

**Study day “How to think about being” – 20 April 2016**

***Abstract of Dr. Rudi te Velde’s contribution***

### **In Search of a Theology with ‘Being’**

Heidegger once suggested writing a theology in which the word ‘being’ would not be used. It would be a theology ‘after metaphysics’. What he had in mind was probably something like a hermeneutics of religious faith. In contemporary philosophy of religion, many have followed Heidegger in his critique and rejection of metaphysical theology. Levinas, Marion, Kearney, and many others try to think divine transcendence beyond metaphysics, envisaging it from a phenomenological perspective of concrete human experience. Marion speaks of a God ‘without being’; and Kearney interprets divine transcendence in terms of the ‘possible’ or the ‘eschatological Otherness’.

However, what is wrong with ‘being’? Does metaphysics necessarily lead to a ‘reification’ of the God of religious experience, to a God conceived of as the highest essence, the ultimate foundation of an ontological system of objective truth? Kearney contrasts the God of onto-theology to the God of Mosaic manifestation: “God does not reveal himself as an essence *in se* but as an I-Self for us... The God of Mosaic manifestation cannot be God without relating to his other – humanity.”

The phenomenological approach to God, for instance as ‘eschatological Otherness’, tends to forget creation, or at least ‘creation’ as asserting something about the very existence of things. There is something in ‘creation’ that resists the phenomenological reduction. It could be argued that a God ‘without being’ (as ‘trace’, ‘icon’, or ‘passage’) can not be thought as a creator-God.

What I propose to do is to explore the possibility of a dialogue between metaphysics and hermeneutics with regard to the question of God and our relationship to God. I do not accept the strict opposition between the God of Mosaic manifestation and the God of metaphysics. In view of this, I wish to present a ‘creative interpretation’ of Thomas Aquinas’ account of the ‘God of Mosaic manifestation’. In his *Summa*, in the context of the names of God (13,11), he gives an account of the name of being (Exodus 3:14) as the most appropriate name of God, which offers interesting possibilities for such a dialogue. This text can be read as showing how the name of ‘being’ by reason of its peculiar semantic structure is most suitable to express God-in-his-revelation-to-us.

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