Kingdoms of God

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ix
Note on Translations xi

Introduction 1

PART I — INWARD LIFE

1. In Priora Extendens Me: Confessiones, IX. x. 23–25 11
2. Inward Life: On Fichte and Henry 34

PART II — ASPECTS OF THE KINGDOM

3. "An Infinite Relation to God": Hegel and Beyond 57
4. Homo Humanus: Kierkegaard on Loving in the World with Constant Reference to Aquinas 75
5. Bonhoeffer’s “Religious Clothes” 94

PART III — MANIFESTATIONS

6. The Manifestation of the Father 115
7. Phenomenology of the Christ 139
8. Notes toward a Supreme Phenomenology 159

PART IV — TRACES

10. Presence 200
11. Four or Five Words in Derrida 221

PART V — CODA

12. Guilty Forgiveness 247
13. Our Father 265

Notes 279
Index 323
Introduction

The Kingdom of God is an ancient notion: it is implied in the Hebrew scriptures and the Septuagint whenever God is hailed as a King, is taken up more surely in Aramaic Targums, becomes a rich theme in the Gospels, and continues, considerably abated, in Paul's letters.\(^1\) Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarship, especially in France and Germany, has focused intently on how the Kingdom becomes a dominant theme of Christianity in one or another way and has traced the many modes in which the biblical notion is taken up and reset in European philosophy and theology. It appears now in eschatology, now in doctrines of creation, now in theologies of Christ's three offices, and now in religious ethics; it converges at times with the rule of reason, as some philosophers writing in the Kantian tradition conceive it, and at other times is leagued with utopian ideas about society.\(^2\) It is a major theme of patristic theology, especially in Augustine, irrupts in the medieval period, with Bernard of Clairvaux and the Victorines and, wildly, in the writings of Joachim of Fiore; it is treated creatively by Luther and other reformers and emerges strongly in modern programs of Christian socialism as well as in other currents of the "Kingdom movement" in the United States.\(^3\) If now the Kingdom is conceived as a state to be achieved, at other times, as in the Hebrew scriptures, it is regarded as the invisible divine reign that must be acknowledged and followed. It is a dynamic notion, and one that resists any single or simple formulation.\(^4\)

In this book I do not seek to trace the idea of the Kingdom from its beginnings, most likely in the royal period of Israel, to its many and varied modern embodiments, whether explicitly religious or not. There is already a great deal of detailed research of this sort that does not need to be duplicated.\(^5\) My focus is restricted to Christianity, to what the New Testament calls the Kingdom of God, the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, yet I do not wish to contribute to historical-
critical accounts of the βασιλεία in the Christian scriptures. I have learned a great deal from such studies, but I cannot offer myself as a historical scholar of the Bible. I am a theologian with deep, persistent interests in philosophy and literature, and inevitably my concern with the βασιλεία is ultimately theological, even when it might well seem purely philosophical for long stretches. All my scholarly work in theology, philosophy, and literature has phenomenology at its center; and the chapters of this book all try, in different ways, to consider the Kingdom in its phenomenological concreteness, whether in scripture or in the writings of philosophers or theologians. Not all the attempts to represent the βασιλεία, even by eminent Christian thinkers, cohere in the one figure, and so I have titled this book Kingdoms of God. The plural testifies that what Jesus ventured by way of an expression translated into Greek as βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ is always in danger of being folded into different ethical, political, and spiritual projects, of being forced to become visible or, equally dangerous, turned ever inward as a private state.6

Of course, like most Christian theologians, I have an interpretation of the βασιλεία that I wish to propose, and it is bound up with a way of practicing phenomenology. I should say at the outset, though, that this book is not the place where I shall attempt a thorough presentation of the idea or a detailed defense of my way of proceeding to explicate it. This is a book of essays, selected from a great many that I have written over the past two decades, and revised so that the chapters cohere around the theme of the βασιλεία. I hope to explore the same themes, in concert with others, in the volumes of a systematic theology that I have started to write; but since it may be some years before that work begins to appear, and since the ideas entertained in these chapters are already being discussed by colleagues and students, I wanted to present them in the one book, if not as a fully concatenated unity. The βασιλεία, in my view, is what happens to life when it is lived according to the first two commandments. When asked by a lawyer which commandment is the greatest, Jesus answers, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matt. 22: 37–39). God has an irreducible claim on us and how we are to live, one that is prior to all worldly claims: Jesus’s public ministry was devoted to helping us recognize it as individuals and as groups. How we are to pass from the world to the Kingdom is my concern throughout this book, and especially in its central chapters.
In chapters 6 and 7 I sketch what I call "the phenomenology of the Christ." The expression is ambiguous: it means both a rigorous description of Jesus as the Christ, one made possible by passing from the questions "What?" and "Why?" to the question "How?" and to the unique manner in which Jesus performs phenomenology. Only the second of these is broached here, and that only barely. In these chapters there are indications of how Jesus, especially in telling the parables, performs a reduction from "world" to "Kingdom." This is not a reduction such as one finds with Husserl, in which one passes from the natural attitude to a transcendental dimension of consciousness in order to see how phenomena are constituted. Rather, the basilic reduction, as I call it, is something that happens to us when we read or hear what Jesus has to say: we are led back to God's prior claim on us, before we emerged as beings in the world, and we are constituted by God, made present to him, in and through our participation in the βασιλεία. Yet the divine call is not experienced until we have been living deeply in the world and have been fascinated by it. Conversion is always needed; it is a perpetual turning toward God, not away from the world but away from being enthralled by it. Our lives tend to be transformed only fitfully and partially. On my analysis, this turning to the βασιλεία has two moments: the first is κένωσις or kenōsis, in which the "I" empties itself out in order to receive the Holy Spirit. But Christianity, to my mind, does not stop here, as many of its followers and theologians suggest. There is a second moment of ἐπέκτασις or epektasis, in which one stretches out into the love of God and neighbor. I take these two words, κένωσις and ἐπέκτασις, freely from Paul and adapt them in my own way. One should not try to seek exact textual support from Paul's letters or to assimilate them to his theology in order to understand how I am using them.

I hope that it will not be thought that when I talk of Jesus as a phenomenologist that I am violently dragging him from his dense historical, political, and religious context into my own times, and so transforming a rabbi into a philosopher. True, phenomenology is usually taken to begin with Husserl, specifically with the Logical Investigations (1900–1901), but on my reading of him Husserl gives philosophical precision to ways of being in the world that have been practiced by earlier thinkers, artists, and religious persons. Phenomenology is not restricted to philosophy, certainly not to modern philosophy. Husserl did his very best to reflect on the nature of the reduction and to make it as rigorous as possible: he distinguished several modes of reduction, though they
all go in the one direction, ever inward toward the transcendental dimension of consciousness. He was not a Neo-Kantian, but he matured as an original thinker in a milieu heavily marked by Neo-Kantianism. Jesus was not a philosopher. Nor was he a theologian. Philosophy and theology are perfectly respectable activities in the academy; increasingly, however, I have come to think that phenomenology allows us to look more deeply, more penetratingly, at issues, including those raised in scripture, than either discipline sanctions. It is not a matter of being inter-disciplinary, which often means no more than being muddled in an erudite manner, but of attending to the things themselves and having the patience to let them disclose themselves in their own ways. If I speak of Jesus as phenomenologist, it is in a highly restricted way; he enables us to see something otherwise invisible, the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, and he does this largely through that intense mixture of metaphor and narrative that we call parable.

Throughout Kingdoms of God I prize the parable of the father and his two sons, as related in Luke 15: 11–32, and do not examine other parables or other acts of Jesus: this is a collection of essays and not a systematic work. My intention is not to be thorough, let alone exhaustive, not even with parables, but rather to indicate some ways in which to consider the notion of the βασιλεία and how it has been folded into some unlikely places in the intellectual history of the West. I often retain the Greek word, not out of philological fussiness but in order to conserve some of the strangeness of the concept it signifies. Part of that strangeness is its plurality: a reign that is here yet not here, that breaks into the world yet is itself unworldly, that is within us and outside us, that we are enjoined to help establish on earth while recognizing that it abides in heaven, that attracts philosophers committed to reason and contemplatives in love with God, that has a distinct beginning and end that are held to be in history (the Ascension and the Second Coming) while transcending all temporality.

I begin with two chapters that are concerned with the βασιλεία and “inward life.” The first is a careful reading of a foundational text by Augustine in the Confessions, the Ostia episode, in which the young Augustine and his mother, Monica, touch God by way of a conversation that leads them inward so as to transcend the world and bring them, if only for a moment, to the βασιλεία understood as eternal life. In the second chapter I relate J. G. Fichte’s and Michel Henry’s philosophies of religion, both of which are bold attempts to find the “blessed life” of the βασιλεία by seeking inner life. Especially for Henry, phe-
nomenality is originally immanent, the movement of life itself, and the classical procedures of seeking phenomenality in transcendence (through a doctrine of intentionality or being-in-the-world) derive, he thinks, from this primary mode. From Augustine to Henry, then, we find a powerful linking of inwardness and the βασιλεία; it is a ground against which I seek to cut a figure in the central chapters that concern Jesus. To cut across is not to deny, however: the βασιλεία subsists in many modes, and phenomenology allows us to acknowledge all those modes without collapsing them one into the other.

The βασιλεία never quite comes fully into focus for us, whether we are biblical scholars, philosophers, theologians, or ordinary people who hear about it. In the second section of the book, studies of Hegel and Bonhoeffer introduce fresh aspects of the βασιλεία, quite other than those considered in the first section of the book. There is a strong tradition of turning the βασιλεία into an ethical commonwealth—and I examine this with respect to Kant and Derrida in chapter 9—yet Hegel contests Kant on this point. For him, the βασιλεία crucially involves a relation with God, and this relation is determined by the death of Jesus. Eberhard Jüngel and Jean-Yves Lacoste both respond to Hegel, and their responses are instructive for modern theology. If the one clarifies the unity of Cross and Resurrection in the Hegelian manner, the other argues, rightly I think, that Resurrection is more than an interpretation of the Cross, and that we can encounter Resurrection only if we fully empty ourselves in this life. Hegel’s old antagonist, Kierkegaard, points us toward the βασιλεία in his consideration of “works of love,” and as a foil to the great Danish thinker I place Thomas Aquinas’s teaching on love in the same chapter. Aquinas did not develop a specific theology of the βασιλεία in his Summae, most likely because of the heat generated by Joachim of Fiore’s teaching on the subject; but he leaves us in little doubt about what it means to love God and to love one’s neighbor. To read Kierkegaard alongside Aquinas is to see both his lusters and some of his dark spots. Bonhoeffer, too, is concerned with establishing a relation with God, and for him this involves casting off “religious clothes” and finding the βασιλεία outside a biblical and ecclesial language that has become ineffective. To enter the βασιλεία now, he thinks, we must reinvent the patristic disciplina arcani or “discipline of the secret.”

With the third section of the book I become more explicit in seeing the telling of parables of the βασιλεία as a way of leading us back from “world” to “Kingdom.” There has been much talk in recent decades about varying modes of reduction, whether from transcendence to immanence (Husserl), or from
beings to being (Heidegger), or from beings to givenness (Marion), but here I attempt to show that Christian experience turns on being led from a relation with a world that is pre-given to us to a relation with God that is more fundamental. The One who Jesus calls Father claims us at a level that is prior to our enjoyment of the world and our troubles in it, and we resist the claim as much as we are remade by it. For two chapters my focus is on Jesus as the Christ, on the prethetic experience of the βασιλεία, yet in the third chapter I turn to consider how for Christians the triune life of God—the original phenomenality of life, the King at the heart of the Kingdom—becomes available to us only in and through the Christ.

In recent years Jacques Derrida has sought to return phenomenology to certain frayed limits by pointing out its illicit preoccupation with presence. Also, in some of his last writings, he has attempted to revive and rethink a Kantian interest in religion as centered in ethics. As already indicated, in the ninth chapter I dwell on the ways in which Derrida develops a Kantian notion of the βασιλεία. I use a magnifying glass in the tenth chapter to examine his notion of presence and, in particular, his case that a deconstruction of presence is needed to relaunch a "secular" notion of the βασιλεία by way of democracy and friendship (rather than by way of community, experience, and life). The word "secular" has to be held in suspension, since Derrida argues—unconvincingly, I think—that there is no undivided and continuous border between ethics and religion, and that ethics lays claim to all the holiness that we can know. The other person is absolutely singular, and therefore indistinguishable from God, Derrida argues with respect to Kierkegaard. Not so: the other person is relatively singular, and only God is absolutely singular. Jesus told us that we must have faith in the coming Kingdom, and Derrida does not shy away from the language of faith, although he figures it differently, as an infinite relation of credit opened with respect to the other person. This becomes the focus of the eleventh chapter.

Many issues remain unaddressed, needless to say, and in the coda to the book I consider two of them: the question of forgiveness as essential to the coming of the βασιλεία, and the question of the reach of the βασιλεία. Without forgiveness there can be no βασιλεία: such is an essential teaching of Christianity. Yet can it be true, as we are told both by Benedict XVI and Derrida, that we should forgive those who have injured us even if they do not ask for forgiveness? Vladimir Jankélévitch does not think so, and by way of engaging his Forgiveness (1967) I try to establish a counter-example to this claim, a phenomenon that I call "guilty forgiveness." Is the βασιλεία wholly a matter of
forgiveness, or must justice be involved as well? In the final chapter I set the 
βασιλεία in the context of the theology of religions and consider the scope of 
the “our” when Christians pray “Our Father.” Is God the Father, the one whose 
Kingdom is to come, to be claimed only by baptized and practicing Christians, 
or when we recite the Paternoster do we pray for all people to be received in the 
Kingdom? If we do, are we right to do so? For some people may not wish to be 
included in that prayer.

