self, in the same way, that the breath breathed out is inseparable from the breath breathed in. "That of an event, the event wherein what is invisible to myself illuminates me in a fashion phenomenologically different from a conversation with myself or an examination of consciousness." (Chrétien 2004, p. 24)

In his writings, Chrétien has quoted numerous thinkers but never proved the legitimacy thereof, making his phenomenology of prayer seemingly lacking in evidence. Ballan has defended Chrétien by arguing that,

"Chrétien is a historian of philosophy who writes poetry as well as phenomenological analyses (often blurring lines between two kinds of writing destined to have been brought into closer proximity), and the singularity of his voice receives perhaps its best description as a particularly eloquent version of what Adriaan Peperzak has described as 'hermeneutical phenomenology'. Such an orientation draws (critically) upon historical traditions of thought that, to varying degrees, offer the possibility of guiding us in the endeavor to understand and describe the phenomena, opening our eyes to aspects of the phenomena that the purportedly presuppositionless mind might have passed over. Chrétien presses this unique philosophical style into the service of a phenomenology whose content also dif-

fers, in significant though not all respects, from many of the most important thinkers within that tradition.” (Benson and Wirzba 2010, p. 197)

For Ballan, Chrétien’s innovation lies in blurring the divide between ancient philosophy and phenomenology and in his ability to describe, in poetic terms, some neglected phenomena. Although he quotes other thinkers without analyzing their legitimacy in his writing, he describes in them some phenomena that have been overlooked by those phenomenologists who emphasize “phenomenology as a strict science”, which is undoubtedly Chrétien’s contribution to phenomenology.

In the case of the phenomenon of prayer, one should not ask what prayer is or even how it should be done. In the *Book of Exodus*, God calls to Moses with His voice, and Moses responds by saying that he does not know how he should speak. This is how prayer begins: the person who prays does not know how he is supposed to pray. Chrétien proposes a cycle of the phenomenon of prayer: the man who prays intends to know how to pray; he shall firstly realize that he does not know how to pray. He should be grateful for his prayers, for they are gifts from God. He can only turn towards God in prayer, and he can only pray through turning towards Him. Prayer is different from other acts of cognitive practice in that wanting to pray and praying are not in relation to succession. Rather, they occur simultaneously; when one wants to pray, one *is* praying. At the same time, however, prayer is not a pure volition; praying is possible when one does not know how to pray, does not want to pray, or is unwilling to pray. In the writings of St. Macarius the Egyptian, a Church Father, Chrétien, has found an explanation of forced prayer, to “force himself to prayer when he has not spiritual prayer; and thus God, beholding him thus striving, and compelling himself by force, in spite of an unwilling heart gives him the true prayer of the Spirit.” (Chrétien 2004, p. 28) In response, one must offer the Self and allow the Self to be changed in order to be able to hear in the deepest sense, because “just as I can only offer my voice to the other by hearing his and by not ceasing to hear him.” (Chrétien 1992, p. 79) Chrétien attempts to use the phenomenon of prayer to transcend the voluntarist tendencies prevalent after Hegel. He further argues that the phenomenon of prayer no longer falls within the realm of truth and untruth judgment since the effects of prayer ultimately work on the person who prays rather than on the criterion of truth and untruth judgment. According to the biblical account, Jesus guides and teaches his disciples to pray with a text as an example. He enjoins that this text is what one should pray with. This prayer has been handed down to future generations of Christians. In the course of history, many other prayers have become “traditional texts”, such as “Panis Angelicus” written by St. Thomas Aquinas and “Laudes Creaturarum” by St. Francis of Assisi. Generations of Christians have learned how to pray and practiced praying through the chanting of such texts. But praying is not confined to these; it comes from the heart and cannot be reduced to a mere recitation of literature; hence the so-called “free prayer” is where the words in the prayer are not set beforehand but are freely uttered when praying (Chrétien 2004, p. 37). Chrétien argues that prayer is neither purely spiritual nor purely material, but a phenomenon in which the body and the mind work together, and that audible prayer overcomes the dichotomy between the spirit and the matter, revealing an intertwined and indivisible ambiguity. Citing St. Augustine of Hippo, Chrétien argues that praying can be performed in any physical posture, but this does not mean that the body is unimportant or plays no role in praying. From the perspective of St. Augustine, each person should choose a way of praying that is suitable for and beneficial to him or her (Chrétien 2004, p. 20). The words of prayer take place in the body, while praying originates at the intersection of the body and the speech. Emmanuel Falque, a French phenomenologist and professor of philosophy at the Institut Catholique de Paris, argues that the uniqueness of Chrétien’s thought lies not only in his insistence on the hermeneutics of the text but also in the importance he attaches to the phenomenology of the body. For Chrétien, the text is not merely a “seen” material to be read but a “body”, a “body” of text from which an audible speech emerges (Falque 2018, p. 175). That is to say, in the phenomenon of prayer, Chrétien tries to cancel the opposition between language and the

body. However, if the body is only a vehicle for the utterance of speech, then Chrétien's phenomenology of prayer is not immune from the philosophical tendency that sets the spirit before the body. In *The Ark of Speech*, there is an essay entitled "*The Wounded Word*" by Chrétien, describing prayer. Why is prayer the wounded word? In a wound, according to Chrétien, the words of prayer always come from the opened lips in the act of crying. Prayers come from the mouth of David, who is clad in a robe of fine linen and fasting on an empty stomach (1 Sam 12:16), and from the mouth of Jacob, who limps after wrestling with God (Gen 30:23–33).

