

A PRINCIPLE OF INCARNATION IN DERRIDA'S (*THEOLOGISCHE?*) *JUGENDSCHRIFTEN*: TOWARDS A CONFESSIONAL THEOLOGY

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Introduction: Platonic Revivals

In pursuing the question of incarnation, it must be noted from the beginning that what is at stake is Platonism. More specifically, my concern will be the relationship of Christian theology to Platonism.

It is a curious phenomenon that here, now, on the brink of the twenty-first century, the question of Christian theology's relationship to Platonism remains an orienting and fundamental theme of reflection. Replaying an Augustinian challenge,¹ the question has been raised anew by two "revivals" of Platonism which serve as catalysts: first, and most recently, a movement in theology which valorizes their identification, sketching a "Platonism/Christianity",² and publishing a manifesto which promises—at the same time—"a more incarnate, more participatory, more aesthetic, more erotic, more socialised, even 'more Platonic' Christianity".³ The second revival is one that takes place under the tent of phenomenology as pointed out in Derrida's early critique of Husserl: concluding that Husserl's "determination of being as ideality is properly a *valuation*, an ethico-theoretical act that revives the decision that founded philosophy in its Platonic form",⁴ we might even suggest that Derrida's critique of Husserl is precisely a critique of his Platonism—in the name, I will argue, of a certain theory of incarnation. These two revivals collide in Catherine Pickstock's curious critique of early Derrida (particularly "Plato's Pharmacy"⁵), where she suggests an inversion of what we might have suspected, first arguing that Plato is in fact

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an “incarnational” philosopher who values the sensible as sacramental, and hence values writing (the *Phaedrus* notwithstanding), and second that it is Derrida, not Plato, who “suppresses embodiment and temporality” and is, in the end, a purveyor of the quintessential Parisian heresy—a “metaphysics of presence”.⁶ In short, she suggests to us that Derrida is a Platonist.⁷

My overall project contests Pickstock’s theses on two fronts: first, elsewhere, by arguing that it is precisely on an incarnational register that Platonism and Christianity are incommensurable—in short, to demonstrate once again that Plato is a Platonist.⁸ In this paper, my goal is on the second front, demonstrating that Derrida is not a Platonist, but rather offers a critique of Platonism⁹ (in Husserl) and argues for what me might describe as an incarnational (or, at least, quasi-incarnational) account of language as constituted by both presence and absence—a “manifestation” (*Kundgabe*) which both “announces” and “conceals”. And it is just such an incarnational account of language, I would argue, which is the condition of possibility for theology. To this point, research on Derrida and theology has tended to travel several (now well-worn) paths: his relationship to negative theology, the possibility of theology after his critique of ontotheology and the metaphysics of presence, his understanding of the relationship between faith and reason, the impact of deconstruction on hermeneutics, or the role of “religion” and justice in his later thought—all of which I have explored elsewhere.¹⁰ In this paper I want to tread a road less traveled, in two senses: first, rather than engage in a negative apologetic vis-à-vis deconstruction,¹¹ I want to enlist Derrida in a *constructive* theological project—even a *confessional* theology; second, I want to return to the *early* Derrida—and in particular, his work on phenomenology—as the foundation for a revisioning of theological method which is *incarnational* both in its account of how God can be known¹² and how we can speak about God.

Part One of the paper will briefly map the issues of language and alterity with a specific application of these currents to theological discourse. Part Two will unpack Derrida’s analysis of language in *Speech and Phenomena*, demonstrating that his is a latently incarnational account of language which is the fund for the conclusion: a constructive proposal for the development of a confessional theology, both as a theology *of* confession and a theology *based on* confession.

I. Language, Alterity, and the (Im)possibility of Theology

Indicative of what Dominique Janicaud describes as the “theological turn” of contemporary French philosophy, recent phenomenological debates have revolved around the question of *transcendence* (as seen in the work of Levinas, Marion, and Derrida). At stake here is, first of all, the matter of how that which is transcendent can make an appearance, and then following from this, how a discourse on transcendence could be possible—both of

which are foundational questions for theology. Having tackled the first question elsewhere,¹³ the focus of this paper is how language, which is finite, can indicate that which is transcendent—and more particularly, how theological language can function in the modality of “confession” and “praise”.