Thirteen essays, then, and I hope that it is not an unlucky number. Each 
turns quickly or slowly around one or another motif of the βασιλεία in Chris-
tian scripture, philosophy, or theology. If they look far and wide, from fourth-
century Africa to twentieth-century France, from ethics to revelation, from 
manifestations to traces, they also draw energy from a single source, the at-
tempt to make the Christ concretely amenable to thought.
The Manifestation of the Father

It is the most prominent of Jesus’s parables: Christianity itself, one might almost say. So familiar is it that it is known almost before it is read. There have been innumerable glosses on it, from Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria to Elizabeth Bishop’s retelling of part of the story in her two sonnets, “The Prodigal.” Augustine’s Confessions is a spectacular elaboration of it, as is a part of the fourth volume of Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics. There have been endless sermons and commentaries on it, both popular and scholarly, and we think too of paintings of the prodigal among the pigs (Dürer) and the scene of reconciliation with the father (Guercino and Rembrandt), along with George Balanchine’s ballet The Prodigal Son (1934), based on Prokofiev’s music, itself inspired by the parable, and Benjamin Britten’s opera The Prodigal Son (1968), along with other literary works that respond to it. Some of these, like Gide’s and Rilke’s, inhabit the story so fully and so powerfully as to make it change direction. Literature aside, it seems that after so much exegesis the hard work of reading has already been done for us and that all we have to do is receive the truths that come from the story. So the parable appears to stand completely in a light that illumines its every detail and to revolve of its own accord for our inspection, leaving no facet unseen. We read the parable in church, in a seminar, or at home and say almost automatically “Forgiveness,” “Atonement,” “Conversion,” “Compassion,” or “Sinners and Pharisees,” even “Exitus-Reditus,” among many other expressions, all of which have been made available to us by millennia of allegorizing or theologizing that translate the parable into moral or soteriological terms, by centuries of psychological speculation on the relations of the father and his two sons, on parental indulgence and sibling rivalry, and by decades of withering historical-critical analysis.
Could it be, though, that this of all the parables of Jesus has not yet been made fully manifest, that parts of it remain hid in a darkness to which we are so habituated that we cannot even make it out, and that the parable needs to be nudged a little to reveal itself? It seems unlikely, but then again this is a parable that for all its centrality to Christianity has been slanted to misinterpreation for generation upon generation, being called the parable of the “prodigal son,” which is only one aspect of the story. The tradition begins in the early Church, though it is heavily marked in the Reformation. Textually, the two words are found in sixteenth-century editions of the Vulgate and may be found also in editions of the Breeches Bible later in the same century. The side-note in scripture reads De filio prodigo ad patrem reverso. The French speak of le fils prodigue, while the Germans talk of der verlorene Sohn, which fits in with the Lukan parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin. It should be noted, though, that the tradition has also stressed another aspect by way of allegory, the duality of the two sons, taking them mostly to represent Gentiles and Jews. That tradition begins with Tertullian, although the exegeses of Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine are more authoritative, as the Glossa ordinaria confirms. Jerome and Ambrose also allow for another slant—the so called “penitential reading”—in which the younger son is the repentant sinner and the elder son the self-righteous Christian, and Chrysostom joins them in this interpretation.

Other dualities emerge later: Spirit and Body (Gottfried of Admont) and the Active Life and the Contemplative Life (Hugh of St. Cher), among other dou-blets. For some exegetes, the younger son is prized over the elder, while for others—Bonaventure, for example—both brothers have significant flaws that make stark moral and spiritual discriminations between them hard to substan-tiate.

Yet more recent, closer readings have shown what now seems very clear, that while the story turns on two sons, the father is the central character. So perhaps we now know what is being told to us in this story; and yet perhaps we still do not feel the pressure and the texture of the “how” behind the “what”: not the formal poetics of the narrative so much as how the phenomena give themselves and how they are received. How does the father manifest himself? How do his sons receive what he gives them? How do the two sons seek to live their lives? How does each son let death into his life in his own way? In order to pass from the “what” to the “how” we must pass beyond the historical-critical method and read the parable as though for the first time. What is silent must
be heard (or its silence brought forward), what is hidden must be seen. And so we open up the Gospel of Luke and begin to read:

Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

"Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends.
But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’

While still in the aura of this astonishing text, I recall some points about it in order to have them acknowledged before I put them to one side. The parable is told just the once in the New Testament, in the Gospel of Luke, and before it begins we see publicans and sinners approaching Jesus with the Pharisees murmuring that this strange rabbi from Galilee consort with sinners. Since the parable is told in only the one version, it does not embroil us in the anxieties of transmission analysis, though it makes us wonder if it comes from a source outside Luke, the hypothetical document that scholars call “L,” or if it comes entirely from the author we call Luke or from another follower of Jesus rather than from Jesus himself. How the parable came to be in Luke and only there cannot now be answered, unless someone discovers other versions of the parable in papyri long hidden in desert caves. Similarly, how the parable intersects with the group of parables in Luke 15, or with narratives in other religious texts, such as other rabbinic parables, or a story in the Saddharmapundarika Sutra, better known as the Lotos Sutra, cannot be our concern here. Nor can how Islamic thinkers have used the parable to criticize Christianity, as falling away from its authentic vision of God’s mercy into messianic confusion and idolatry. Perhaps the parable opens paths from Christianity to other religions, Judaism and Buddhism in particular, and so offers us ways of seeing that the outside of Christianity is not entirely separate from it. Perhaps it allows us to see how we deviate from our own faith. My concern is rather with a “how” at the heart of the parable itself, a double “how,” in fact—how God is and how we relate to him—which we find by reading this parable about the manifestation of fatherhood to two apparently quite different sons.

“There was a man” [Ἀνθρώπος τις], Luke’s Jesus begins, and with those words the world of work and commercial exchange is bracketed for a while. Those who first heard the story belonged to a culture of storytelling, in which oral narrative is a vehicle of wisdom as well as pleasure. On agreeing to listen to or read the parable, one is led from one’s own situation in life, whatever it
may be, to an essential meditation on being human that will encompass the lives of any audience members, each in a singular manner. One is not led outside all circuits of exchange, though, for something can be given back to Luke’s Jesus: attention, of course, but also acceptance or rejection of what he has to say, which implies a shift of perspective on how to live from now on.

At first we know very little about the man in the parable, only that he has property, ὄψια, and two sons. We hear of one son right away, and anticipate hearing of the other. When we first see the man he is passive; his younger son has asked something of him, and we hear nothing of their conversation or what precedes it. Pauses in conversation are sometimes called “accountable silence,” but here, in this exemplary story, there are unaccountable silences: what the father presumably says to the son would be important yet is passed over, and we hear nothing of what the mother says. So familiar is the story and so quickly does it move that we can miss the fact that the narrator neither lets us see nor lets us hear the mother. Not that one would expect to see or hear a woman in the story. In a first-century Semitic family the father is predominant by virtue of being the legal and spiritual head of the household, with the eldest son being next in the line of authority; and yet one needs to stress that we see no mother because the parable is about fatherhood, finally about God as father, and among the parents the focus must be exclusively on the figure of the father for the story to work as parable. Could it be otherwise? Only if the parable came from another culture and another time: as it stands, it is a story that exhibits a wholly male world, except, of course, for the allusion to harlots. But not an entirely symmetrical world, for here, as everywhere, the relation between father and son is asymmetrical. The father gives life to his sons, and the sons cannot return the gift of life. They can give love, respect, annoyance, sorrow, even death to the father, but never life.

What we hear from the younger son is disconcerting. He says, “Father, give me [δός μου] the share of the property [ὄψιας] that will belong to me.” The son is not eliciting a gift, strictly speaking, so much as implying that he wishes no longer to participate in the free circulation of life on the farm as gift. He requests both his share of the property and the right of disposal. It has been argued that the son’s request is perfectly reasonable and that he has done nothing blameworthy in making it. In Jesus’s day, a time of great hardship, people migrated in order to do better elsewhere. Torah is clear that property would usually be distributed to sons at the death of the father (Num. 27: 8–11; 36: 7–9; Deut. 21: 15–17), although it may be settled beforehand by deed of gift. Yet Sirach
33: 20–24 suggests that it is not prudent to do so, and even a gift is not usually to be realized until the death of the donor. That the son asks both for his portion and for it to be realized now amounts to a silent allusion to the death of the father. It is as though the father silently hears, "You might as well be dead as far as I am concerned." The son wants the money immediately in order to go to the "distant country," presumably a Gentile land where he will be well away from his father's watchful eyes and where (as he may not fully grasp) it will be almost impossible to remain ritually pure. Were the son's request of the father morally neutral, the dramatic structure of the narrative would fall apart. It would be hard to see why the father is not completely surprised by the boy's admission on his return of having done anything so very wrong. Of course, the father would see when running to the child that he was in a bad way but may well think that he had been robbed and beaten on the way home. All the boy would have done, so far as the father knew for sure when running to him, is to have left in order to have a better chance in life: a regrettable but understandable decision in a depressed economic climate. Instead, the father accepts that the returned boy has indeed "sinned against heaven" and against his parent, against Father and father, without knowing anything about him squandering his portion, and guessing from his condition that he must be impure. He may have boils, he may have had contact with corpses (and, as we know, pigs), and he would not have been able to keep kosher.  

We might take the elder son when he vents to his father to imply that his brother has "disobeyed" the father's command, which would presumably be not to leave home, diminish the value of the family property, and risk impurity. The status of the story of the younger son wasting his portion is unclear: we know that it has happened, but what exactly does the family know of it? Has the father heard of it before the return of the son? Has the brother? And how reliable is the information they would have heard from the "distant country"? It could be that the father simply sees the son, now destitute, and puts two and two together on the spot. The son has not been robbed and beaten but has returned penniless. His sin has been the impetuous request that insults the father and breaks the Law, doubtless compounded (as the father would instantly recognize on seeing him) by grievous mistakes made in the distant country. The brother may earlier have heard gossip from people who traveled to the distant country; more likely, he may have been told only now by the servant boy what all the servants and locals instantly recognized—the younger son is back and indigent—and in his anger at the father's throwing of a party put two and two
together and got five. I shall return to this. The main point I wish to make now, however, is that in venturing his request the younger son anticipates two things that are materially distinct though bound together by the one event of death, the realization of his inheritance and the father's demise. Actually, he does not ask for his "inheritance" [κληρονομία], a word the evangelist uses elsewhere in the Gospel (Luke 12: 13, e.g.), which would imply a responsibility for it, but only for what falls to him, his share [μέρος] of the оυσίας, as so many possessions the value of which can be realized. He already shares in the property he desires because he is a member of the family, enjoying his father's "property" (or "the living" [βίον]). In asking for what will be his, the younger son refuses to see the property as an invisible gift that he already receives but solely as so much visible material that can be cashed in and possessed individually.17

Does the younger son wish to migrate for economic reasons or does he wish to leave because he cannot bear working the farm at home, now and forever? We do not know. We might say without too much speculation, though, that he wants freely to try life himself now, to have his future begin now, whether because for him life must be lived to the limit in the present, or because (it is the same point but seen from behind), young as he is, he anticipates his own death and wishes to live fully before dying. To block his death by living to the hilt now, the younger son must first mark his father's death. Certainly we see the father as injured. We expect him to beat this ungrateful child and hear him say harsh things to him. Because we neither see nor hear anything of the sort, do we also regard the father as foolish, not maintaining his rightful pre-eminence in the family? Sirach 33: 20–22 would incline us to do so. For we moderns, it is hard not to let the image of King Lear or Père Goriot pass through the mind, though in doing so we risk making a hasty induction.18 The narrative is so sparing of details that we have little traction for any speculation as to character or motive. We are reading a first-century parable, not a Renaissance tragedy or nineteenth-century novel. Besides, the father may permit the younger son to have what he asks for while not countenancing it to the slightest degree. And that may be a sign of wisdom and love.

In acceding to the request of the younger son, the father must also distribute property to the elder son but without right of disposal. He too no longer receives the оυσία fully as gift. The property would be divided unequally, as Torah requires, the elder son receiving two-thirds of the whole (Deut. 21: 17). No mention is made of the elder son's response to this, and no mention is made of any conversation about the impending request between the two sons. There should
have been a conversation; it would have been the elder son’s duty to protect
the father from insult from the younger son, and — once the insult had been
given — to reconcile the son to the father. Perhaps the elder son has coolly an-
ticipated coming into his share of the farm sooner rather than later through the
action of his brother. Equally, he may feel that responsibility has settled on his
shoulders too quickly thanks to his brother: his life has run toward him, tak-
ing away his youth. There may have been a rift between the two sons: it would
be an impetus for the younger son to act as he does, and for the elder son to
be silent. At any rate, the younger son gathers up his goods in only a few days:
his animals and coats, some shekels, no doubt, and — given his destination—
Greek and Roman coins. So quick he is to leave the family, the community,
and the land of Israel that he does not take enough time to get the full value
of his inheritance. His father and brother are left with less of the farm than the
family had before, certainly with less disposable property, and with the gnaw-
ing sense that it has been sold off cheaply. This boy is impossible! He passes
more than one limit before finally going into “a distant country,” a Gentile
land, and so seeks unknown possibilities. He believes that life is elsewhere, and
that it is now to be given to him in abundance. He does not see that he is not
only breaking his link with the family but also shattering the normal rhythm
of family life: he keeps nothing for the future, for looking after his father, for
the family he will have in years to come, and for himself as head of that family.
Rather, being young and thoughtless, he “squandered his property in dissolute
living” [διεσκόρπισεν τὴν οὐσίαν αὐτοῦ ζῶν ἀσώτως]. Meanwhile, the elder
son, economist par excellence, stays home, living out tried possibilities, hav-
ing been thrown into the midst of life with all its cares by the younger son’s
thoughtless death wish for the father.