It should be noted that, in terms of structure, the words of prayer emanate from and act upon the Self, but prayer is not an act of self-satisfaction. Therefore, it is different from self-talk. Whereas self-talk is always unrestrained, the words of prayer are linked to, guided by and bound to the established prayers. It is because "any response to a call must, on pain of denying itself as such, end up appearing in the human dialogue." (Chrétien 2007, p. 20). In audible prayers, whether a private prayer or a collective one, there is a communal dimension. Unlike the secret rituals of ancient witchcraft, prayers do not need to be kept secret; they are uttered in community with others. Even when a person is praying alone, he is in a state of "being in the world with others". In the Credo, he begins with "I believe", but then he declares that Christ died for us rather than me. In the words and through the words, prayer forms a community. Formed by prayer, the intersubjectivity between the Self and the Other excludes the subject-object dichotomy.

The manifestation of the phenomenon of prayer recognizes God as the giver through stripping away egocentrism; "this (has the effect) of leaving the called out one alone to give possibilities at every moment that He has instituted." (Chrétien 2004, p. 40) In praying, the Self reveals itself to the Self as the moon does, for the moon borrows light from the Other to reveal itself. It is in the posture of the Self towards the Other that prayer reveals itself. This is not a rational or volitional subject but a praying "I" in a "receiving-giving" structure, which is not confirmed by the compulsion of the Absolute Other but is the effect shown in the intimate interplay with the Absolute Other. The world is offered in one's "naked" words and praises, not only for declaring openness and acceptance to the Other but also for speaking and singing to the Other (or God). The soul is naked only in dialogue, but the form of the nakedness in dialogue is not a scene to be viewed but an exposure to the Other, a real hearing, and a stripping away of what is required to speak to the Other (Benson and Wirzba 2010, p. 206).

4. Conclusions

As Courtine said at a seminar held by the Centre de Recherches Phenomenologiques et Hermeneutiques-Archives Husserl de Paris in the years 1990–1991 and 1991–1992, it is clear that the study of the phenomenology of religion is not intended to present something like a conclusion (Janicaud 2000, p. 121). The analyses and descriptions of the phenomenology of religion, written by the two French philosophers mentioned above, are not intended to construct some contemporary Christian theology; each of them offers a different path in their exposition of the phenomenology of religion. Marion's phenomenological references, criticisms and analyses are detailed and delicate. According to Yun Ding of the Faculty of Philosophy at Fudan University, Marion's phenomenology, though criticized as a "theological turn", arrives at the conclusions by a rigorously step-by-step approach with the implementation of the phenomenological methods, and his conclusions can be tested. Marion's phenomenology is even more "scientific" than the so-called "scientific turn in phenomenology" (Ding 2019, pp. 76–90). Nevertheless, the rigor of scientific procedure does not guarantee an objective truth. Moreover, Marion's account of the phenomenology of call and response in the phenomenology of religion never reaches the heart of the Christian faith. His description of the pure call ends up being an exploration of the possibility of an anonymous call without any apparent connection to God in Christianity. Marion's later discussion of the Trinity, in terms of the relationship between the visible and the invisible,

has shown a stronger characteristic of Christian theology, but it is outside the purview of this paper to address the phenomenon of the call and response.