In particular, I want to consider the way in which a “confessional” theology is confronted by the challenge of transcendence.¹⁴ By a “confessional” theology, I mean a theology which begins from an experience of the divine—a theology of *testimony*, for which we might look to Augustine or Kierkegaard for a paradigm.¹⁵ For both Augustine and Kierkegaard, one of the fundamental challenges of any “theology” (or proclamation in general) is the incommensurability between the radical interiority of the God-relationship and the public traffic of language. In this sense, the interiority and privacy of the God relation is incommensurate with language which is exterior and public. With respect to the “making present” of language, such an incommensurate interiority must remain absent. But how, then, could one speak of God, confess God? How could one “reveal” or “manifest” one’s interiority to another? Would the theologian be consigned to silence? What is needed is an account of language and expression which can do justice both to the imperative of confession but also the incommensurability, even “transcendence”, of this interiority. This would be an account of language which accounts for a modality of “speaking” which can both “make present” and “conceal”. In this sense, I would argue that it would be an account of language analogous to the Incarnation itself, which is a mode of manifestation that both makes God present to the immanence of human perception but also retains the transcendence of the Wholly Other. In short, it is a non-reductive manifestation.

It is just such an incarnational account of language, I will argue, which we find latent in Derrida’s critique of Husserl—to which we now turn.

II. Presence, Absence, and a Principle of Incarnation

A. Husserl’s Docetism: Purifying Expression

1. The Critique of Metaphysics as a Critique of “Platonism”

We might describe Husserl’s phenomenology as a process of decontamination whose goal is the distillation of “purity”—even a “pure” metaphysics. But in this process, it is precisely materiality and embodiment which constitutes a contamination. It is for this reason that Derrida locates at the heart of phenomenology—intended to be a radical critique of metaphysics—a latent but persistent “Platonism” (i.e., metaphysics). Thus Derrida’s project in *Speech and Phenomena* is to raise the question: Does the phenomenological reduction itself—which attempts to bracket metaphysics—in fact conceal metaphysical presuppositions (pp. 3/4)? Does it not “harbor a dogmatic or

speculative commitment which, to be sure, would not keep the phenomenological critique from being realized, would not be a residue of unperceived naïveté, but would *constitute* phenomenology from within, in its project of criticism and in the instructive value of its own premises?" (pp. 3–4/4–5). That is, could it be that phenomenology is *at root* (i.e., *radically*) metaphysical? In pursuing this question, it is not a matter of finding mere "vestiges" of metaphysics in phenomenology—like unintended "stowaways" in the good ship phenomenology—but rather seeing at the heart and mission of phenomenology a metaphysical project—just what phenomenology sets out to "deconstruct". What other "degenerate" metaphysical speculations consistently missed, Husserl argued, was "the authentic mode of *ideality* ... what may be infinitely *repeated* in the *identity* of its *presence*, because of the very fact that it *does not exist*, is *not real* or is *irreal*" (pp. 4/6, emphases original). This ideality is ultimately "the *living present*, the self-presence of transcendental life" (pp. 4–5/6). Metaphysics here represents the determination of being as presence purified of materiality which is infected by absence.

As a kind of "case study", Derrida locates these operations in the opening discussion of the "sign" in the *Logical Investigations*, where we "see the phenomenological critique of metaphysics betray itself as a moment within the history of metaphysical assurance" (pp. 3/5). Phenomenology, Derrida will demonstrate,

seems to us tormented, if not contested from within, by its own descriptions of the movement of temporalization and of the constitution of intersubjectivity. At the heart of what ties together these two decisive moments of description we recognize an irreducible nonpresence as having a constituting value, and with it a nonlife, a nonpresence or nonself-belonging of the living present, an ineradicable nonprimordially (pp. 5/6–7).

The phenomenological ego is haunted by a nonpresence, an absence, perhaps even a *transcendence*—another, an Other. And more so: the phenomenological ego is in fact *constituted* by such non-presence. In this sense, Derrida's analysis of the constitution of the ego by an absence or otherness could be read as a kind of poststructuralist "Third Meditation" like unto Descartes, where the Other disturbs the solitude of the ego (as emphasized in the reading of Descartes in Marion and Levinas).¹⁶

Here we must appreciate the correlation of three key terms: first, *absence* or *nonpresence* (which is consistently opposed to presence); second, *alterity* or *otherness*; and finally, *transcendence*. The first two are regularly employed by the early Derrida, the latter more frequent in later Derrida. But they are functional synonyms since, phenomenologically speaking, that which is "transcendent" is precisely that which lies outside of consciousness, that which cannot be made present within the sphere of immanence and thus remains absent. In other words, the transcendent is the *alter*, the other. Once

we appreciate these connections, Derrida's early arguments regarding the primordially of absence and nonpresence have significant theological implications. Further, the critique of metaphysics lies precisely in metaphysics' penchant to valorize "full presence" and hence exorcise any vestige of absence—which, give the correlation just noted, constitutes a fundamental exclusion of *transcendence*. Derrida is thus offering an apologia for transcendence, particularly in our account of language.