Jesus’s narrative is relentless; it is a machine that has been wound up very
tightly and uncoils rapidly. Two bad things happen, one right after the other:
“When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that
country, and he began to be in need.” Death, which has appeared until now
only as a qualitative limit, something linked to property rights, begins to ap-
pear as a quantitative limit for him here and now. Without resources, and es-
pecially without family, community, and the protection of the Lord God, the
young man is in grave trouble. Still he does not go home. In a great famine it
would be impossible for him to avoid contact with corpses. He receives the pos-
sibility of death but differently from before; he now seeks work, for he has no
choice in the matter, and certainly the Gentile to whom he has attached him-
self does all he can to shake off this clinging Jewish boy. The job assigned to him is offensive, as the master would have known full well: the lad must look after pigs and—so dire is his condition—he even wishes to eat the carob pods that compose their food in this bad time. According to Talmud, he is cursed because he has become impure. According to everyday knowledge of farm life, were he to venture to take the pigs’ food from them the swine would maul him. His boon companions have abandoned him, and he is cut off from family and community by his own decision. Marking his father’s death has led, before very long at all, to the bringing closer of his own death: “I am dying of hunger!” [ἔγω δὲ λιμόν ὅδε ἀπόλλυμαι]. It is just then, when death presses hard on him, that we are told that he “came to himself” [εἰς εὐαυτόν δὲ ἔλθων], or as we would say, he came to his senses or woke up to himself. He must get close to death before he acknowledges his mistake and returns home. This is hardly a scene of ideal repentance. When he says to himself, “I will get up and go to my father,” for how long has he realized that he had done wrong, not merely got into a bad way? His decision seems more pragmatic than moral. Now, though, he wants to live, not just to recover his health but also to live in the right way. This does not mean, as he readily accepts, that he can live in relative comfort as he once did, but it does mean that he can live within the circle of his family and community, even if considerably further from the center than before.

How the son comes to himself is given to us in overhearing his interior voice. (He comes fully to himself by dividing himself into speaker and hearer.) He rehearses to himself what he will say when he shakes off this uncaring master to whom he has no real connection and returns home: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.” There is acknowledgment of sin but no clear statement of repentance. He may be decrying his own stupidity as much as expressing remorse. Yet the son sees the father in anticipation, and the imagined speech to him begins appropriately; it acknowledges his fault before God as well as before his father. He is, after all, enjoined by Torah to honor his mother and his father (Exod. 20: 12) and to look after his father in his old age (Sirach 3: 12), things he had forgotten or pushed aside, and we remember the rest of the verse from Exodus: “so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.” Yet the lad has so far only come to his senses, not to his father’s senses. Having started by thinking primarily about property and money he still sees the world in terms of value that can be nicely calibrated: “I am no longer worthy” [οὐκέτι εἰμί ἄξιος], as though being
a son is only a matter of corresponding to a particular value in a culture carefully indexed to honor and shame. On the long trip home from the “distant country” the lad still thinks of himself as impure and unworthy, as having devalued himself, especially in the eyes of God and his father. (No mention is made of the brother. It is still the father’s farm, the boy knows full well.) The new, lower relation should be of himself as servant and his father as master. All this time the son is absent from the father, or rather, as we learn from the story, the son is still cared for, present to the father in the mode of hope, of anticipation of a final homecoming. The son anticipates the father as a master; the father anticipates the son as son. “But while he was still far off [τετελεσθεις ἐκ τῆς ἐπιστολῆς], his father saw him.” This could be a chance observation, a momentary glance at the dusty plain, although the parable is an exemplary narrative, not a realist story, and the stronger reading is of the father always having an eye on the horizon since the son left because he is, after all, a father. His love is invisible and silent for most of the parable.

The parable reaches its first climax with the scene of how the father’s invisible, silent love becomes visible and vocal, how the younger son is received: the father runs to him, breaking all expectations of proper, dignified behavior. Why does he do this? Because he “was filled with compassion” [παθηθείς εὐδοκίας]: a rare thing for human beings according to the New Testament, and one commended by the evangelist (see Luke 1: 78, 10: 33). In the unforeseen embrace of his father, the son cannot reach the end of his rehearsed speech, which he has otherwise got nearly word perfect. He cannot get to say, “treat me like one of your hired hands,” and thereby re-negotiate a different relationship with the father. As soon as the father hears the words “no longer worthy to be called your son,” he interrupts the boy. Once again, there is no conversation, not because nothing is reported but presumably because the father is too overcome by emotion to speak directly to his son. He turns from the son and speaks to those who are servants. Once the father was passive and the younger son active; now the roles are reversed.

The scene of forgiveness is outside all economy; there is no reason for the father to act as he does in embracing the disgraced son, calling for a robe, “the best one”—his own, without a doubt—“a ring” (so that the younger son has authority with the servants), and “sandals” (to indicate he is not a servant), in short reinstating him as an honored member of the family, and, with the slaughter of the fatted calf and the ensuing party, re-integrating him into the entire community. The feast is a startling contrast to the boy desiring to eat
the pigs' food and not being able to do so, and a contrast too with the servants' usual fare, bread. By rights, the son should have been received, if at all, in the house, and should have had to fulfill rites of purification (Parah Adumah, for one) and been required to abase himself before the father. Yet this son who has been impossible, who has gone beyond the limit of the possible, is treated with a love that is equally, or more than equally, impossible, outside any and all expectations and limits. What manifests itself in the father is not parental authority or the primacy of religious ritual but the phenomenality of fatherhood, not just biological life or the legal right to respect, but care, compassion, and forgiveness. The father is prodigal, like the son; unlike the son, though, he is prodigal in love, not money.

The father does not have a legal, social, or cultural reason to act as he does in forgiving the son. And yet he does not simply act "without why" but gives a cogent reason for his deeds: "this brother of yours was dead [ὁ ἄδειλος σου ὁ ὄτος νεκρὸς ἤν] and has come to life [καὶ ζησεν]; he was lost and has been found." The father whose death had been cruelly anticipated, brutally brought forward by the son, and whose relationship with his younger son has been assigned a discounted cash value turns out to have seen his son choose death rather than life: he was dead to the father for his thoughtless behavior, dead to the family, dead to the community, and dead to the Lord God. Only in returning to the father does the son return to life. The return of the son in a state of utter destitution and saying the first words of penitence are sufficient atonement as far as the father is concerned. The father is the giver of life in all its modes, including family, communal and spiritual life. Life, here, is seen not to be the fulfilling of one's highest possibilities (however misidentified and misunderstood they may have been by the son) but being in relations of love and fidelity, being reunited with the family, the community, in observing Torah, and in being before the Lord God. The younger son asked to be given something, and he received it. His true gift came only on returning home, however, and was unasked for, totally unexpected, and never able to be presumed.

Yet the parable has a second climax, one that is more troubling, in part because it is not resolved. The elder son, the one who remained within the realm of the possible, objects to the father's compassion for his wayward younger brother. On the way back from the field, where he would have been paying the workers their daily wage, he hears music and dancing and is told by one of the local boys [παιδῶν] what has happened. "Then he became angry and refused to go in," we are told; and the sudden anger suggests the freshness of
the news heard by the elder brother. Once again, the father comes out, risking losing face once more, and once again the father hears an unfilial speech from a son. The father must come out, since the elder son is breaking all convention in not greeting the guests. A family humiliation is about to brew. Now the elder son’s speech is not as blunt as the younger son’s wish for his inheritance and the right to realize it, but it is just as bad in another way. It flings salt in the father’s face. He has served the father for many years [Ἠδού γοναῦτα ἔτη δουλεύω σοι] and not abandoned the family farm, as his brother once did. He has lived more as a servant than as a son, he feels, has borne responsibility for the farm, and directly accuses the father of withholding a gift that was his by rights: “you have never given me even a young goat [Ἳμοι οὐδέποτε ἐδώκας ξιφόν] so that I might celebrate with my friends.” The accusation is clear: you have not been a father, only a master. By the terms of settlement, the elder son would have been assigned the remaining property, including the fatted calf and the goats, although the father would maintain possession of everything until his death and have rights of use and enjoyment. Hence the father’s right to re-instate the younger son in the family, “this son of yours,” as the elder boy bitterly says, denying all relationship with him, this “son” who has—the elder boy grasps for an image sure to wound the father, one drawn from his sudden anger, vivid imagination, and likely local gossip—“devoured your property with prostitutes” [καταφαγὼν σου τὸν βιον μετὰ πορνῶν], Gentile harlots no less. It is the father’s living, no doubt, but the elder son knows full well that it is his living as well. Since the younger son left, he has had to carry more burdens in order to keep the farm going.

The father shows tenderness for the elder son too (“Son [τέκνω: Child], you are always with me”) and full awareness of the legal situation (“all that is mine is yours”). Note that the father does not deny what the elder son has said; no attempt is made to make the lyrical moment of return the whole family story, one that occludes issues of fairness, only to stress the significance of the moment. The father’s silence about justice, and the anger that he sees in his elder son, is not to be interpreted as a denial of the importance of being fair. Instead, the father quietly re-affirms the proper relationship that should be observed: the younger son is “this brother of yours,” he says. The elder son has conspired in affirming the father’s death by not preventing his brother from injuring him; he has been physically alive but dead to the deep love that is shown by the father. For the father, it is clear that the younger son “was dead and has come to life” biologically and in every other way as well. The father repeats his main
statement, as the younger son does, though the father speaks publicly both times. The younger son is alive—what an impossible possibility! It is less clear that the elder son, who has always been with the father, is alive and not flirting with death by way of endangering his relationships. Will the elder son choose life (and come to the party) or death (and stay outside)? The younger son has seen his father first as dead, then as a master, and then as a true father. The elder son has seen him as a master but not yet as a true father. He still sees life as fulfilling possibilities, albeit more local and socially acceptable ones than his brother, possibilities limited by accepting the responsibilities of running a large farm in a hard time. He does not yet see life as being embedded in relations of love. Will he have that last perception of the man standing before him, or will he remain in his own “distant country”? We do not know.

What we do know on reading the parable closely is that it is not a parable of choice, as it is often thought, largely due to the influences of reformers like Luther, along with Calvin and Counter-Reformation exegetes and preachers: we should be more like the younger son than the elder son, seeking forgiveness for our faults rather than being obedient yet brooding all the while on some hurt, real or imagined. Both sons refuse the gift of the father, unconditional love, the younger son at the start and the older son at the end, each because he is fixated on another good, freedom or fairness. And each son is the subject of an unfinished narrative: we think we know what has happened with the younger son, but we surely do not know the end of his story, for we have no idea how the older son will act. Nor is the parable simply a story of reversal: the father comes out to both sons. Rather, we have been reading a parable of decision, one that offers eidetic possibilities that, structured according to a narrative, indicate that we should decide to be more like the father than like either son. The parable gives us all that we need to make the decision, and in making it the Kingdom—the Kingdom of the Father—breaks into our lives here and now. We should be more like the father than we are now because the father gives continually without stinting, even when he is hurt, even when there are rituals that really should be observed. At no point does he choose death, in any of its modalities (leave taking or grudge holding, for instance), only life. He allows his death to be marked and accepts the wound. The father manifests himself variously, not just at the miraculous moment of reconciliation but in accepting the leave taking, in anxiously watching for the younger son, and in coming out to speak to the elder son and deflecting his anger. Each son is close to him even when, as we know, each is dead to him. The younger
son's return to life is in fact a return to more life, to love understood as something freely given, not something to be measured or held in suspense until conventions have been observed and purity rites have been fulfilled.

Two questions have been surfacing and then hiding as I have been reading this parable. The first one is: Who speaks here? And the second is: What exactly does Jesus do here? They are closely related.

I have called the narrator "Luke's Jesus" out of prudence, keeping one eye on the "L" hypothesis and the possibility that the parable is Luke's, not Jesus's, and another possibility that the parable may have originated with Jesus but been styled by Luke. Most likely received without a context, the parable is given one by Luke, one that fits his theology quite nicely. Some readers will adopt a minimal answer to the question "Who speaks here?" while others will seek a maximal answer. A minimal answer will satisfy those whose interest in the text is oriented by the historical-critical method: it is "L" or Luke who speaks through a character called Jesus. If there is a link between the parable and the historical Jesus, it is not one that can be recovered or relied upon. On this understanding, the parable may be a piece of wisdom literature; it may point to something essential to Christianity, as experienced by the early Church, but it has no more authority than that. A maximal answer may entertain the hypothesis of "L" or Luke's Jesus, though it may also allow both "L" and Luke to embody a story spoken by the historical Jesus. What makes it maximal, however, is the judgment that the parable has two authors, one human and one divine. For Catholics, whether the story comes from the historical Jesus, "L," or Luke is beside the point in terms of ecclesial authority (though not with respect to the intersection of history and revelation), for the parable is canonical by dint of being in the Vulgate (Den. 785) and the magisterium teaches that the Holy Spirit inspired what is included in the canon (Den. 348, 706, etc.). Protestants who hold to a doctrine of plenary inspiration will find common cause with Catholics, while those who do not will find the historical-critical method forever threatening to erode the authority of scripture. If Luke 15: 11–32 is really the work of "L" or Luke and not Jesus then it speaks with only one voice, or at most a first-century human voice and the voice of tradition, whether deemed hallowed or hollow.

