

EMMANUEL FALQUE

The Metamorphosis of Finitude
An Essay on Birth and Resurrection

TRANSLATED BY GEORGE HUGHES

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Introduction

To Be Transformed

“Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet” (1 Cor 15:51–52). To die or to be transformed, or rather for *everyone to be transformed* whether already dead or not, since only the last trumpet sounds here, is the universal *metamorphosis* proposed by St. Paul as a definition, no less, of the resurrection. And the resurrection is immediately of the Word made living body, and subsequently it is quite simply of human beings, at the Last Judgement. That the living Christ was transfigured—or, rather, literally metamorphosed—in the eyes of Peter, James, and John on a “high mountain, by themselves” is certain (Mt 17:1). That he was, “as he said,” “raised from the dead” (Mt 28:6–7); that “God raised him the third day” (Acts 10, 40); that his body “experienced no corruption” (Acts 13, 37); and that he “appeared “to Simon” (Lk 24:34) and “appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time” (1 Cor 15:6): Why not? These are so many episodes, although, when all is said and done, they concern only a few privileged disciples, spectators of a body that has been “transfigured” or metamorphosed (*metamorphoō*)—a body that they gaze at without experiencing for themselves what we call a “transformation.” But that “God raised the Lord, and will also raise us by his power” (1 Cor 6:14); that he will “transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory” (Phil 3, 21); or, further, that “all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in

a mirror are being transformed into the same image” (2 Cor 3:18): These are statements that cannot simply be taken for granted.¹

There are two reasons why all this is not straightforward. On the one hand, there is a hesitation on the part of theology to believe that it should be concerned with what happened to the resurrected Christ. On the other, there is a burden of philosophical finitude that probably we cannot overcome and even less can hope to transform. The first problem for the theologian is in some way to “get into the picture, to get out of the auditorium and to throw oneself onto the scene,”² something that would be worthwhile for every Christian, in particular when it is a question of the metamorphosis of one’s own finitude (resurrection). What belongs to God indeed often stays with God, and the divine heroism that his disciples accord to God has in reality no other end but to distance him from the ordinary condition of human beings. But as for the burden of finitude, if the philosopher starts to calculate what it involves, then he or she will rapidly give up waiting for any other arguments that might lighten the burden or, even less, that might transform it. When all is said or done, neither Christians nor philosophers are led to believe for themselves in their own resurrection. The former abandon this privilege to Christ alone, raised from the dead; the latter often suppress even the possibility. To insist on the suffering of the Son in its specifically finite aspect (anguish, suffering, and death) is then inadequate, and a phenomenological examination of the passion turns out to be a necessity from the start (see my *Le Passeur de Gethsémani*).³

Moreover we have to believe, to accept, and to welcome the notion of the resurrection, that a *passage* on this occasion could transform the ontological structure of this world and alter it from end to end. “We have underlined throughout that in enduring (i.e. *suffering*) this world, the Son communicates to the Father (i.e. *passes on*) the burden of the finite that he has experienced in his death, and begs him now that he will also deliver him from pain.” Understanding this passion is then the task, proposed in my earlier book but not yet accomplished, and that constitutes the object of the present enquiry, *The Metamorphosis of Finitude*.⁴

§1. From Death to Birth

Le Passeur de Gethsémani, to which *The Metamorphosis of Finitude* stands as a companion volume, concluded precisely with “an analysis of incarnation (finitude, suffering, and death) opening toward a difficult albeit possible *analysis of the resurrection* (birth and imperishability).”⁵ Man and his body lay claim in effect to a past (birth), a present (sexuality), and a future

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(death). In his incarnation, the Son of God takes on the radical corporality of the experience of man, even transforming that corporality the better to come to terms with it. He dies in being born (at Bethlehem), in making a gift of his body (at the Last Supper), and in dying (on Golgotha). I have shown elsewhere that the Son of Man suffers *the corporal modality of the future*—that is, of death—as a total rending apart and that suffering is consecrated precisely as the receptive space for the other that is the Father in him.⁶ He takes on fully *the corporal modality of the present*, or the gift of the body (which is the subject of the third volume in my “triptych,” *Les Noces de l’Agneau* [The Nuptials of the Lamb]) in the unique, almost conjugal, moment of the act of love, in which his body is given to the other: *Hoc est enim corpus meum*—“this is my body” (Mk 14:22).⁷ It is the corporal modality of the past, or of birth, that we are concerned with in this book, and that opens paradoxically onto a new future, a “second birth.” There is something more fundamental in man and in God than death: birth. One can, after all, bring about one’s own death but not one’s birth. All heroism of the subject here definitively comes to an end, up to and including Nietzschean attempts to “bring oneself back to life.” Birth for the nascent (for those who are born) is not self-given but visited on us. It is with the living body as it is with one’s name, a thing not drawn from oneself and initially imposed on the self. From the *passivity* of the nascent we shall draw as paradigm the *passivity* of the resurrected. What goes for human beings in our own birth goes also most probably for the Son of Man. “Like man,” Tertullian suggests, “Christ *loved his birth, he loved his flesh*” and “sent down *to die*,” he writes in a later passage, “he had necessarily to be born also in order that he might die; indeed nothing dies but what is [first] born.”⁸

It is not enough, then, following the Heideggerian motif of my previous book, to underline that, “as soon as man comes to life [as was the case at Bethlehem], he is at once old enough to die [as at Golgotha].”⁹ I would echo Heidegger here (though he neglected to develop the point) that “the inauthentic *Dasein* [and thus also Christ in his humanity] exists ‘*natively*’ and it is ‘*natively*’ that he dies in the sense that he is a being for death.” In other words, if death, or corporal modality of the *future*, for human beings as for the Word incarnate, is not a simple accident of birth or of the corporal modality of the *past*, it always sends one back to “another ending,” probably more originary even though never analyzed as such, the first of all the beginnings—the “birth.” What is simply there “between” our birth and death constitutes in the first place the totality of our life, our pure being, which is inauthentic insofar as we are ourselves, for ourselves, the temporal extension of this beginning always oriented toward its own end.¹⁰