What exactly is meant, however, by the "concept of metaphysics"? Here Derrida suggests that in fact what is at stake is a traditional theory of language which posits the priority of logic over rhetoric, which Husserl assumes (pp. 6/7)—determining the essence of language by reference to its supposed logical telos. "That this telos is that of *being as presence* is what we here wish to suggest" (pp. 6–7/8, emphasis added). Hence the project of *Speech and Phenomena* is to demonstrate the way in which language itself is haunted by—indeed constituted by—an absence, a non-presence (a transcendence). Incessantly in Husserl, this "presence" of self-presence is elusive, slips away and is deferred; and in such cases, where "presence becomes threatened" (pp. 8/9), Husserl recalls it as a telos or ideality (in the Kantian sense of an "Idea") which can be infinitely *repeated*—but is for that reason Irreal. Derrida argues that "language is properly the medium for this play of presence and absence" (pp. 8–9/10); in fact, what is at stake is a *spiritual* matter:

But we ought to consider, on the one hand, that the element of signification—or the substance of expression—which best seems to preserve the ideality and living presence in all its forms is living speech, the spirituality of the breath as *phōnē*; and, on the other hand, that phenomenology, the metaphysics of presence in the form of ideality, is also a philosophy of life (pp. 9/10).

Or to put it differently: Derrida seeks to demonstrate that the "soulless consciousness" of the phenomenological ego "is still a *living* transcendental consciousness" (pp. 9/10). Husserl posits a radical heterogeneity between "empirical (or in general, worldly) life and transcendental life" which Derrida seeks to question (pp. 9–10/10–11). Husserl accounts for the relation between the empirical and transcendental egos by recourse to a "parallelism" (p. 12); but "we must notice that this parallelism does more than release transcendental ether; it renders more mysterious still (as it alone is capable of doing) the meaning of the *mental* and of *mental life*; that is, of a *worldliness* capable of sustaining, or in some way nourishing, *transcendentality*, and of equaling the full scope of its domain, yet without being merged with it in some total adequation" (pp. 12/13). Thus could we not suggest that what is at stake here, in a sense, is the relation between soul and body? Or the relation between the transcendent and immanent? Further, insofar as he critiques this framework, might we not conclude that Derrida is seeking

an account which avoids the reduction of the one to the other? And what would that be but an incarnational account? In other words, Derrida seeks to demonstrate a more holistic, incarnational account of the relation between body and soul, presence and absence, immanence and transcendence. Below we will see that it is precisely the relation between soul and body, the question of ideality and materiality, which orients Husserl's phenomenology—but in a Platonic direction, seeking to decontaminate the ideal of any connection to embodiment.

2. The Word Without Flesh

This metaphysical (i.e., Platonic) penchant of phenomenology is traced in Husserl's discussion of speech and expression. In the opening of the first of the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl seeks to clarify a fundamental distinction between two different concepts of the "sign" (*Anzeichen*)¹⁷: (1) "expression" (*Ausdruck*) and (2) "indication" (*Anzeichen*). Indications are signs that "express nothing because they convey nothing one could call ... *Bedeutung* or *Sinn*; they are deprived of 'meaning,' but not of signification" [since there can be no sign without signification] (p. 17/17). Indications, in other words, are characterized by *absence*. Expressions are expressive insofar as they are linked to "the ideality of a *Bedeutung*" and thus tied to "the possibility of spoken language (*Rede*)" (p. 18/18). What distinguishes spoken language as expression from "indication" is *meaning* [*vouloir-dire*]: "a speaking subject, 'expressing himself,' as Husserl says, 'about something,' *means* or *wants to say* something" (p. 18/18). Only speech is "expressive" in this sense.

However, this distinction between expression and indication is more functional than substantial: "One and the same phenomenon may be apprehended as an expression or as an indication, a discursive or nondiscursive sign depending on the intentional experience which animates it" (p. 20/20). In other words, it is a question of how it is constituted by the subject. As such, the distinction sometimes leads Husserl to describe their relation as an "entanglement" (*Verflechtung*)—an "interweaving", or "contamination"—and even that such an entanglement is a "*de facto* necessity". In fact, the distinction between the two is only effected *de jure*, and *in language*—which is itself always already "infected" by the "contamination" of the two (pp. 21/20–21).