In the development of the French phenomenology of religion, we see that, on the one hand, French phenomenologists talk about specific religious phenomena, making it possible for questions about God to return to the context of contemporary philosophy, even if this possibility will not be widely recognized and noticed. On the other hand, these French phenomenologists used the topic of religion to introduce some new stances and doctrines to phenomenology and even to Continental philosophy. With a more radical reduction, Marion breaks out of the originally marginal domain of phenomenology, which promotes the development of phenomenology. In the philosophical trend of de-subjectification, Marion, a post-Heideggerian phenomenologist, gives his answer with the term *l'adonné* by jumping out of the confinement of the “Dasein”. He does not retain the term “the subject of rational thinking”, nor does he accept the position of abolishing the subject (for the abolition of the subject generates a new subject). According to his description, when *l'adonné* accepts, it is simultaneously giving, just as the painter is in communion with nature. When accepting the life of nature, the painter also gives his body to the nature that is happening. Each one presents or even dedicates itself to its own initiative, without the other one being its object or material. As a hot issue in French philosophy, the Other is given a novel perspective by Marion in the phenomenology of religion: when *l'adonné* hears the call and responds to it, the response, as the manifestation of the initiative, occurs after the call but reveals itself before the call is revealed, while the call of the Other occurs first and arises from the sublime. By describing and analyzing the interaction between the Self and the Other, Marion tries to reconcile this long-standing tension, and it is clear that Chrétien's phenomenological thought does not have the evidence of the phenomenologists such as Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, nor does Chrétien seem to seek such consequences. In his work, we see him applying phenomenological methods to specific religious phenomena, thus broadening the scope of traditional phenomenology and showing the vitality of the discipline. In his analysis of the phenomenon of prayer as a religious phenomenon, Chrétien attempts to “revise” the relationship between the unnamable, unreachable Absolute Other and the Self in Levinas' philosophy. Despite this, hearing the call is not an option for the primacy of the Self, and the Self is not superior in the structure of the call and response: I am not called because I can hear, but because I am called, I hear and can hear (Chrétien 1992, p. 30). In his attempt to dialogue with transcendence, Chrétien unites, in a unique way, the opposition between the spirit and matter in the Western philosophical tradition, reconciling the inequality between the speech and the body. As an idiosyncratic phenomenologist, Chrétien's seemingly unrestrained quotation seems somewhat rebellious. However, the absence of legitimacy of the texts cited does not seem to affect the effectiveness of his phenomenological account. It is undeniable that he has broadened the scope of what phenomenology can describe and has “phenomenalized” religion.

Based on the works of Marion and Chrétien, Janicaud's claim is not reliable. Phenomenology does not “degenerate” into a phenomenological theology due to discussing the issue of religion, nor does it make phenomenology cease to be phenomenology. When discussing the issues related to religion, phenomenology, as a method, has a new object of study; when the topic of religion is explained by the phenomenological method, Christianity has an additional approach of explanation in addition to metaphysics. Although Chrétien sometimes expresses man's relationship with the Divine Other as prayer, there is no doubt, however, that prayer is a form of expression in calling and response. The calling and response are far from being the whole of the religious phenomenon but are features of the essential and indispensable elements of the religious act. The work of Marion and Chrétien shows us the development of a phenomenology of religion, which is a new direction in the philosophy of religion.

Modern philosophy has seen the transition from the subject of rational thinking to “prescribing law to nature”, from the Self as a universally independent spiritual being in dialectical unity to the Self as a will that is driven by desire, even to the Self that is found

to be intertwining consciousness and unconsciousness. In the development of modern philosophy, the dimension of otherness has never been truly manifested; the Other hides from the horizon of the Self. Levinas' critique of the "existential-selfology" leads him to propose the primacy of the Other, where the Self becomes a hostage to the Other, and the Self is defined by the responsibility of coming from the Other. But is the Self really reduced to such a humble role? Through the analysis of the interrelationship between a series of religious experiences and acts in the call and response, a new possibility is suggested for the philosophy of the subject in modern times in the elaboration of the French phenomenology of religion.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Note

- ¹ *The Calling of Saint Mathew*, a painting by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio in 1597, currently housed at the Church of St. Louis of the French.

References

- Benson, Bruce E., and Norman Wirzba. 2010. *Words of Life: New Theological Turns in French Phenomenology*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Chalier, Catherine. 1991. Une philosophie en gestation (Jean-Louis Chrétien). *Esprit* 168: 148–51.
- Chrétien, Jean-Louis. 1990. *La voix nue: Phénoménologie de la promesse*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit.
- Chrétien, Jean-Louis. 1992. *L'appel et la réponse*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit.
- Chrétien, Jean-Louis. 2004. *The Ark of Speech*. London and New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Chrétien, Jean-Louis. 2007. *Répondre: Figures de la réponse et de la responsabilité*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Ding, Yun. 2019. On Theological and Scientific Turn of Phenomenology. *World Philosophy* 6: 76–90, 158.
- Falque, Emmanuel. 2018. *The Loving Struggle: Phenomenological and Theological Debates*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield International.
- Fang, Xianghong. 2013. "Claim of the Being" or "Claim of God": On the Phenomenology of the Call of Heidegger and Marion. *The Phenomenological and Philosophical Research in China* 1: 175–69.
- Heidegger, Martin. 2008. *Basic Writings*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics.
- Janicaud, Dominique. 2000. *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Marion, Jean-Luc. 1998a. *Étant donné: Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Marion, Jean-Luc. 1998b. *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*. Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- Pa, Chin-Ken, and Ching-Hsiu Lin. 2010. The Third Reduction of Jean-Luc Marion: Towards the Call of Other. *The National Cheng Chi University Journal* Issue 24: 77–106.