We are long used to thinking of scripture speaking with different voices. The allegorical hermeneutic of Origen enables us to see how that is possible,
as does the literal exegesis of Theodore of Mopseustia. Doubtless both styles of reading have lost their power to recruit defenders with passion and make do with advocates beset by nostalgia. Yet it is not difficult even today to grasp the thesis that a text speaks with two voices. Maurice Blanchot, for one, argues that we can hear or overhear a “narrative voice” beneath the “narrator’s voice,” the former being the endless shifting of words as they pass from being to image and back again. More straightforwardly, one might say that certain texts—the 2010 State of the Union address, for instance—are at once the words of a particular person and of a structure, the president and the executive branch of government. One may hear the personal speech rhythm of Barack Obama while also hearing the impersonal voice of political authority. In many translated texts one may hear both the author and the translator, especially if one knows the work in its original language. (In reading Odes 4: 7 [“Diffugere nives”] as translated by A. E. Housman I can hear both Horace and Housman.) In the case of Luke 15: 11–32 one might wish to say that the text is authoritative with respect to salvation because it was uttered by Jesus (understood as God incarnate) or because it has been deemed canonical by the Church. These disjunctions may be taken to converge or to diverge. That is, the parable may be regarded as canonical because Jesus spoke it or some version of it or because it is held that the Holy Spirit inspired scripture. In the latter case, “L” or Luke may have been thinking while writing that he was composing the story when in fact it was the Holy Spirit who was working through him. Also one may rightly say when one reads Luke 15: 11–32 in English that one can hear the translator as well as the author. This is particularly so when reading the King James translation of the Bible with its distinctive cadences. There may be multiple voices in any text, then. I doubt that anyone can properly say that one hears an Aramaic original behind the Greek text, though a scholar of Semitic languages could construct an Aramaic text for the parable. Whether it would contain the trace of Jesus’s idiom is another issue, however.

For the non-believer, Luke 15: 11–32 is spoken by “L” or Luke; it is a historical text of profound importance to Christianity but one that has no revelatory claim upon us. For the believer, the Holy Spirit speaks the same text, regardless of whether or not Jesus, “L,” or Luke also spoke it or wrote it. If we ask how could one pass from non-belief to belief in reading the parable we approach a central question, both with respect to biblical hermeneutics and with the poetics of parable. There is nothing in the historical-critical method that allows anything miraculous—whether an event depicted in the text such as
radical forgiveness or an event brought about by the text such as seeking such forgiveness—to have the status of evidence. Just because an evangelist testifies to the forgiveness of sins does not mean that there is such a thing as either sin or divine forgiveness, the historian will say; and just because a few or many millions of people became believers on reading a passage of scripture does not mean that God is the author or co-author of the passage. Only the principle of sufficient reason, sufficient historical reason, governs the reading of the text, and by definition miraculous events fall outside the scope of that principle. Now a phenomenological reading of the parable is not confined to sufficient historical reason, although it may learn a good deal from what historians say about the text; it is beholden to the principle of principles, and so makes no pre-judgment about the status of evidence. In phenomenology, the evidence that counts is Evidenz, the making evident of something, and no rules are set in place to limit what makes itself evident. The otherness of the other person, the disclosure of distance in the icon, and the pathos of life that manifests itself in self-affect: all these are invisible, and all are evident for recent phenomenologists. Toward the end of his life Heidegger spoke of the "phenomenology of the inapparent," and others have heard him and acted upon his words. 

No judgment is made in phenomenology about the rights and wrongs of belief or non-belief with regards to what scripture tells us. Phenomenology merely allows the full range of Evidenz to be received, and when reading a text it may take a great many readings for it to be received. Each reader is given eidetic possibilities in the parable; no reader is asked in phenomenology to realize them or not to realize them in his or her own life. Now in Luke 15: 11–32 one may see the father in the story as manifesting human fatherhood in compassion in his running to the son, and one may also see God as forgiving sins and brushing aside human (and religious) rules and regulations. The phenomenality of sin consists in allowing death to come forward (through the son’s insolent request that breaks the Law), and the phenomenality of God is registered in love impulsively coming forward, freely manifesting itself by way of overwhelming compassion for both sorts of people, the younger and the elder sons. One may receive this phenomenality in diverse ways, most usually as artistic pathos or as divine truth. Phenomenology as such is neutral with respect to the choice; it merely allows the choice to be made. So Luke 15: 11–32 is open to a phenomenological reading. Also, though, it is itself an example of phenomenology, a narrative that nudges the Kingdom so that it comes forward and makes itself evident. How so?
Phenomenology is usually taken to be a style of philosophizing that began with Husserl and was revised variously by Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, and many others, right up to Henry, Marion, and Lacoste. In this tradition there is debate about the number and order of reductions, whether reduction is needed in the first place or even if reduction is faithful to phenomenological method. One may speak of the “first reduction” (Husserl’s), the “second reduction” (Heidegger’s), and the “third reduction” (Marion’s). This sequence is a narrative of the proper aim of phenomenology from securing an object to manifesting being to disclosing givenness, one that begins with “transcendental consciousness” passes to Dasein and ends with l’adonné. In each case, the issue is a relation between phenomenon and subject or whoever comes after the subject. Of particular interest, since it evokes not only the leading back to transcendental consciousness but also the motivation for this movement, is Eugen Fink’s revision of Husserl’s reduction, which humanizes the one who performs reduction and leads him or her to the very margin of the world. Along the same lines, although perhaps sensing a Gnostic element in Fink’s reduction, Lacoste advocates a “liturgical reduction” that leads the one who prays to the border of the world. Rather than refine reduction endlessly in the wake of Husserl, one might, thanks to Husserl, see phenomenology being performed long before him, long before even Descartes or Hume, philosophers he credited with occasional phenomenological insight. Husserl clarifies phenomenology and purifies it in a particular way; he does not inaugurate its distinctive gestures but allows us to discern them in the past, even when they are at an angle to the ones that suit his post-Kantian agenda. I want to suggest that Jesus performs a reduction in his telling of parables, and that we see more deeply into what a parable does when we recognize this.

In telling a story Jesus brackets everyday life and its worldly logic in order to lead those who hear him to a deeper place. So ἐποχὴ and reduction: but not a reduction from transcendence to the immanence of transcendental consciousness, as Husserl taught, or a reduction from beings to being, as Heidegger proposed, or even a reduction from both to givenness, as Marion commends. Instead, Jesus leads us from using a worldly logic—one involving exchange, honor, law, and convention—to using a divine logic, one based on compassion and forgiveness. We pass from “world” to βασιλεία, from every inflection of “world” (αἰών, κόσμος, mundum, orbis terrarum, imperium mundi) to “Kingdom.” The parable is the means by which we shift our perspective on life, to see how we are to live so as to be pleasing to the God we can now know (and not know). We
are not asked to see how we constitute the meaning of phenomena but rather invited to see how we can be constituted as properly human by participating in the Kingdom. If we examine this movement closely, we can see that it has two moments. The first is κένωσις: the one who learns from the parable empties himself or herself of the worldly logic that has controlled his or her life. One is stripped of worldly humanness, led to the very border of the world, as Fink and Lacoste stress in their versions of the reduction. The second is ἐπικτάσις: the listener stretches himself or herself into the Kingdom of God, that is, into the embedded relations of unconditional love that are already available, with all the risk of being repeatedly humiliated and hurt by entering into those relations. One sees that it is not one’s fellow human beings who provide models of how to live but only the Father who is Life itself.

Several things follow from figuring parable as reduction from “world” to “Kingdom.” The first is that the vehicle of the reduction is not philosophy, or anything of central importance to philosophy in its modern formation. No concept of βασιλεία is given to us; the βασιλεία is not a utopia, church, or social group but a way of being with others that comports with how God is. Parable is a brief interlacing of metaphor and narrative, and we learn how to live as God wishes us to by being attentive to narrative (here: the story of the two sons) and metaphor (here: God is our father). Philosophical and theological concerns certainly follow from the reduction—in working out a doctrine of God, for instance—but they are not essential to it, except, of course, for clarifying the very notion of reduction in the first place.

The second thing that follows from thinking of parable as reduction is that the means of reduction, the parable, itself tells us something of God. He is like a human father and yet, at the same time, quite unlike any human father we know. God is like a human father in the ancient Semitic world in that he has sovereignty and that his child is always his child, yet few human fathers, if any, would completely throw aside all decorum, honor, convention, ritual, and sense of grievance, even if committed to the principle of unconditional love. God is unlike any human father, at the very limit of fatherhood as we know it, and manifests that fatherhood fully because he is wholly compassionate and his relations with us are entirely and always relations of love, not obligation or utility. Luke is clear in his Gospel that only God, Father and King, is truly
compassionate. The phenomenality of God is given both in his running toward
the sinner in love and mercy and in coming out to the righteous elder son with
tenderness toward him. Humans, even pious ones, usually act differently. So
parable gives us a structure of doubled revelation: how we are to know God
(as Father) and how God transcends our knowledge of him (we cannot tell the
depths and heights of what it means to call him “Father”). We are also told how
we can become more like the Father, by showing mercy rather than by clinging
to a culturally and socially determined status. God comes to us modus sine
modo, in a way without a way, without being bound by categories or even by re-
ligion, and we come to God modus sine modo as well, though in another scan-
sion of the Latin, at the very limit of our love for others. We love God as we love
our fathers (and mothers, wives, husbands, children) but without any measure
or bound, without any quid pro quo; yet God who is pure love, ἀγάπη, loves
us outside all categories and all rules. We freshen the imago dei when we love
without measure, which includes radical forgiveness.

The odd logic of “like but unlike” that governs the parable means that we
can and should forgive as God does but that we never quite forgive as God
does. Justice sticks in our throats, not because it is wrong but because we want
it immediately. We might say that the father in the parable shows us lyrical for-
giveness: it is immediate, pure, symbolic, a gift given without any thought of
exchange, and one that in effect completely neutralizes the effects of the past.
Perhaps there is more in God’s reception of the sinner than pure forgiveness,
but if there is we are not told what it may be. This scene of lyrical forgiveness
is of two persons and two only; no consideration is taken of others—the elder
son, the rest of the family, and the community—who are also wounded in one
way or another by the past act. The father throws a party, but a party does not
cure all ills, as the parable quietly points out in the passage about the elder son.
The past has been neutralized in its effects, not erased in all its being. What
will happen on the morrow? Will the father speak to the younger son about
justice now that forgiveness has taken place? What would that justice be? I
want to suggest that Luke 15: 11–32 does not promote forgiveness over justice
but rather concerns itself with the necessity of forgiveness before justice takes
place. Forgiveness occurs and is always lyrical—without calculation, pure gift,
a doubled act of κένωσις and ἐπεκτασις—but it takes place in order to open a
narrative space in which justice may properly appear. The father forgives the
son, and in doing so he summons an indefinite future in which the son, and
Indeed the entire family, can thrive once again. The narrative of forgiveness has a clear structure: the fault is in the past, forgiveness is in the present, and justice is in the future.  

Without forgiveness there can be no future in which broken relationships are healed, and yet without justice those relationships will not be healed. Forgiveness neutralizes the past and opens an alternate future for being in relation with others. The elder brother shows us a man concerned with the past and the future, not with the value of the living present; and the father points out to him the rightness of celebrating the moment of return, of accepting the brother back, of forgiving past faults. He says nothing against the elder brother's angry concern for fairness. It is not wrong; it is just inappropriate at the time. Tomorrow is the day for justice to begin, to work out the ways in which the younger son can start to restore damaged relationships. Fallen humanity seeks justice before offering forgiveness; the Kingdom breaks in to show us that forgiveness must come before the difficult work of justice. Forgiveness, then, is always the midpoint of a narrative in which it appears: it responds to a past event or events, and it opens a new future in which all parties may flourish. Will the younger son act for justice? Perhaps he will need to be forgiven again (and again and again). The present can move into the future but the future is not thereby eliminated or drained of moral significance. Without the midpoint, an irrevocable past will erase in advance all possible futures except the darkest ones of broken and stunted relationships.

When forgiveness is placed in terms of an overarching narrative, one that is not offered to us in Luke 15: 11–32, one expects a clear change on the part of the one forgiven. Opened by an act of radical forgiveness, the future is nonetheless fragile: it depends on relationships being healed and trust restored among all parties. The future will be robust, workable, only if all parties take part in gift giving, though not as simple exchange. For what they give to one another—help, kindness, patience, understanding, all in varying ways and in different circumstances—is unable to be measured, or given at the one time, and is incommensurable in any case. Mostly, it is invisible and silent, discreetly hidden in words about other things and in the performance of ordinary tasks. Without the younger son's gift giving, all those hurt by the past deed or deeds will remain unhealed, and the same is true if it is only the younger son who gives. The future of the family remains invisible, unsaid, in the parable; yet what the younger son will do in the future is as important as what the elder son will do. What the parable makes perfectly visible is that the younger son can begin to
live again now that he has been forgiven, while the elder son may destroy himself as well as others in not being able to forgive. Sin breaks communities; lack of forgiveness also breaks them, and the demand for justice can break them too if it comes out of sequence. Luke 15: 11–32 is not an exemplary story about forgiveness; it is a story about the proper relation of forgiveness and justice.