The implication of this would be that "[e]very expression would thus be caught up, despite itself, in an indicative process" (p. 21/21). As such, the expressive sign would be a species of the genus "indication"; and then "we would have to say in the end that the spoken word, whatever dignity or originality we still accorded to it, is but a form of gesture [—a kind of indicative sign characterized by absence]. In its essential core, then, [...] it would belong to the general system of signification and would not surpass it. The general system of signification would then be coextensive with the system of indication" (pp. 21–22/21). But *this is just what Husserl contests*.

Note, then, that it is Husserl here that wants to maintain the “purity” and privilege of spoken language, reserving a privileged presence in speech. This demand for “presence” is also an exclusion of “absence”, and hence alterity. In other words, Husserl’s account of language leaves no room for the manifestation of a transcendence which cannot be made fully present.¹⁸ And it is here that Derrida wants to point out the contamination and infection of absence—the inescapable interweaving of alterity in language. In order to retain a privileging of expression and speech, Husserl must demonstrate that “expression is not a species of indication” (pp. 22/21). In order to make this case, Husserl would have to find a case in which expression is disentangled from indication, “a phenomenological situation in which expression is no longer caught up in this entanglement, no longer intertwined with the indication” (p. 22/22). Insofar as all “communicative” expression (“colloquy”) would always already be infected by “indication” (because [a] “expression indicates a content forever hidden from intuition, that is, from the lived experience of another” and [b] “the ideal content of meaning and the spirituality of the expression are here united to sensibility” [p. 22/22]¹⁹), Husserl must locate a “pure” expression in *soliloquy*, a “language without communication, in speech as monologue” as found in “solitary mental life” (p. 22/22), for in this private sphere of solitary mental life we would have located both a site of full presence and a site uncontaminated by sensibility. “By a strange paradox, meaning would isolate the concentrated purity of its *ex-pressiveness* just at that moment when the relation to a certain *outside* is suspended” (p. 22/22). Thus it is demonstrated by a kind of reduction to interiority which brackets all exteriority, and hence all communication/colloquy.

But can this be sustained? Will not the privacy of this “sphere of ownness” be interrupted by another, an Other?

The metaphysical attachment of phenomenology is evidenced in Husserl’s attempt to lay down an *extrinsic* relation between indication and expression, thus attempting to maintain a “pure presence” in soliloquy. In order to retain the privileging of “expression” as the only site of “meaning”, the treatment of “indication” is *reductive*: “Indication must be set aside, abstracted, and ‘reduced’ as an extrinsic and empirical phenomenon, even if it is in fact closely related to expression, empirically interwoven [entangled] with expression” (pp. 28/27). In fact, “Husserl’s whole enterprise—and far beyond the *Investigations*—would be threatened if the *Verflechtung* which couples the indicative sign to expression were absolutely irreducible, if it were in principle [*de jure*] inextricable and if indication were essentially internal to the moment of expression rather than being only conjoined to it, however tenaciously” (pp. 28/27). It is precisely this irreducibility of the “interweaving” that Derrida seeks to demonstrate.

Husserl, on the other hand, makes a docetic move which seeks to purify expression of any material attachment. Expression, he argues, is always

inhabited and animated by a meaning because it never takes place outside oral discourse (*Rede*) (pp. 36/34). “What ‘means,’ i.e., *that which* the meaning means to say—the meaning, *Bedeutung*—is left up to whoever is speaking, insofar as he says what he *wants* to say, what he *means* to say” (pp. 36/34). Thus Husserl concludes that all speech counts as expression—and this is the case whether or not such speech is actually uttered (*Logical Investigations*, p. 275). So all the aspects of the “physical incarnation of the meaning” (“the body of speech”) is “if not outside discourse, at least foreign to the nature of expression as such, foreign to that pure intention without which there could be no speech” (pp. 36/34). In short, the physical, material incarnation of meaning is relegated to indication and “retains in itself something of the nature of an *involuntary* association” (p. 36). That is, the “bodily” manifestation of intentionality in the flesh of words also exceeds the “control” of the speaker; once I have spoken, my words take on a life of their own and I can no longer control their meaning.

