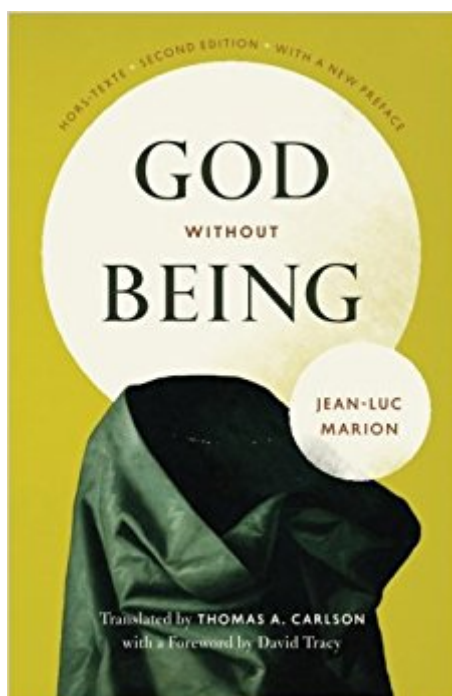


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God Without Being: Hors-Texte, Second Edition (Religion And Postmodernism)



Synopsis

Jean-Luc Marion is one of the world's foremost philosophers of religion as well as one of the leading Catholic thinkers of modern times. In *God Without Being*, Marion challenges a fundamental premise of traditional philosophy, theology, and metaphysics: that God, before all else, must be. Taking a characteristically postmodern stance and engaging in passionate dialogue with Heidegger, he locates a "God without Being" in the realm of agape, or Christian charity and love. If God is love, Marion contends, then God loves before he actually is. First translated into English in 1991, *God Without Being* continues to be a key book for discussions of the nature of God. This second edition contains a new preface by Marion as well as his 2003 essay on Thomas Aquinas. Offering a controversial, contemporary perspective, *God Without Being* will remain essential reading for scholars and students of philosophy and religion. "Daring and profound. . . . In matters most central to his thesis, [Marion]'s control is admirable, and his attunement to the nuances of other major postmodern thinkers is impressive." *Theological Studies* "A truly remarkable work." *First Things* "Very rewarding reading." *Religious Studies Review*

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"A profound study on the perception of God with an identity." (Prabuddha Bharata)

Jean-Luc Marion advances a controversial argument for a God free of all categories of Being. Taking a characteristically postmodern stance, Marion challenges a fundamental premise of both metaphysics and neo-Thomist theology: that God, before all else, must be. Rather, he locates a "God without Being" in the realm of agape, Christian charity or love. This volume, the first translation into English of the work of this leading Catholic philosopher, offers a uniquely contemporary perspective on the nature of God.

I should begin with the confession that I entered *God Without Being* with a bit of trepidation. On the one hand, the text is somewhat foundational for my own field (phenomenological theology), on the other, I find myself consistently disappointed by Marion's explicitly theological texts (he makes a better philosopher than theologian, I would suggest). On top of this, I also had the strong suspicion that, having been so foundational to phenomenological theology in the 90s and 00s, that this text would say nothing that I hadn't already heard. All that being said, I was nonetheless pleased with the reading, and though at times it tends to bog down in the very dense specifics of Marion's reading of Heidegger, I would still suggest that it is a significantly valuable text, specifically the second edition, for reasons that I will explain below. The main focus of *God without Being* is Marion's attempt to theologically sidestep the Heideggerian critique of ontotheology. By ontotheology Heidegger intends, primarily, the theological or philosophical move wherein a greatest being or super-being (i.e. God, the Good, the One, etc.) is posited as the foundation of all other beings. Without going into considerable detail, I will leave that for Marion, Heidegger contends that this move fails to recognize the fundamental nature of ontological difference (the difference between beings and Being). Simply, for Heidegger, the foundation of all beings must be ontologically dissimilar to the beings it grounds (beings can't pull themselves up by their own ontological boot-straps). Or again, the absolute foundation of all reality must be of a completely different nature from the reality it is said to found. To his credit, Marion does not begin by attacking this notion of ontotheology, but rather, fully embraces it, re-articulating it under his notion of idolatry. For Marion, to think God as a being among beings is, not only to fall victim to ontotheology, but to furthermore commit the crime of idolatry. This redoubling of Heidegger's critique culminates in his notion of "conceptual idolatry." For Marion, any attempt to delimit God under the guise of a concept, is already to subsume God under the reign of Being, and therefore ontotheology; the "true" God, the God without Being, must also be a God beyond conceptuality. In order to make the case that Christian theology can bypass this critique, Marion attempts to articulate his notion of a God which is "beyond Being," that is to say, is completely dissimilar to created

beings. For this task, he draws upon a variety of sources, most notably the Neoplatonic tradition of Christian theology inaugurated by Pseudo-Dionysius. For these mystical thinkers, God surpassed, not only all beings, but also Being-itself, even, they would add, Nonbeing. God, for Marion and these mystics, cannot be rendered as an object, either physical or conceptual, but instead surpasses all objectivity, all beings, even being itself. God, in this thought, is radically transcendent. The obvious critique of this position is built upon the question of evidence. If God is beyond both Being and conceptuality, than how can this God be known, experienced, or verified? Marion's creative solution to this problem, one which points to his latter work in *Being Given*, is to think God, not principally as a being, but as a giving (and as charity). God, for Marion, is defined by self-revelation. His principal case study in this notion is the Eucharist which, he argues, permits the presence of the absolute Otherness of God to manifest as the ultimate gift. More strongly, and revealing an indebtedness to the work of Michel Henry, he argues that this gift of presence is also the gift of the present, that the eucharistic presence of God cuts through the negative irreality of the past and future and offers the only true access to the present now. The great addition to the second edition of this text is the inclusion of an additional essay "Thomas Aquinas and Onto-Theology." In some ways more interesting than the primary text itself, Marion here pits Aquinas against Thomistic theology, arguing that while the latter falls victim to ontotheology, that this turn is only prepared by a misreading of Aquinas himself, who never subjugates God under the categories of Being. Overall, I would recommend this text to anyone interested in the relationship between continental philosophy and theology, scholastic thought, or ontology, but would caution casual theologians or those who do not already possess a background in Heidegger as they may find themselves lost in his extended engagement with Heideggerian phenomenology.

Marion claims a genuine theology must not only overcome metaphysics (scholasticism), but must also overcome the overcoming of metaphysics (Heidegger), because both are "conceptual idolatry" in that they substitute some concept (being/Being) for God. A "true" theology must be "Eucharistic" and welcome God as the gift of love which is beyond ontology. Other topics are covered as well: the icon vs. the idol, vanity, and whether Aquinas is onto-theological. I would say this book is essential reading for anyone who wants to grapple seriously with the continental philosophy of religion -- however, readers should be familiar with some Thomistic philosophy and phenomenology (especially Heidegger) before diving in, otherwise Marion's critique will not make any sense. The prose is extremely dense and at times convoluted, but also quite witty, especially when Marion takes subtle aim at his philosophical opponents. It is probably helpful to know some French and, if

one really wants to understand the final chapter on Aquinas, medieval Latin. My only real criticism is that Marion is not quite clear about the broader pastoral and theological ramifications of his thesis, and his essay on Aquinas seems crafted to defuse conservative critics (and thus makes it appear as if Marion lacks the conviction to defend his critique of ontology in the public sphere, and is willing to misinterpret Thomas to that end). Nonetheless, there are some wonderful chapters here--the part where Marion discusses how love transforms our experience of being is especially beautiful and thought-provoking, almost transcendent.

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