That Jesus uses the metaphor of the father is clearly culturally determined, as already indicated. For us, who experience a quite different familial structure in twenty-first century America, there is no theological reason whatsoever not to think of God also by way of the metaphor of mother. Not that we have come to this realization so recently, even with respect to this passage of Luke. In his great work "The Return of the Prodigal Son" (ca. 1662), Rembrandt paints the young son, returned, with the father's hands on his back: the left hand is masculine and the right hand is feminine in appearance.35 God, who transcends gender, has male and female traits in his dealings with us. Theologically, the parable helps to clarify what we mean by the *imago dei*. We have lost the image of God by a fall from the divine to the worldly, one that can always be repeated—we are falling creatures more than fallen creatures, falling because fallen and still alive, making difficult decisions in multiple, incommensurable relations—and that we can regain the image by exercising compassion in ordinary human relations. The Christian life is a perpetual movement of κένωσις and ἐπέκτασις, a recognition that the one leads to the other, and that ἐπέκτασις itself involves κένωσις, for when we truly stretch ourselves in the Kingdom we are continually emptying ourselves of what keeps us grounded in the natural and political world regarded as self-sufficient. Our center is in God, not ourselves (consciousness, intellect, feeling, the unconscious, the will), and without κένωσις and ἐπέκτασις we cannot find ourselves, let alone God.

Third, when we think of the parable as reduction from "world" to "Kingdom" we recognize two things: that the parable is revelatory, and that what is revealed is divine phenomenality, not an object or being but the invisible coming forward of love itself. This calls for reflection. For it is by no means clear that phenomenology is able to treat revelation. A phenomenon can be made to manifest itself fully, to come out from partial darkness into the light. We learn phenomenology explicitly (through philosophy) or implicitly (through art, e.g.) in order to know how to do this the better. Yet no human, not even the subtlest of all phenomenologists, can make God manifest himself. The Father is hidden. We must wait for revelation. So we have no a priori right to assimilate "revelation" and "manifestation." When God reveals himself, he may also
re-veil himself in order to preserve his holiness and to safeguard us against its blinding presence. We cannot figure God as phenomenon. Yet we may say that once God has revealed himself this revelation may be made more fully manifest; such is the presumption of following the modes of revelation: scripture and ecclesial tradition. Now the Kingdom of God is a phenomenon, an elusive one that is easily blocked by others, one that we are enjoined in the synoptic Gospels to help the Father make more manifest. True, only the Father can realize the Kingdom; yet it is in our acts of compassion, forgiveness, and sacrifice—the very meaning of ἀγάπη—that parts of its outline are discerned on Earth. Theologically, the pressing question is by what right can we say that the Kingdom, which must be revealed to us, is a phenomenon and therefore able to be disclosed to us. The answer must begin with the evident: only Jesus can tell us a parable of the Kingdom, such as Luke 15: 11–32, which is held to have revelatory authority, and this situation obtains because only Jesus is one with the Father. All other parables are, as Barth says, secular parables of the Kingdom; they may generally point us to it but only Jesus can reveal it to us.

Since Jesus, and only Jesus, is the revelation of the Father and can preach the nature of God as being-in-relation, specifically as Father, only he can authoritatively teach us what the Kingdom of God is like. Yet since Jesus is also fully human, a dative for manifestation, he can present this revealed truth as a phenomenon. Now Jesus’s concern is not the revelation of God in all its fullness (including, e.g., the triune nature of God) but instead the revelation of the Kingdom of God, which is revealed in and through his earthly life, his teaching, and his acts. Where the historical-critical method forbids any passage from scripture to creed, phenomenology allows us to recognize that one vital element of the creed, the incarnation of God, is transcendentally supposed by Jesus’s relating of a parable of the Kingdom. What is the Kingdom? Neither a concept nor a law but living in such a way that one is like God in being compassionate and forgiving to one’s fellow creatures, living in such a way that God, and only God, is the true King, and understanding that this King is not like a hard master but like a father to us. It is living not so that love may cancel justice but so as to open a future in which justice may take place. Only Jesus can nudge this Kingdom so that it manifests itself to us, and he does so by means of parable. Of course, no one parable, not even Luke 15: 11–32 or Luke 10: 25–37, can provide all the aspects and profiles of the phenomenon, and so others must be told. Yet not even an infinite number of parables can exhaust the reality of the Kingdom, participation in the divine life. When Is-
Islamic scholars criticize Christians for not being satisfied with Jesus's teaching in Luke 15: 11–32 and imposing Incarnation, Cross, and Resurrection upon the parable, thereby generating the idea of a God-man, they miss the essential dialectical structure of Christianity that is latent in the parable we have been reading: the preaching of the Kingdom by the one person who can do so brings about the Cross, and the Resurrection is a vindication of the Kingdom as the true teaching of God and how to live here and now so as to enter the eschatological Kingdom of heaven, eternal life with God. And when we look to the Lotos Sutra for a parallel with Luke 15: 11–32 we surely find one, though it is drained entirely of the very dialectic that I have named.

When Jesus preaches the Kingdom, saying that the true King is God, and that his sovereignty is manifest in fatherhood and not mastery, he is responding to an urgent situation. The order of Creation as we know it on Earth has been compromised by the imposition of worldly logic as the only logic to follow: what was created in a proper relation with the Father has fallen from that proper relation. We must change our perspective and once again recognize that the true ruler of the created order is the Creator who we may know as our Father. To preach that the authentic ruler of the Earth is God, not Caesar or anyone else, is always to risk punishment of one sort or another. It will be said that no one has ever been executed for telling parables, and indeed there are reasons in addition to preaching the basileia why the cross was built. Yet Jesus was tortured and executed because his preaching, including his parables, made people see that we are to live in a way that places God in contradiction to the world in all its modes, even the quest for justice, and the people of Jerusalem acclaimed him for this change of vision, calling him the Messiah.37

To preach the Kingdom and to try to live there, in God's power, is to risk the cross, as Jesus's followers discovered: it is the most derelict 

\[ \kappa \varepsilon \nu \omega \sigma \varsigma \]

and the most painful \[ \epsilon \pi \kappa \tau \alpha \varsigma \varsigma \], the stretching out into the blank absence of God. The cross is the antitype of the parable of the prodigal son; it is the Father retreating from the son. The resurrection of Jesus is the overcoming of death, but it is more than that: it is also the vindication that his preaching of the Kingdom is not one philosophy among others—that is, philosophy—but is the truth. The parable is changed retrospectively from being a story, a piece of wisdom literature once with the \[ \theta \varepsilon \iota \varsigma \d '\eta \rho \] tradition to being sacred truth by dint of the resurrection of Jesus, the revelation that this strange rabbi was and is the Christ. The Kingdom is the truth of Creation, the truth that can be glimpsed again in a fallen world, and the truth of the world to come.
Aspects of the Kingdom, as shown by Luke 15: 11–32, include the unlimited compassion of the Father, to be sure, but cross and resurrection are also involved. They are immanent in the story when seen with hindsight: the destitution of the son in the “distant country” is cross, and his reception by the Father is resurrection. Nonetheless, these immanent truths presume the transcendent truths, strictly outside the parable, of Jesus’s death and resurrection. Only then do we see that Jesus’s reduction from “world” to “Kingdom” is not one more species of reduction, or one more literary story, but divine truth: truth as faithfulness and power.
Phenomenology of the Christ

Christian theology properly begins by considering the confession that Jesus is the Christ. A great deal follows from this starting point. Affirmatively, it means that Jesus is held to be the one who receives the revelation of God, and indeed over time is taken to be that revelation itself. The event of Christian revelation takes place within Judaism, is to be interpreted within the sphere of its relations with YHWH, and involves a readjustment of its traditional understandings of “Messiah.” Negatively, it marks a break with other choices of starting points in the ordo theologiae, though only as starting points and not necessarily as themes to be elaborated later in a systematic theology. Set aside, among other possibilities, are attempts to begin by arguing for the existence of God (Aquinas), by the intimate inter-relatedness of anthropology and theology (Luther), by reflecting on the interconnection of the knowledge of God and ourselves (Calvin), by discerning a feeling of absolute dependence on God (Schleiermacher), by unfolding the self-consciousness of God (Hegel), by an appeal to “ultimate concern” (Tillich), or by affirming God in his triune revelation (Barth). Of course, Christian theology must be able to tell a coherent narrative of God’s involvement with created beings from eternity to eternity, but it cannot begin with creation since that would presume a doctrine of God worked out without reference to Jesus as the one who receives the revelation of God. Rather, Christian theology’s starting point is the relationship between Jesus and his Father, and this claim is not merely a bow to the authority of historical criticism but is rooted in regarding Jesus as the datum of revelation who is also, as the Church came to see in the years before and after Nicaea 1 (325), the genitive of revelation. Christian theology therefore requires a phenomenology of the Christ before anything else; it needs both to examine how Jesus becomes meaningful for us as the Christ, first and foremost through our read-
ing of scripture, and to see how Jesus himself does a peculiar form of phenomenology, how he brings the Kingdom of God to the very horizon of appearing in his words and acts.

Several things immediately call for clarification. The first is the nature and scope of phenomenalism, one of the dramas of modern philosophy, which I give in a highly condensed form. Kant begins the action by limiting phenomenality to the realm of synthetic a priori judgments and by prizing phenomena that are low in phenomenality: numbers, for example. In his quest to pass from theoretical formations to living intentions, Husserl detaches phenomenality from judgments of the understanding and attaches it to intuition. More narrowly, he regards it as shared between transcendental consciousness and phenomenon, and maintaining a sense of "phenomenon" as limited by presence to consciousness. For the phenomenon is what appears in intentional experience. Heidegger extends phenomenalism so that it is co-extensive with the field of being. For him, Husserl is mistaken to adopt a Cartesian account of consciousness, even if it is refined by way of a doctrine of intentionality; and so he eliminates transcendental consciousness in favor of disclosedness (Erschlossenheit) to Dasein. Since being for Heidegger is finite (and, as he later claims, at home in language), the infinite God becomes a matter of faith, not thought. Theology is the unfolding of the logic of faith, which holds God to be pre-given (yet absent), and phenomenology needs to restrict itself to the study of Christian life. Marion follows Heidegger in fully crediting the phenomenon with phenomenality, though he finds the latter in givvenness rather than being. That which must come before any grasping of an appearing is of course prior to being. This insight allows him to consider revelation from the side of philosophy with a vigor that has not been witnessed since Schelling's Spätphilosophie; it is, he argues, saturation to the second degree. In revelation there is an excess of intuition with respect to all the categories of the understanding. The integrity of the intentional horizon is compromised with respect to quantity, quality, and relation, while the transcendental ego is suspended with respect to modality. And yet in electing givvenness as the site of phenomenality, Marion distances the latter from the intentional experience that ἐπιστήμη makes available. For what gives itself does so before it shows itself. Accordingly, the phenomenon gives itself before it appears in experience. I shall return to this oddity in due course.

Revelation for Marion upsets the Kantian categories while remaining within their limits. He can document the reception of revelation in the mode of counter-
experience—as unexpected, dazzling, absolute, exceeding any gaze—but not the giving of revelation, including the granting of it to Jesus. The self-revelation of God must be reckoned a special mode of manifestation, one that cannot be prompted by way of ἔποικη and reduction but that is given only by the God who himself does not appear (John 6:46). Already, modern philosophy is being used to interpret the New Testament, for “self-revelation” is a modern notion that reached its first maturity in Hegel and was adopted and adapted by Barth in the interests of a reformed dogmatic theology. “Self-revelation” can also be understood phenomenologically, and I shall propose later a dialectical movement that I take to be central to Christianity that has nothing to do with Hegel. For now, though, it needs to be said that for a Christian the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ cannot be a matter of eidetic possibility but must be claimed as an actuality. An actuality can overflow horizons; a possibility cannot saturate anything, and the most that a modification of the Kantian understanding, even one as robust as Marion’s, can yield is revelation as an eidetic possibility. Phenomenology, for Marion, is philosophical, yet a philosophy with bad intent toward some of those who precede him, since his account of givenness seeks to blunt the critiques of revelation by Kant and Fichte by agreeing to sequester actuality to faith and to affirm possibility, which is certainly allowable within philosophy. It also has a place within the study of religion. When a Christian attends to Hinduism or Islam as a faith requiring existential decisions, he or she speaks of eidetic possibilities but does not do so when personally responding to Christ, except of course when engaging in imaginative variation in order to discern something about the Christ (King, Messiah, priest, prophet, and so on) or his teaching.