What is excluded, then, is “the whole of the body and the mundane register, in a word, the whole of the visible and spatial as such” (pp. 37/35)—such as facial expressions and gestures. Thus I have described this as Husserl’s docetism (or Platonism). What is at stake is an *opposition* between body and soul [cf. pp. 13ff.]: “The opposition between body and soul is not only at the center of this doctrine of signification, it is confirmed by it; and, as has always been at bottom the case in philosophy, it depends upon an interpretation of language” (pp. 37/35). Visibility and spatiality, on Husserl’s terms, would represent the death of self-presence.²⁰ Bodily indications such as gestures and facial expressions lack meaning: “Nonexpressive signs mean (*bedeuten*) only in the degree to which they can be made to say what was murmuring in them, in a stammering attempt” (pp. 38/36); indication lacks *vouloir-dire*.

Husserl has excluded indication from expression in order to guarantee a “pure presence” (indeed, a bodiless soul); however, he must exorcise a still “considerable sphere of the nonexpressive in speech itself” (pp. 39–40/37); in other words, further “decontamination” is still needed to achieve purity. In order to do so, Husserl will bracket from “expression” “everything that belongs to the *communication* or *manifestation* of mental experiences [to another]” (pp. 40/37). This will require a reduction to privacy and the exclusion of all intersubjectivity; in other words, the elimination of all “nonpresence”—which here represents all otherness, all alterity (pp. 40/37). Recalling that “the difference between indication and expression was functional or intentional, and not substantial” (pp. 40/37; cf. p. 20), Husserl can now exclude as “indications” elements of substantial speech; in particular: “All speech inasmuch as it is engaged in communication and manifests²¹ lived experience operates as indication” (pp. 40/37–38, emphasis added). Excluded, then, are all forms of discourse which are intersubjective; even though Husserl concedes that expression is originally intended to serve the function

of communication, it is not *pure* in functioning this way: “only when communication is suspended can pure expression appear” (pp. 41/38). Thus all the “goings-forth (*sorties*) effectively exile this life of self-presence in indications”, indicating, in fact, “the process of death at work in signs” (pp. 44/40). “As soon as the other appears, indicative language—another name for the relation with death—can no longer be effaced” (pp. 44/40).

3. Manifestation, Revelation, and Absence

Why is communication “bracketed” in the attempt to distill “pure” expression? What is it about communication which “contaminates” expression? What happens in communication? For Husserl, communication [an “intercourse” with another] represents a *loss* of pure presence: “Sensible phenomena (audible or visible, etc.) are animated through the sense-giving acts of a subject, whose intention is to be simultaneously understood by another subject. But the ‘animation’ cannot be pure and complete, for it must traverse, and to some degree lose itself in, the opaqueness of a body” (pp. 41/38; *Logical Investigations*, p. 277). The intersubjectivity of communication demands a mediation which constitutes a loss of full-presence. “Manifestation”, for Husserl, is always “inadequate”. We need to appreciate—as Levinas has suggested—that what is at stake here is a concept of *revelation* and incarnation (since the incarnation is the revelation of the invisible God *par excellence* [Col. 1:15]); indeed, what is at issue is the *possibility* of revelation and incarnation.²²

As Derrida notes, this evaluation and analysis revolves around a notion of “presence” as “full” and “immediate”:

If communication or intimation (*Kundgabe*) is essentially indicative, this is because we have no primordial intuition of the presence of the other’s lived experience [i.e., the other is “absent” to me]. Whenever the immediate and full presence of the signified is concealed, the signifier will be of an indicative nature. (This is why *Kundgabe*, which has been translated a bit loosely by “manifestation” [...], does not manifest, indeed, renders nothing manifest, *if by manifest we mean* evident, open, and presented “in person”. The *Kundgabe* announces and at the same time conceals what it informs us about (pp. 43/40, emphasis added).

For Husserl, “manifestation” indicates a presentation *without remainder*; as such, we must note that manifestation (*Kundgabe*) would in fact represent a *reduction* of the alterity of the other to the sphere of the same—a reduction of the transcendence of the other (here in a rigorously phenomenological sense) to the immanence of the perceiver/receiver. Thus it seems that Husserl leaves us with two (heretical) options: the other’s subjectivity is either merely “indicated” and thus not *really* present, or it is “fully present” and thereby presented without remainder and reduced to immanence. This

is both based on a theory of “purity” and contributes to it. Theologically speaking, we might say that the options are either Docetism or Arianism.

