The modern discussion of divine simplicity often feels like a tug‑of‑war between two dead ends. On one side stand the heirs of late‑scholastic metaphysics, Suárez, the Baroque manualists, a good deal of twentieth‑century neo‑Thomism, whose brilliant analytic distinctions can harden into what Henri de Lubac once called an “inert catalogue of predicates.” On the other side looms the Kantian legacy: a critical reserve that confines theological speech to the frail interior of consciousness. Yet the tradition itself has never stopped searching for a middle path. Suárez’s *Disputationes Metaphysicae* safeguarded transcendence by defining simplicity as “the negation of all real composition,”[[1]](#footnote-1) but he also hinted at a relational horizon when he called the divine perfections “mutually implicative.” De Lubac’s *Mystery of the Supernatural* refused to let that grammar fossilize, insisting that the human heart is “stretched toward God by a call inscribed in its very being,”[[2]](#footnote-2) welding simplicity to history and desire. Karl Rahner radicalized the point: because the human spirit is “always already oriented toward absolute mystery,”[[3]](#footnote-3) grace is the horizon of knowing, not a detachable supplement. Each thinker presses for a synthesis of conceptual clarity and experiential overflow, yet none settles the tension once for all.

Jean‑Luc Marion’s phenomenology enters this ongoing conversation as a helpful and surprising interlocutor. His account of the saturated phenomenon, above all the *icon* of Christ, shows why revelation must be received as event: it comes “only as much as it is received, yet always gives more.” Against the static tradition he insists that divine manifestation exceeds every concept; against Kant he insists that the excess nevertheless shows itself. Cyril O’Regan captures the significance of this turn: Marion’s icon, he writes, “breaks into and corrugates the phenomenal field and stretches the self.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Yet phenomenology alone cannot finish the task. Gift needs grammar. How can theology honor excess and achieve doctrinal precision, here, a renewed account of divine simplicity, without retreating to either cul‑de‑sac?

A three‑stranded *relational hermeneutic* supplies the answer. First comes O’Regan’s own “rule of vision,” a disciplined gaze learned from Augustine’s *relatio subsistens* that keeps phenomenology tethered to dogma; phenomenology, he argues, can “open out to theology without fear of confounding two discourses that have each their own protocols and limits.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Continuity alone, however, can ossify into possession. Robyn Horner therefore introduces a *kenotic safeguard*: “God is for the world giver, gift and giving, a trinity of self‑emptying love who is beyond all imagining, and in this gift what seems like an impossible relationship is made possible.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Because every reception risks turning the gift into property, authentic recognition “must pass through forgetting,”[[7]](#footnote-7) a dispossession that keeps the icon from solidifying into an idol.

To hold continuity and excess together without collapse, Hans Urs von Balthasar supplies an aesthetic distance. Beauty, he insists, is *splendor veritatis*: form that both reveals and conceals surplus. His portrait of the Holy Spirit as the unseen “off‑stage director” of the Theo‑Drama grants space for donation to remain dramatic rather than static. Distance is not a buffer that keeps God aloof; it is the luminous interval that lets gift be gift instead of absorption.

Braided together, rule, safeguard, distance, these insights generate a hermeneutical spiral: remember, receive, relinquish, remember deeper. The spiral honors the gains of Suárez, de Lubac, and Rahner while letting Marion’s phenomenology enrich them. Within this framework, simplicity can be re‑voiced as actus donandi, the inseparable circulation of Trinitarian self‑gift. John 17’s “all mine are thine” becomes the biblical cipher: mutual dispossession, not static identity, grounds unity. Augustine already intuited the point when he described the Spirit as *donum donans*, “both the gift of the giver and the giver of the gift.”[[8]](#footnote-8) In Marion’s vocabulary, simplicity is the infinite capacity to let love saturate without remainder.

This reframing speaks directly to today’s controversy. Rigorous Thomists fear that relational language erodes immutability; process‑leaning revisionists abandon simplicity for love’s sake. *Actus donandi* affirms the Thomistic intuition (no parts, no becoming) while answering revisionist desires for divine dynamism by locating all “change” on the side of reception, not in God. Derrida, meanwhile, remains on stage only where Horner explicitly leans on him, the aporetic logic of the gift sharpens the safeguard but does not set the agenda.

In sum, the problem is the twin impasse; the tools are Marion plus a relational hermeneutic forged from O’Regan, Horner, and Balthasar; the payoff is a sharper doctrine of simplicity, simplicity as actus donandi, and an open research program for even finer metaphysical precision. What follows pursues that promise.

1. Francisco Suárez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae* VII, c. 1, n. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Henri de Lubac, *Mystery of the Supernatural* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967), 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Karl Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, trans. William Dyer (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), 215. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cyril O’Regan, “The Return of the Theological in the Thought of Jean‑Luc Marion: A Reading of *Givenness and Revelation*,” *Nova et Vetera* 16, no. 3 (2018): 1003. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid., 1000. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Robyn Horner, *Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida, and the Limits of Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Jean‑Luc Marion, *Givenness and Revelation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 112 – 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)