We may say, then, that as a matter of principle phenomenality must be granted unlimited extension so as not to exclude anything that gives itself, in whatever way, from whatever “region of being,” to intentional experience and how to value what is given depends on the degree of intuitive fullness that it yields. We may speak theologically, and not only philosophically, of the phenomenality of revelation only if we accept that it belongs to revelation. Marion insists that this revelation is merely received; yet even though it may well surprise a listener what Jesus says is surely constituted, made present to the understanding, and of course interpreted on many levels, including pre-interpretation. Like other phenomena, revelation will have meaning (Sinn) and ways in which it is given (Gegebenheitweise). It may occur in various manners, in signs as well as in perceptions, and be subject to all sorts of syntheses, active and passive (both pri-
mary and secondary). It is to be weighed by the degree of Evidenz that it supplies, and for Christians this general revelation is restricted to the first-century witnesses whose testimony that Jesus is the Christ remains central to the faith. Special revelations, such as given to those we moderns call "mystics," or, more traditionally, the deep understandings of those granted the grace of passive contemplation, might also supply Evidenz (yet, as we know, with some beats these may be no more than delusions or deceits). Most Christians, however, make an act of faith on the basis of testimony that has become concrete in the context of a community and a tradition, and not just on a possibility that comes into view. In other words, phenomenological theology must draw on genetic and generative issues as well as those that come from static intentional analysis.

The second clarification required is what "Jesus" means for a phenomenological theology. Certainly one needs the wealth of material supplied by modern historical criticism partly for purposes of clearing away pious constructions and partly to determine the realm of discursive possibilities for a rabbi of the first century. The historical Jesus, however, is an abstraction that comes into focus only through the lens of modern historical research, and this research is entirely unable to deal with the question of Evidenz required by faith. No amount of testimony about the resurrection of Jesus could ever satisfy a historical critic that it was a historical event, the crucial one for Christian faith. The historical critic, writing as a historian, limits phenomenality to the realm of the empirical. We cannot expect to find a neutral narrative of Jesus, and must confine our sense of him to the last two or three years of his life when he was teaching in the rural villages of the Holy Land. All that we have about him is selected and interpreted; and less important than whether the testimony comes from a canonical gospel, or from Q, L, or M, among other early texts, including Paul's letters (1 Thess., in particular), is the sense of finding a relation with God through Jesus. So when I speak of Jesus I am thinking first and foremost of the testified Jesus in the Gospels and not the one who is the richly theorized subject of the Nicene Creed. The Creed was written for various reasons, some political and others doctrinal (if one can draw a neat line between them), and its Christological part is a firm rejection of the philosophical Ariantism of Eunomius; it is not intended to be the basis of a systematic theology. The Creed is preoccupied with claims that Jesus was conceived, suffered, died, was resurrected and ascended into heaven. Yet a phenomenological theology is primarily concerned with something that the Creed leaves out, that Jesus lived
and taught, that he taught us how to live, and that his words and acts disclosed the meaning of God’s kingly rule to those with whom he came into contact.

The third clarification turns on whether a phenomenology of the Christ subtly transforms Jesus into a twentieth-century philosopher, and so becomes subject to the criticisms that Albert Schweitzer directed to the liberal Leben-Jesu-Forschung. In answer we must distinguish between phenomenology as a way of seeing and as a particular philosophical position clarified and ramified by Husserl and his successors: the structure of an intentional act, the delineation of formal and material ontologies, the elaboration of Befindlichkeit, and so on. Only the former is at issue here, a phenomenology avant la lettre, and one that differs significantly in important ways from the styles of philosophizing we recognize in Ideas I, Being and Time, Being Given, and elsewhere. It differs chiefly, as I shall argue, by not being practiced as philosophy, though it can be identified today by using the vocabulary and procedures of phenomenology. No story is told without ἐπιστήμη and reduction, however partial; religious persons perform a conversion of the gaze, look for manifestations of the holy, seek the divine where ever it can be found concretely, and claim that truths become evident over time, though not as fully as logical, mathematical, or even straightforward perceptual truths. Of course, we must take care to see Jesus as a historical figure, a rabbi of the first century, and not to discount the eschatological dimensions of his religious vision or to diminish his strong sense of the election of Israel. We begin with the synoptic Jesus “who, as man, is our road to God,” as Aquinas puts it simply and finely. Also, Jesus is not to be made to subscribe, even covertly, to philosophical positions that were determined by far later generations. Yet the phenomenological basis of what he does can be brought out more completely: he helps people see what is essential in being in relation with God. Phenomenology is sometimes an extension of an earlier and partial phenomenology. In the case of the ἐπιστήμη and reduction as practiced by Jesus, we meet a quite different practice of disclosure, in some respects, from those developed in the twentieth century. To draw it out to its fullest extent, clarifying it as one does so, is to produce a phenomenological theology.

Phenomena give themselves in different ways, with varying modes of clarity and degrees of intuitive fullness; they offer themselves to us by way of a formal or material a priori; they become evident to a greater or lesser extent, depending
on whether the presentation of a phenomenon corresponds to the intentional aim of the person, and the nature of the intentional rapport. This aim can be perceptual, imaginative, recollective, anticipatory, schematizing, wishful, hopeful, and so forth, and it takes place from one or another bodily perspective. For Husserl, perception allows a phenomenon to present itself to consciousness (Gegenwärigung), while anticipating, imagining, and the rest, allow presentationification (Vergegenwärigung). A phenomenological theology would begin with Jesus as phenomenon, given to us in scripture, with a determinate material core, as seen, heard, questioned, believed in, and rejected; and detailed attention would have to be given to his relations with his followers and critics, his styles of teaching, his understanding of the Sabbath, his prohibition of oaths, his sense of purity laws, his exorcisms, healings, miracles, and inevitably his suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension. It would also distinguish Jesus from prophets who were roused to action by a call from Yhwh but who did not receive the revelation considered definitive for Christianity. Since this examination would rely on what others have said about Jesus, it would be a heterophenomenology, and, for the modern reader of scripture, would begin from a baseline of empty intentions. No one receives the historical Jesus with intuitive fullness. The important question is how one receives the testified Jesus who is believed to be the living Christ.

In addition, and more importantly, phenomenological theology would attend to Jesus as phenomenologist, that is, to how he receives phenomena. As already indicated, in the New Testament God is not regarded as a phenomenon: the one Jesus calls “Father” does not appear. What comes to the horizon of appearing is the kingly rule of the Father, what Jesus calls the βασιλεία—I use the Greek word from now on in order to preserve the strangeness of what it means—though even here one must be wary of calling it a “manifestation,” pure and simple. For the βασιλεία is both here and to come (Luke 17: 21, Matt. 25: 34), external and internal (Luke 17: 20–21, Thomas 3), and one aspect of this being still to come is Jesus’s eschatology: only the Father can bring on the βασιλεία in its fullness at the time he chooses. We might say that it is revealed and re-veiled, never fully present to consciousness. It needs to be acknowledged that the βασιλεία is not wholly original with Jesus, for it is mentioned in the Targum Jonathan to the Prophets (Isa. 52: 7, e.g.), though it becomes elaborated and vivid only with Jesus. The central issue is how Jesus makes “God,” that most abstract of abstract nouns, name a concrete reality in his parables, sayings and acts by telling us or showing us what the kingly rule of God looks
like. Consider what happens in the parable of the father and his two sons (Luke 15: 11–32), a text examined at length in the previous chapter. As soon as Jesus says, "There was a man who had two sons" he has performed εὐστρατῇ: he and his listeners bracket the world of work, of contingencies and worries, for a few minutes so as to step back to hear a story that will tell them something essential about life and, in particular, their relations with God. This is not merely a mental act of putting aside an attitude that we have to the world; it is a loosening of Jesus's hearers from captivation by the world, to the world, and in the world that can be extended, in the parable, to a way of overcoming that captivity. In hearing or reading the parable we seize concretely what it is to be a father. Concretion, for Husserl, is not the finding of an instance of an abstraction but rather the drawing out of a definite situation in which an abstraction—here "fatherhood"—has solid, pointed meaning here and now.

"Concretion" comes from the Latin concrescere, "to grow together," which has the sense of coalescing in order to form something enduring. When we hear the parable of the father and his two sons we begin to see how God comes to us in the ordinariness and trouble of our lives; we recognize that God is best approached relationally, in the metaphor of "father," and that fatherhood is understood in terms of compassion: not an exercise of legal authority but a graciousness and even vulnerability. For the person who shows compassion can expose himself or herself to a loss of face in the eyes of the world. God too can be rebuffed. We can begin to see how a family can grow together by turning to the father for forgiveness, as the younger son does, and we wonder what will happen if the older son does not also turn to him. Certainly we are not told everything about the family, and we have no clear sense of what will happen on the following day: we see a scene of forgiveness, and glimpse the older son's justified anger, but we do not see if or how justice will play into the family's life. The parable reaches into silence; we feel its look upon us. It stimulates us to think about how to live with God as our father, and part of that invitation to think is to ponder that God is at once like a father and unlike any father we have known, which is something to which I shall return.

Biblical scholars do not usually regard the story of the father and his two sons as a parable of the ἱερασία, and yet it shows that God's rule is like that of a compassionate father rather than that of an imperious King. We can be in relation with God as children with a loving parent. On realizing this, God is no longer an abstraction, a deity regarded as "distant, difficult," but we draw close to him in faith. This faith is not a pallid mode of knowledge but a firm sense
of trust that we are present to God, a trust that is warranted by God’s raising of Jesus as the first born from the dead. We do not have experience of God as proposed by Schleiermacher (“feeling of absolute dependence”) or a direct intuition of the deity as advocated by Hamann and Jacobi, or even the “transcendental experience” of God affirmed by Rahner. 16 We do not have any experience at all, except as intentional rapport with the noema given to us (“βασιλεία”). Nor do we have knowledge of God, as Hegel thinks can be achieved. Instead, God has become thinkable; we know better now what it means to say “God,” that it means “God-for-us,” and to orient one’s entire life around his kingly rule. We do not have a metaphysical description of God’s properties, we have no idea of the divine essence, but we are able to turn toward God and receive him in the ways in which he gives himself, that is, in the βασιλεία: here and to come, within and without.

Note also that we have not understood God outside all perspective, as some philosophers might wish to do, but he has become thinkable for us from one particular vantage point, the story of a father and his two sons, each wayward in his own manner. God has become thinkable for us, not as an extraordinary item in reality, or even the ground of reality, but as given in and through a story of the βασιλεία. Other parables, and attention to other acts and words of Jesus, will give further angles on the βασιλεία, though nothing that is testified in the Gospels or the letters of the New Testament will present the one Jesus calls “Father” as he is. To call God “Father” is to know him by way of a relation, not as a being or an essence. So the Father reveals himself only through the coming of the βασιλεία, the dynamic breaking into the world of his kingly rule. And Jesus teaches us to respond by saying “Your kingdom come” [ελθετω η βασιλεία σου] (Luke 11: 2). The βασιλεία works a peculiar logic of “already-not yet”; it calls for a conversion of the gaze for the here and now and a phenomenology of anticipation for what is to come.

It remains entirely possible for someone to hear a parable and not find that God is thinkable. Such a person may not accept the authority of Jesus, or may doubt that the story comes from Jesus, or may be looking for God to give himself more clearly, more fully, or in some other way: through the proofs of natural theology, for example. Concretion does not supply Evidenz by itself; it only enables one to think God concretely and to venture into the presence of God by living one’s life in the manner disclosed by the parables of the Kingdom and by imitating Jesus. Of course, even the firm believer engages in docic modification with respect to revelation; one wants more certainty, or further grounds for
certainty, and the shadows of daily life can sometimes fall across us and hide God. So one may seek assistance from the proofs in natural theology in order to understand better what “God” means, and indeed to have an appropriate awe of him (primum movens, efficientem primam, aliquid quod est per se necessarium, aliquid quod est causa esse et honitatis, aliquid intelligens a quo omnes res naturales ordinatur ad finem), and to do so in the spirit that ultimately reason and revelation are one. God may reveal himself to some extent in the elegance of a mathematical theorem, though Christianity sees this as supplementary Evidenz that needs to be grounded in antecedent belief in the revelation of God’s kingly rule in and through Jesus. Or, equally, the beauty of the theorem might attune one to the Christian revelation, though it can never substitute for it. And one may read the works of the mystics to be buoyed up by those who have received special graces or the gift of passive contemplation and been led to a fuller life with God. Yet Christianity is finally not a matter of bringing God to presence in human consciousness but rather of allowing oneself to come into the presence of God, the two modes of “presence” being quite different, one a matter of presence to consciousness, cashed out (if one can) as knowledge, and the other a matter of ἀγάπη. If taken alone, as a relentless hunger for proof or experience of God, the quest to make God present leads to pride or conceptual idolatry, while the trust that we are present to God is the very meaning of “faith” (fides qua). He is absent from us, yet we are present to him.