B. Christ, the Indication of God: Discerning Derrida’s Incarnational Account of Language

As we have noted above, Husserl’s devaluation of the embodiment of indication stems from his conception of presence as “full” presence (without lack, without remainder) and the correlate demand for the purification of expression in order to maintain such full presence. In other words, Husserl seeks to eradicate the *Verflechtung* of expression and indication, soul and body, by guarding a pure presence which is uncontaminated by materiality. On an incarnational register, Husserl will not jeopardize presence (being as ideality) by exposing it to sensibility or embodiment which are necessary for communication.

But does God maintain the same protections? Does God refuse to risk full presence? Does God refrain from communication in order to guard presence? Indeed, is it not precisely the Incarnation which would be the catalyst for a radically different notion of “manifestation” (*Kundgabe*)? Could we not conceive “manifestation” in different terms, meaning by it not *full* presence, but *real* presence?²³ And would not such a notion of real presence retain the “remainder” and thus transcendence? Could we not thus evaluate “manifestation” (*Kundgabe*) more positively?

It is just such a notion of the interweaving (*Verflechtung*) of presence and absence which grounds Derrida’s critique of Husserl’s “Platonism”. Derrida insists that the intertwining²⁴ of presence and absence, ideality and materiality, is inescapable and constitutes the very conditions of language, discourse, and communication. Manifestation indicates both an announcement and a concealment—a “making present” which also retains an element of absence or transcendence. In other words, language operates as the Incarnation, which is its condition of possibility.

Conclusion: Towards a Confessional Theology

The Incarnation ruptures the two things which Husserl’s Docetism/Platonism seeks to put out of play: it is *communicative* and thus communicates by means of *embodied signs*. In the same way, what I have described above as a “confessional” theology both seeks to *express* or *manifest* transcendence and seeks to do so *for another* (i.e., it is communicative—its goal is communication). Such a “method” of theology begins with the *testimony* or “experience” of the believer and the believing community as the primary locus or site for theological reflection.²⁵ Thus it is a “confessional” theology in two senses: first, it begins from the confession of the believer testifying to her experience of God, and second, it is informed by participation in the believing community and tradition (and so, dialectically, also informs and nourishes the

community and tradition). As such, it is also a *relational* theology, again in two senses: first, it begins from the relationship between God and the believer, and second, it is both informed by and nourishes the believer's relationship to the believing community. It is the first element of *confession* or *testimony* which requires "manifestation" or "expression", and it is the second element of *relationality* which demands "communication". And both of these are summoned in response to a primary *communication* of God to humanity in the Incarnation, reconstituting a *relation* engendered by creation.

The condition of possibility for both confession and communication is language, and in order for such manifestation and communication to take place, we must break with a Platonic or metaphysical account of language that privileges "full" presence, because such an impossible full presence would preclude the possibility of manifestation, and hence the possibility of communication. As such, it would preclude, first of all, the very possibility of *revelation* and so the Incarnation; and insofar as the Incarnation is the condition of possibility for language, especially theological language,²⁶ such a Platonic or Husserlian account of language would also preclude the possibility of theology in the mode of "confession".

Instead, theology must operate with an incarnational account of language which entails a notion of "real" presence²⁷—a presence which includes an absence, an excess or remainder which remains transcendent. The Husserlian criterion of "complete" or "adequate" presence would demand the complete absorption of alterity into the sphere of the same; more concretely, it would demand an Incarnation in which all transcendence is denied or given up—an appearance *without remainder*. But the result would be to permit only an "apparition" (no real appearance or giving, only an illusory presence) or an immanentizing "appearing without remainder" which shuts down any transcendent excess—neither of which are genuine Incarnation. But we need not adopt Husserl's logic on this score: an appearance can be "real" without being completely "adequate", exhausting the phenomenon's transcendence. Thus one can speak of the Incarnation as a genuine appearance—a *real presence*—which is nevertheless attended by inadequation, indicating a reference to a transcendence which exceeds the appearance, but is also embodied in the appearance. Such an incarnational logic will be the condition for both God's confession and communication²⁸ which evokes from the believing community a theology which is a mode of confession, involving—like the Incarnation—both manifestation and communication in words that *embody* the experience of God (1 John 1:1–3).

NOTES

- 1 Few questions in Augustinian studies have generated more discussion than Augustine's relationship to Plato, Platonism, and Neoplatonism. For a lucid and helpful survey of the state of the question, see Robert Crouse, "*Paucis mutatis verbis*: St. Augustine's Platonism"

- in *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner*, Robert Dodaro and George Lawless (eds) (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), pp. 37–50. I have also addressed the question in my “Staging the Incarnation: Revisioning Augustine’s Critique of Theater”, *Literature and Theology* Vol. 15 (2001), pp. 123–139 and *The Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), ch. 5.
- 2 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 290. Similar formulations include the identification of “Platonism and Christianity” (p. 290), “the Platonic/Christian shepherding ideal” (p. 293), and an identification of “the neo-Platonic/Christian infinitization of the absolute” (p. 295). Correlative to this is a critique of any who would seek to “de-Platonize” Christianity (pp. 294–295).
 - 3 John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock, “Introduction—Suspending the Material: The Turn of Radical Orthodoxy” in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), p. 3.
 - 4 Jacques Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène: Introduction au problème du signe dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* (Paris: PUF, 1967), p. 59/*Speech and Phenomena*, trans. David Allison (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 53. Henceforth cited in parentheses in the text, providing first the French then English pagination.
 - 5 Jacques Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy” in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 63–171. It is important to see the critique of the privileging of “speech” in this essay as analogous to the critique of Husserl in *Speech and Phenomena*; this will serve as further evidence that the object of critique in the latter is Husserl’s Platonism.
 - 6 Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 4, 21, and *passim*. My goal here is not a sustained critique of Pickstock (for such, see chapter five of my *Speech and Theology: Language and the Logic of Incarnation* [London: Routledge, forthcoming]). At stake is an entire history of interpretation which could be summarized as follows: the “traditional” reading of Plato’s *Phaedrus* has concluded that Socrates devalued writing as sensible, temporal, and external; further, the tradition has agreed with that evaluation (this is Derrida’s point in *Speech and Phenomena*, *Of Grammatology*, and other early works). In “Plato’s Pharmacy”, Derrida continues to uphold the “traditional” interpretation of the *Phaedrus*, but unlike “the tradition”, calls this evaluation of writing into question (for reasons we will explore momentarily). Finally, Pickstock enters the fray, attempting to argue that Derrida is a nihilist and a modernist who has misread the *Phaedrus*, as indeed, has the entire “tradition” since, she argues, in the dialogue we find that Socrates in fact values sensibility, temporality, and hence, writing. If we follow Pickstock, it is Derrida who is the “Platonist” (in the “traditional” sense of the term). Permit me here to just note that I would argue Pickstock is mistaken on both scores, regarding her reinterpretation of Plato and her first interpretation of Derrida: first, Platonic participation differs fundamentally from Christian incarnation (this is argued elsewhere); second, as I will suggest in this paper, Derrida’s early project is funded by an understanding of embodiment and language which is much closer (perhaps too close to see) to Pickstock’s “incarnational” and “liturgical” account. So in the end, Pickstock and I agree about the importance of an incarnational ontology, but we disagree as to the resources for its development: she finds it in Plato and not Derrida; I am locating it in Derrida and not Plato (or Husserl).
 - 7 Not a real Platonist, since the burden of her work is to argue that Plato is really a quasi-incarnational and sacramental philosopher; so Derrida is a “Platonist” in the “traditional” sense, an “apparent” Platonism.
 - 8 See my *Speech and Theology*, chapter five.
 - 9 In other words, I think “metaphysics” and “Platonism” are basically synonymous in early Derrida.
 - 10 Respectively, on the question of negative theology see my “How to Avoid Not Speaking: Attestations” in James Olthuis (ed), *Knowing Other-wise: Philosophy on the Threshold of Spirituality*, Perspectives in Continental Philosophy Series (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 1997), pp. 217–234 and “Between Predication and Silence: Augustine on How (Not) To Speak of God”, *The Heythrop Journal* Vol. 41 (2000), pp. 66–86 (esp. pp. 80–84 where I develop a theology of “praise” in dialogue with Derrida and Marion, returning to Augustine); on the relationship between faith and reason, see my “Is Deconstruction an Augustinian Science?: Augustine, Derrida, and Caputo on the Commitments of Philosophy” in James H.

Olthuis (ed), *Religion With/out Religion: The Prayers and Tears of John D. Caputo* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 50–61; on deconstruction and hermeneutics, see my *The Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), pp. 115–129; and on questions of religion and justice in later Derrida, see my “Determined Violence: Derrida’s Structural Religion”, *The Journal of Religion* Vol. 38 (1998), pp. 197–212 and “Re-Kanting Postmodernism?: Derrida’s Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone”, *Faith and Philosophy* Vol. 17 (2000), pp. 558–571. These studies will be collected in my forthcoming *Pure Derrida?: Infection, Incarnation, and Deconstruction*. One should also consult Guy Collins, “Thinking the Impossible: Derrida and the Divine”, *Literature and Theology* Vol. 14 (2000), pp. 313–334 and John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997).