In Christianity, then, God does not usually give himself directly but rather in and through the βασιλεία; and the preaching of the βασιλεία, along with acts and words that also point to it, is done first and best by Jesus of Nazareth. There are exceptions to the general rule: the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3: 13–17) and Saul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9: 1–31), for instance, and of course these have different statuses. No example, however, and certainly neither of those just cited, changes the fact that Jesus is the datum of divine revelation, and when we accept his authority, his closeness to the Father, and understand that intimacy theologically in terms of unity (and finally, in the mode of high theory, as consubstantiality), we see that he is also the genitive of revelation. Such is the deep truth that Origen saw when he called Jesus αὐτοβασιλεία, the Kingdom in person. And such is the basis for the Christological theses formulated at Nicaea I. Before we pass from the dative to the genitive of revelation, however, we need to clarify some further aspects of what has been suggested. In what sense is a parable a revelation of God, even God as given solely in the βασιλεία?
It will be remembered from the previous chapter that a parable has a double structure of revelation. On the one hand, the parable we have been considering reveals that God is like a father; and on the other hand, it reveals that God is unlike any father we have known. Mostly we attend to the former, which of course is the concretion that makes God thinkable, and yet the parable also indicates to us that God not only embodies fatherhood in an eminent manner—his compassion and mercy are endless—but also is beyond all known fatherhood. What is revealed is also partly hidden: God the Father does not give himself to us as he is but only through Jesus and only in relational terms. A parable calls forth apophasis; it sets us on the path to approach God in the darkness of unknowing, which, I underline, presumes the acceptance that we cannot make God present to ourselves though we can take ourselves to be present to God. The Christian life is devoted to an endless dialectic of this like and unlike, of the friendship to which God calls us, and the divine transcendence that humbles us. We are established in the revelation of the Father in the βασιλεία, and, at the same time, kneel before the God whose very holiness requires him to reveal himself before a sinful mortal. The Christian hope is that if we live according to the revelation we shall behold God as he is. Only in heaven is one not burned by divine glory. Saul was blinded when the risen Christ admonished him (Acts 9: 9).

Jesus performs ἐποχή and reduction in his parables; the “world” is put out of play for the time of the story and perhaps for a little while longer, and we are led back to a state that is anterior to it, namely the Father’s kingly rule. It appears, if only for a moment or two, and in doing so it breaks our sense of what is normal and concordant and exposes us to what is abnormal and discordant yet nonetheless offering the possibility of a more optimal relation with God.19 The world is pre-given, Husserl teaches, yet the βασιλεία is given to us as an uprooting of the captivation that this world holds over us. It takes many years of Christian life, for some of us almost the whole of it, before the βασιλεία does not seem alien, a joyful yet grievous interruption to life as it insists on being lived in the natural attitude: the conatus essendi. Only Jesus performs this reduction in his parables and implicitly in all that is testified of him. We cannot do it, no matter how hard we try, though we may tell ourselves and other people “secular parables,” as Barth names them, and so try to find analogues for the Kingdom within the limits of human imagination.20 In the basilicar reduction, as I shall call it, we are led back to a prefatory state: not transcendental consciousness but something that is at once inside and outside ourselves, here
and still to come: the βασιλεία. It involves Gegenwärtung and Vergegenwärtung both at once.

We are brought to the βασιλεία not by intentional analysis but by the counter-intentionality in which the parable confronts us; it stirs us to look and see something that we cannot see by our own efforts. So there is no first move in which we suspend the natural attitude and, by passing to transcendental consciousness, constitute God—make him present—as he appears on our intentional horizons. We cannot consider the Father as an eidetic essence that we can revolve and inspect at our leisure. To be sure, once we have been led back from "world" to βασιλεία we may engage in phenomenological exercises to do with many things that Christianity presents to us, including reading scripture and responding to sacred places and practices. If we have taken an interest in Jesus beforehand, that interest will be redoubled, and of course we may perform reductions on what is testified of Jesus and do so to our spiritual benefit. We may see, if we relax our intentional rapport with the Jesus we often receive through Church and culture, that we have inherited too much theological or cultural construction and may need to return to scriptural testimony. As Otto Weber would say, we seek the exemplary Jesus Christ, not the Jesus Christ who is a moral exemplar.

Another way of approaching this thought is by way of what I shall call the supernatural attitude. It is akin to the natural attitude, and it also needs to be suspended in phenomenological theology. In the supernatural attitude we think of Christianity as so many theses taught by the Church (and therefore authoritative): virgin birth, Resurrection, Second Coming, and so on. We think of the uncreated world as parallel to the created world, and (paradoxically) as another "world" rather than as "Kingdom." We have limited pre-thetic experience of the βασιλεία when we hear a parable—we see one or two facets of how God wishes to be in relation with us—and we may well pass from this intentional experience to form one or more theses about the βασιλεία. For example, we may think of it within the natural attitude as a moral commonwealth (Ritschl) or as a theo-political state that will be formed in some future present, as some American evangelicals and Russian Orthodox believe. Or we might think of it within the supernatural attitude, as a heavenly community of the Trinity, angels, and the blessed, including Mary as the first of the blessed. The truths of these theses can be weighed by theologians and by ecclesial authorities. For the ordinary Christian, though, what is important is to be led back from the world to the βασιλεία, figured as how to live in such a way that is pleasing to God.
The βασιλεία cannot be captured neatly by way of theological theses, for it eludes concepts, being at once within us and outside us, here and to come; it never becomes fully present in our terms—moral, political, or even religious—and it never can be used as a set of clearly defined norms that can guide us in each and every event that we shall experience in life. The relationships in which we are embedded and through Christ are shifting, challenging, sometimes insuperably difficult; and we often lack the concretion that we need. Jesus tells us what “neighbor” means with all possible imaginative specificity in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25–37), but we must largely work out for ourselves what “friend,” “citizen,” “husband,” and “teacher” mean with the same density of specific gravity. In short, the Christian must learn first to say the βασιλεία, to grasp where he or she has been led back to, and be open to unsay it as well: to rethink it, re-imagine it, and to inhabit it differently than before. The βασιλεία is the way to God the Father through Jesus whom we come to see as the Son; and if it “contains” the Father—as a relation, not as an item—then it cannot be formulated as a mundane statement or set of statements. The divine life, transcendent and always creative, resists being netted, even by the Church.

Doubtless it will be objected that the parables that give God to be thought could well be stories that Jesus made up for pedagogic use, just as other rabbinic meshalim, and that they are not vehicles of divine revelation. After all, concretion is to be found in secular poems and stories and novels, as well as in scripture. It needs to be kept in mind, though, that the concretion of “God” is ensconced in narratives of testimony that pivot on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. We do not have access to any Evidenz of the resurrection except indirectly, through the testimony of the Gospels and Paul. To be sure, a Christian can grow in holiness by living the sacramental life, by daily prayer and acts of charity, and while all of this makes Christian faith concrete it does not supply compelling Evidenz of God or God’s revelation in and through Jesus. A sacramental life, twinned with contemplative prayer, may attune us to God but these things do not and cannot nudge God to appear in an audition, a vision, an intellectual structure, or anything of the sort. The Christian relies at heart on biblical testimony, and supplements it as needed. Christian life, as I am proposing it, turns on Jesus’ reduction from “world” to βασιλεία. All that we rely on as grounds of life—work, family, political order, our children as our future—are bracketed; what seems to make up life for us, to be a rich totality, is suspended, and we are led back to something that lays claim on us be-
fore these things take hold. The basilica reduction reveals that a mode of passivity is primary, that is, being taken outside oneself as the center of activity and being receptive to God’s kingly rule. The other things I have mentioned may be good in themselves but they are shown not to be good as grounds of life; they are active, sometimes violent—think of the Roman imperium mundi, and think too of the “principalities and powers” that are hard at work today (Stringfellow)—and we need to be situated in another order, one that Jesus says is sanctioned by God and that “contains” the divine.

There is a rhythm disclosed in the basilica reduction that can be explicated by way of two Greek words associated with Paul: κένωσις and ἐπέκτασις. A parable such as that of the father and his two sons jogs us to convert our gaze, to recognize that we are asked to live in the βασιλεία, and to help bring it on by our acts in the world and our prayer, and in order to do so we must contract ourselves, our desires and our deeds; we must give up the security we anxiously search for in the world about us. This is the moment of κένωσις: not a retreat into ourselves but a step back into an anterior claim on us that is made by God and revealed by Jesus. This κένωσις can be refused, for God wishes it to be accepted freely. Yet if it is accepted—taken as a cross, as the Gospel frankly warns us (Luke 9:23)—then we are invited to experience another moment: ἐπέκτασις. We are given many opportunities to stretch ourselves into the βασιλεία, not in order to experience God, as though he were a phenomenon, but rather to experience life under divine rule, which is compassionate and fatherly. This expansion into the βασιλεία is social and temporal; it is here, partly, and to come, partly; it is ethics and eschatology, each written on one side of a piece of paper whose ends are taped together and given a half-twist; and if it offers consolations from time to time it offers frustrations and pain more often. The basilica reduction that Jesus performs does not happen once for all; we are returned to κένωσις, led back to the very margin of the world, stripped of relying on anything mundane, and once again released into community and hope by way of ἐπέκτασις. The rhythm of Christian life is constant, κένωσις and ἐπέκτασις, but seldom regular, and our hope of eternal life is that it shall be ἐπέκτασις without κένωσις.

The model of divinity I am proposing is perhaps unusual in that it does not begin with God but with the revelation of the Father to Jesus. The model answers solely to Christianity, and does not seek a point beyond it from which to
secure a sense of God outside his revelation. Certainly it does not seek a God whose nature or will, once determined, explains the world or the course of history. Appeals to a transcendent reality do not explain experience, and indeed can account for it in skewed ways ("I get sick because I am sinful"); yet the lived experience of what Jesus teaches contains principles or structures that can orient one's life to a transcendent God. Not that philosophical questioning and construction have no parts to play in theology. They do, but neither of them can establish the ground of a living, historical faith. The model may well be called "phenomenological theology," although it would be more accurate to say that this expression names only the base of the model. A systematic theology must reach back to creation and forward to the eschaton from the midpoint of salvation history, which is given in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. A certain amount of construction is needed. Also, the doctrine of God will finally involve metaphysics, even if the triune nature of God is regarded as a development of the phenomenon of the Christ.23 Such is the work required of a systematic theology in addition to what is sketched here: a doctrine of the triune God, an understanding of creation and creativity, an account of being human with God, and an exploration of the end of all things. None of this can be discussed here.

What we have seen so far is that God is radically irreducible to human consciousness but that Jesus performs a reduction from world to βασιλεία that leads us back to the life that his Father wishes us to live. Phenomenological theology, as I propose it, would therefore run in quite the opposite direction to that of most classical phenomenology. Husserl tells us that we cannot bring God to consciousness because his mode of transcendence exceeds all intentional rapport.24 He is correct in his reasoning but misses the opportunity to see that we are reduced, not God. This approach would also run a different path from others that deviate from Husserl's, such as Michel Henry's non-intentional phenomenology, including that portion of it that has a bearing on Christianity.25 Only to the extent that the βασιλεία is within us could it be thought by way of enstatic phenomenality that is at once God's and mine, and further distinctions would need to be drawn before the claim can be made in a sound and clear way.

The model I advocate is concerned with Christianity, not religion, although, when sufficiently developed, it would include a theology of religions. Indeed, such a theology is implied in the very opening of the prayer that Jesus taught us to say about the coming of the βασιλεία: "Our Father" [Πάτερ ἡμῶν]. By what right could we restrict the scope of "Our" or, in a more violent gesture,
seek to limit the divine fatherhood? Religion has no such right, and if it claims it then it becomes demonic. (I shall return to the theology of religions a little later in this chapter and also in the final chapter of the book.) In phenomenology we are dealing genetically with Christianity, uncovering its sediments, and recognizing that while its claims are absolutely binding on believers they are not thereby necessarily universal. The Christian is concerned with understanding his or her home—in the habitus of belief, in Church, in parish life—and is therefore engaged with generative phenomenology, whether knowingly or unknowingly. The Jew or the Buddhist, for example, can be seen by Christians to live in the βασιλεία as a Jew or a Buddhist (and not as an “anonymous Christian”).

There is no path to God other than the βασιλεία, but it is spoken of in other ways in other faiths: I have already mentioned the Targum Jonathan to the Prophets, and I shall add the Lotos Sutra, thinking in particular of the story of the son who left his father. But this is to veer into difficult territory, far from the “mooring of starting out,” and I leave it for another occasion.

Phenomenological theology differs too from the fledgling phenomenology of God that one discerns in Husserl. There is no quest to find transcendencies in immanent consciousness, or to speculate about an absolute monad. To be sure, the Husserlian conversion of the gaze draws from and re-situates Christian discourse on θεωρία; but to my mind contemplative prayer is properly not a gaze that rises simply from the visible world to the invisible God, as one finds so beautifully presented by the Victorines, especially Richard, but rather one that begins in the βασιλεία and seeks to find repose on the assurance of God’s kingly rule, here and to come, rather than on his being. There is a conversion of the gaze, but it involves recognition of an antecedent claim made upon us by God, not a purification of how we see so that we can mentally encompass him: the temptation of all temptations. To be sure, the Victorine language has roots in the New Testament, especially in Paul (Rom. 1: 20, Col. 1: 15–16, 1 Tim. 1: 17) and Hebrews (Heb. 11: 27), though the model of contemplative prayer at issue is more complicated than their guiding idea of a movement from the visible to the invisible: the βασιλεία appears as invisible in people’s hearts and minds, on the one hand, and the King is himself invisible, on the other. The passage from Kingdom to King is apophatic, a quest that finally suspends “King” with all its earthly associations, as we enter into the darkness of divine love.

Also, phenomenological theology differs from the evangelical theology that seeks to find the βασιλεία in the parable; instead, the parable is a special sort of literary prompt to see the βασιλεία. The parable does not give us the βασιλεία as an object of experience; for it is not given in perception but is constituted by
Jesus in the intentional synthesis that is a parable. I see the \( \text{βασιλεία} \) in hearing Jesus; it is intelligible, an intentional correlate of an act; but whether there is such a thing is a risk, one that I must engage by trying to live the life one calls Christian. The eidetic possibility of the \( \text{βασιλεία} \) can be imaginatively revolved before one decides to live it out or to keep on living as before. The experience of the essence is subjective—it turns on a human subject engaging with what the parable reveals—yet it is also inter-subjective, for the structure of the \( \text{βασιλεία} \) can be read, as it were, on the noematic structure of the phenomenon. In Reinarch’s terms, the a priori at issue here is not epistemological (as it is with Kant) but ontological, and subsists in the “state of affairs” that is given in the parable.\(^{30}\) With all that said, it should nonetheless be clear that phenomenological theology begins with attention to a literary form, the parable. It is the study of metaphor and narrative that grounds Christian theology, not metaphysics or philosophy, or even phenomenology as a school within philosophy.