- 11 Such apologetic strategies usually begin from the premise that Derrida is a “nihilist” or, in Pickstock’s terms, “immanentist”. See, for example, Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, pp. 302–315 and Pickstock, *After Writing*, pp. 47–48. For an antidote, see Collins, *op.cit.*
- 12 This was the focus of my “Between Predication and Silence” (see note 10 above).
- 13 Permit me to refer, for instance, to my “Respect and Donation: A Critique of Marion’s Critique of Husserl”, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 71 (1997), pp. 523–538.
- 14 A similar challenge would confront a “revelational” theology, which grapples not with the challenge of a heterogeneous *interiority* but a radical *exteriority*—the Wholly Other. However, these two challenges are not mutually exclusive; in Augustine, for instance, both challenges are at work. For a discussion, see my “Between Predication and Silence” (*op.cit.*).
- 15 I have discussed this further in my “How (Not) To Tell a Secret: Interiority and the Strategy of ‘Confession’”, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 74 (2000), pp. 135–151.
- 16 We might recall and compare the interruption and displacement of the Cartesian cogito in the *Third Meditation* (“I am not alone”), particularly in light of the analysis of the “summons” (*revelation*) in Jean-Luc Marion, *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998), pp. 204–205. Contrary to the standard “subjectivist” reading of Descartes’ *Meditations*, close attention to the text will see that the *ego* is in fact constituted by this Other—that God is the very condition of possibility for the *ego*, both epistemologically and ontologically.
- 17 We should be reminded that what is at stake in a Christology and doctrine of the incarnation is a certain semiotics, an account of the way in which Christ constitutes an “icon” of the invisible God (Col. 1:15). In a sense, I am arguing for the formulation: “Christ, the indication of God.”
- 18 This is also why Derrida suggests that Husserl’s analysis of the appearance of the Other signals a discontinuity in this regard—a key moment of interruption. See *Speech and Phenomena*, pp. 6/7, but also “Violence and Metaphysics”.
- 19 Note what is at stake here: Derrida is seeking to demonstrate that such “interweaving” is characteristic of all expression, that there is no “pure” expression, no “ideality” or “spirituality” which can be detached from the sensible or “disinfected” of indication. Thus against Husserl, Derrida is arguing for the constant “contamination” of presence by absence, or immanence by transcendence, or the intertwining of the sensible and intelligible [we need to return to Merleau-Ponty here and the relation between visible and invisible].
- 20 This “incarnation” would represent the “death” of self-presence only insofar as we conceive presence as “full presence”, as complete presence without absence; then any spatialization or temporalization would represent a *loss*. But could we not think presence differently? Could it not be a matter of both presence and absence, immanence and transcendence?
- 21 To place this in a broader discussion, we should recall the connection between “manifestation” and “revelation” as unconditioned in Marion and Levinas.
- 22 Ultimately, I think Levinas (and, for that matter, Jean-Luc Marion) offers us only an inversion of the Husserlian schema—not something like an “incarnational” account. For my criticism of Levinas and Marion on this score, see chapter five of my *Speech and Theology*.
- 23 Derrida uses the term “real presence” (pp. 57/52), but basically as a synonym for “full presence”; I would argue a fundamental difference.
- 24 I think this opens new horizons for the theological consideration of Merleau-Ponty, “The Intertwining—The Chiasm” in *The Visible and the Invisible*, Claude Lefort (ed), trans.

- Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), pp. 130–155. For developments of this, see Phillip Blond, “The Primacy of Theology and the Question of Perception” in *Religion, Modernity, and Postmodernity*, David Heelas (ed) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 285–313 and *idem.*, “Perception: From Modern Painting to the Vision in Christ” in *Radical Orthodoxy*, pp. 220–242.
- 25 The Pentecostal filiation of this notion of theology will be evident; however, the same can be found in David Kelsey’s *To Understand God Truly: What’s Theological About Theological Education?* (Atlanta, GA: Westminster/John Knox, 1992) and Edward Farley, *Ecclesial Reflection: Anatomy of Theological Method* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1982).
 - 26 This is the thesis of my *Speech and Theology*.
 - 27 I will postpone, for the moment, any specifically eucharistic investigations.
 - 28 We might think of the revelation of God in the Incarnation as a kind of “confession” or “testimony” of God, wherein God speaks “in Son” (Heb. 1:2) and thus communicates to humanity (Heb. 1:1–3).