One consequence of this approach is that the account of the self, in the context of Christian theology, does not seek to determine the essence of “being human” in the individual. Whereas modern philosophy attempts to find the animating center of human being in the reason, the will, consciousness, the unconscious, a structure of responsibility, a genetic string, or somewhere else, Christianity affirms that “the central of our being” is in God and not in our selves.\(^{31}\) As Augustine says at the start of the Confessions, “You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you” [\( \text{tu excitas ut laudare te delectet, quia fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiscat in te} \).\(^{32}\) Despite the vigor of this view, Augustine has frequently been quietly suborned to the modern quest for the essence of human being as within our selves, as though he is simply a fore-runner of Descartes. After all, it is often thought and said, Augustine insists “Return within yourself” [\( \text{in teipsum redi} \)] in De vera religione.\(^{33}\) And so he does. Yet in this early work he is marking a need to hear the call of God, and is not urging a retreat to subjectivism. The theology of disclosure also prizes a conversion of the gaze, but it seeks the truth outside us as well as within us.

Jesus’s parables offer pre-thetic experience of the \( \text{βασιλεία} \); we begin to see what it might mean to live as God wishes us to do, and if we seek to bring on the \( \text{βασιλεία} \) by following Jesus we also have pre-thetic experience of Christianity. We do not have direct experience of the Father, only experience of living under his kingly and fatherly rule when we see it indicated by Jesus. We
take ourselves to be present to him ("redeemed," as we say in church), and do not presume to make him present to us. We should be aware that it is possible to mistake the βασιλεία as it is with any phenomenon (to the extent it is one). I may see an act, or perform one myself, and think that it helps to bring on the βασιλεία only to discover that the actor has acted from crude self-interest. Here, as with anything, we must follow Husserl’s advice and always look more than once, which includes looking within.34 The βασιλεία is within and without; with strict spiritual direction we might be able to tell if we are truly conforming ourselves to the Gospel or deceiving ourselves, but it is endlessly harder to know about others. It should not be an interest in any case, for only God can tell what brings on the βασιλεία, and we discern it, if we do, in intentional life and not in ordinary experience. It is enough to shuttle back and forth from the one to the other. Such is “Christian experience.”

The βασιλεία does not remain a theme of the New Testament, not even in Paul, although it is central to Jesus’s teaching. And even in disclosing the βασιλεία what Jesus reveals is limited. The rest of Christian doctrine is largely left unsaid: nothing is said precisely, for instance, about the crystallization of the Church in and through the Holy Spirit or the Trinitarian nature of the deity—for such things one must look for the proto-Catholic stratum of scripture after the fact—and the claim that Jesus is one with the Father, and what this unity means, must be worked out in passing from the pre-theetic to the thetic. This passage takes place over a complex history in the first, generative centuries of the faith, and culminates in Gregory of Nyssa’s redefinition of “divinity” as that which is marked by infinity rather than by unbegottenness, a trait that is restricted to the Father.35 Of this passage phenomenological theology can say little, except to say that it turns on imaginative variation. One might think that there is also nothing that can be said of Jesus’s resurrection. Certainly there is no proof that can be offered of it, and even if it were established strongly by one means or another it would not compel us to regard Jesus Christ as God Incarnate. God could raise from the dead a holy man or an incarnate angel, as the Arians believed. Yet something can be said in a phenomenological key of what the resurrection means for thinking of God’s kingly rule.

Christianity comes to think of Jesus as the genitive as well as the dative of revelation because of the testimony that he was raised from the dead. In the Creed the βασιλεία is mentioned only after the ascension of Jesus into heaven,
and of course the Fathers of Nicaea I in their crafting of the Creed were not interested in Jesus’s life and preaching, only the Christological theses about his conception, death, resurrection, and relationship with the Father: same substance, similar substance, or different substance. We gain phenomenological insight into Christianity when we begin with the preaching of the βασιλεία. What we see is that the affirmation of God’s kingly rule is invariably in conflict with worldly rule, whether it come from the center of political life in Rome or from the center of religious life in Jerusalem. When Jesus tells the Pharisees, “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matt. 22: 21) and, in a later testimony, when he tells Pilate, “My kingdom is not from this world” [Ἡ βασιλεία ἡ ἐμῆ ὑπὸ τοῦ κόσμου πούτου] (John 18: 36), he indicates that one can participate in the βασιλεία while also being in the world as a political and social order. Christianity is not concerned to reject “the world”; it dismisses it only as the ground of life. Yet the conversion of the gaze, the perception of the βασιλεία’s prior claim upon us, is inevitably a challenge to political and social structures. Simeon saw clearly that Jesus was to be “a sign that will be opposed” (Luke 2: 34), and it may well be historically that the cleansing of the Temple, a symbolic annunciation of the coming of the Kingdom most convincingly described by John, was the main trigger for bringing about the execution of Jesus. Yet even if one excludes misunderstandings about Jesus’s preaching, among some of his followers, the aristocratic priests of Jerusalem, the crowds who welcomed him into Jerusalem, and the Roman civil authorities, it seems clear that early Christian self-understanding was that preaching the βασιλεία leads to the cross, which is a curse as well as a hideously cruel death (Deut. 21: 23). That the Romans did not round up Jesus’s disciples after executing Jesus does not count against the danger of preaching the Kingdom; rather, it shows that Jesus’s execution was a matter of how the crowds reacted to him when he entered Jerusalem for Passover. The disciples would be executed themselves precisely because of their preaching of the Kingdom and the one who preached it.

The central moment of the Christian faith is the resurrection of Jesus not only because this is an astonishing event, an interruption of world history, but also because it tells us something about the βασιλεία. In raising Jesus from the dead, the Father both confirms his kingly power (as distinct from his authority) and restores Jesus’s preaching to the fullness of life. The body of Jesus hung on the cross, and so did the body of the βασιλεία; it was, in effect, mocked as so many poetic stories defeated by imperial and religious powers. The disciples
scattered when Jesus was arrested. Yet the resurrection brings both the body of Jesus and the body of the βασίλεια to new life; indeed, the resurrection is the Father's vindication of the βασίλεια as the right way of being in relation with him. It is not one philosophy among others—Cynic, Epicurean, Platonic, or whatever—and not even a philosophy in the first place. It is a manifestation of how to live in a way that is pleasing to God, one that is affirmed above and beyond what is offered by the Essenes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Scribes, the Herodians, and the Zealots. That it comes to us by way of the humility of metaphor and narrative, rather than from the grandeur of metaphysics, is a facet of the divine condescension. To clarify the βασίλεια using a philosophical vocabulary associated with Husserl and his successors is a task for the theologian. In doing so, of course, we realize that it can never be reduced to anything we can master—it is here yet also to come, in the hands of the Father—and once again we are, to a degree, passive with respect to it, open to what it asks of us, and free to reject it.

For Jesus, the preaching of the βασίλεια leads to the cross, and the resurrection overcomes the cross and affirms his preaching. This is the central dialectic of Christianity—one that redeems the βασίλεια as truth and not as the subject of so many lyrical stories—and for Jesus it ends, for resurrection is being raised to eternal life with the Father and the Spirit. For Christians, it is different; we live until eternity in a ceaseless melody of Kingdom-Cross-Resurrection that is played in minor keys. Our attempts to bring on the βασίλεια upset the powers of the world in small ways but ways that can be sufficiently painful: one can be marginalized, reproached, mocked. That God restores us through prayer and sacrament is our share in the resurrection here and now; and the βασίλεια is uplifted in the sacraments. The Christian dialectic plays itself out, as we have seen, by way of κένωσις and ἐπέκτασις, and we can think of the dialectic as a rhythm of ἐπέκτασις, κένωσις and ἐπέκτασις. Jesus's parables, along with his other words and acts, perform ἐποχή and we are led back to the claim that the βασίλεια makes on us. We hold the βασίλεια in intentional experience for a moment; and we may well inquire about the phenomenality of what comes to the horizon of appearing. As we have seen, the βασίλεια does not simply or fully show itself; it is here yet to come, and its coming is in the gift of the Father. So its phenomenality cannot be said to abide at the level of givenness, for it is not given all at once; it also needs to be embodied in our actions.

The Father gives himself in and through the βασίλεια; so if we inquire after the phenomenality of God we shall have to say that it consists in the reveala-
tion of the βασιλεία: a revealing and a re-veiling. Yet if the revelation is finally Christ himself, if the Church is right to say that Christ is not simply the vehicle of communicating God’s revelation but is the content of that revelation as well, “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1: 15)—the exemplary life that is pleasing to God—then we may say that Christ is the phenomenality of God. So the phenomenality of God, as Christianity understands things, is apparently divided, βασιλεία and Christ, though only apparently since the two are one. Neither is given before it shows itself. Neither is fully given in the first place, and both give themselves on their own terms and not in response to a gaze. Christianity reflects on the early experiences people had of Jesus, and the testimonies to which they give rise, and this reflection ends in a number of theses assembled in the Nicene Creed, the Apostle’s Creed, and all the other creeds. Yet these dogmas come after the fact, after pre-thetic experience of the βασιλεία and Jesus Christ, and are not naively posited. This situation is valuable for ecumenicalism, for we may speak within Christianity of Christ as the phenomenality of God while also speaking, without any diminution of the faith, to members of other religions of the βασιλεία as the phenomenality of God. A Muslim or a Jew, say, may participate in the βασιλεία here and now and live a life that is pleasing to God. Muslims or Jews too may enjoy pre-thetic experience of God. No religion, including Christianity, is at heart a series of theses about the supernatural world and its relations with the natural world. The theses of the Nicene Creed are binding on mainstream Christians, but being brought to the anterior claim to serve God in and through the βασιλεία is primary in the faith.
NOTES

Introduction

1. God is hailed as King many times in the Hebrew Bible: in the enthronement psalms (Ps. 45, 93, 96, 97–99), and especially in Isa. 6: 5. The notion of the Kingdom of God occurs in the Septuagint: Wisdom shows the righteous man "a divine kingdom" (Ws. 10: 10). Otherwise, in the Hebrew Bible one hears of the Kingdom without the divine name being used. In the Targums a characteristic shift is from God as King to the Kingdom.


5. See, for example, the source documents gathered together by Ernst Staehelin in his Die Verkündigung des Reiches Gottes in der Kirche Jesu Christi: Zeugnisse aus allen Jahrhunder-


8. Scholars of the parables of Jesus often talk about a specific set of parables of the Kingdom: Arland J. Hultgren, for instance, identifies the parables of the seed growing secretly, the mustard seed, the leaven, the treasure in the field, and the pearl of great price as “parables of the kingdom.” However, I take a far broader view of the relations of the parables and the Kingdom. See Hultgren, The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2000).


1. In Priora Extends Me

1. Dom Cuthbert Butler, Western Mysticism: The Teaching of Augustine, Gregory and Bernard on Contemplation and the Contemplative Life, 2nd ed. (1926; repr., New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 20. The book was originally published in 1922 and then a section entitled “Afterthoughts” was added for the 1926 edition. It is worth noting that at first Dom Cuthbert did not think of including Augustine in the book: “It was an afterthought to include St. Augustine,” he writes in the preface (xl).


3. See Butler, Western Mysticism, 88. I presume that Dom Cuthbert also wishes to exclude Eastern Catholicism from consideration.

4. See Butler, Western Mysticism, 130.


45. Bonhoeffer, Ethics, 299–300.


47. See Quinn, Divine Commands and Moral Requirements, 130–135.


49. See W. H. Auden, "Grub First, Then Ethics (Brecht)," in About the House (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 33.

6. The Manifestation of the Father


2. See Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, 4.2, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans.


The Gospel Commentary, trans. Hieromonk German Ciuba (Erie, Pa.: Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Christ [Old Rite], 2002), 13–28.


14. If either son is married, we know nothing about it. One presumes that the younger son is unmarried. Alicia Batten argues that the parable "demonstrates a gynocentric point of view," though I find her argument unpersuasive. See her essay, "Dishonour, Gender and the Parable of the Prodigal Son," Toronto Journal of Theology 13 (1997), 187–200.


34. It is always possible for Catholics and Protestants alike to complicate the schema by adding that contrition, confession, and atonement must precede the act of forgiveness.


37. The issue is explored in a little more detail in the following chapter.

7. Phenomenology of the Christ


8. Clearly, it is possible for a historical critic also to be a believer. John P. Meier, for example, is a Catholic priest and the author of *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 4 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1991–2009). One could also add other Catholic priests who are historical critics: Raymond E. Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer, and Francis J. Maloney, for example.


10. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1 a. q. 2 prologue.


14. For further details about the parable, see the previous chapter.


17. See Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1a, art. 3 responsio.


21. See on this point Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3. i. 52.


23. See the following chapter, "Notes toward a Supreme Phenomenology."


38. On dogmatic claims made after reduction, see Fink, *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*, 111.

8. Notes toward a Supreme Phenomenology