It is no small matter from the point of view of the eternal engendering of the Son in the breast of the Father, but it falls to theology to recognize that for the Son of God to be born “in bands of cloth” (Luke 2:12) is exactly already for him to start to die on the cross (Acts 5:30). Not that life has been made only for death—a notion that in this context would be a serious philosophical and theological misinterpretation—but, insofar as *to be born* is already to proceed toward *death*, to live in the light of that end that must, I think, be either definitive (a nothingness) or provisional (resurrection). Although he took the form of “Being for death” [*Sein zum Ende*] at Gethsemane and on Golgotha, the Son of God had originally taken the form of “Being for the beginning” [*Sein zum Anfang*] at his birth in Bethlehem, or in his multiple apparitions to his disciples, witnesses at this time of a “new birth,” or “renaissance.” To pass from death to birth, or from the “twilight of the gods” to the “first dawn of things,” is then not only to enter into the experience of the Son suffering the burden of the world and its incomprehensible finitude but also to brave with him the passage he took toward what was most fundamental in his own life. We learn from him—that is, by his revelation and the supporting texts—how his “Being for death” breaks itself apart definitively on exposure to a “new Being for the beginning” provoked, or rather raised up by the Father, in him. If he was sown as “perishable” like all human beings, in his temporal birth at Bethlehem or wherever (not that this prejudices in any way either his eternal birth or his conception in the virgin birth), he was resurrected as “imperishable” but nonetheless corporal at Jerusalem and in all other places (1 Cor 15:42). The mystery of the Passion (anguish, suffering, and death) rejoins here the mystery of the Nativity (birth), which in turn joins the mystery of Easter (resurrection as [re]naissance): “They kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean” (Mk 9:10).

§2. The Dialogue with Nicodemus

If theology invokes a mystery here, however, we cannot ignore the need for dogma to be intelligible. In the history of theology there has surely never been as little discussion of the “final resurrection” as there is today. It is a safe bet that this is because we don’t know what, or what more, to say about it. Silence of this kind, which exists around the possibility of a “phenomenology of the resurrection,” does not spring from a weakness in theology—there are countless impressive discussions, in particular by the Fathers of the Church. It springs rather from the almost total absence of any reference to the original *life experience* of human beings in the act of

birth. What is not discussed is the act of birth by which Christ and his disciples come (come anew?) to life and open another world or, better, a new way of being in this same world. In his conversation with the Pharisee Nicodemus (John 3:1–21), however, Jesus puts us on the right track for such an existential analysis of the resurrection.

It is common to emphasize, on the basis of this exchange with Nicodemus, that for us today to be resurrected is first of all to be “born of water and Spirit” (John 3:5). Although that is true of baptism (a rebirth of water and of the Spirit), such a reading of the dialogue with Nicodemus is often used as a way of obscuring what is its ultimate sense: It is a first declaration and exegesis of the *resurrection of the body*—that also being a “new birth” (supposing that on the one hand one is “already born of the flesh,” and on the other hand that one can really grasp the sense of what is being said). When the purport of resurrection or of being “born again” is taken entirely in terms of baptism as spiritual renaissance, the tendency is to leave aside the final resurrection as a new birth of the flesh. The rejoinder of the sage, who comes by night to question the “master,” is thus of great pertinence: “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” (John 3:4). This is far from indicating the naïveté that is often attributed to Nicodemus. Like all men, he had in reality no other experience of birth than what was first and originally his own—what was most peculiar to him because at the same time it was nearest: the birth of *his* living body, drawn from *his* “mother’s womb.” And Jesus precisely understood this and seized on this, which suggests an *analogic* response where commonly we stick to false dualist ideas: “What is born of the flesh is flesh and what is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). This formula does not signify that flesh (*sarx*) and spirit (*pneuma*) should be dogmatically opposed in the Greek manner, as though the rebirth of the one (the spirit) could not win out except by the death and destruction of the other (the flesh). On the contrary, it invites us, and rightly, to join in the silent corporal auto-comprehension of all human beings, to think analogically of what is brought forth in the resurrection, of the way in which this is lived in the act of birth for us all. Just as you know for yourself what birth is from the birth of your own flesh from your “mother’s womb,” or you know because in your turn you also have begotten by your own flesh, so, in the same way, you understand today what the “rebirth of the spirit” is, starting from the first experience of the birth of your flesh, or by your flesh. In other words, as flesh is born of flesh in the act of filiation, or of begetting, so spirit is born of spirit in the act of baptism and even more in the final resurrection. The latter (resurrection of the body) brings to the former (baptism) a corporal dimension that the former lacks and that must

nonetheless be written into every act of birth. To be reborn is not to “enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born”—which explains the very appropriate reply of Jesus to the Pharisee. It is to be born of water and of the Spirit, truly to be reborn of the body, just as I myself was born of the flesh and derive from another my own flesh—that flesh out of which our own bodies are always composed.¹¹

This dialogue with Nicodemus, which serves as a motif through the present work, can be taken to justify the philosophical, and therefore human, interrogation of what is our actual experience of the birth of the flesh. And from this we arrive, in the guise of a believer’s interpretation this time, at the theological dimension of that other experience, of the resurrection of the body, lived through so far (at least according to Catholic dogma) by Christ and by Mary his mother. The passage from death to birth invites us to a “rebirth” that can never skip over the meaning, first of all phenomenological and descriptive, of the act of birth—because the act of birth serves as its guide and model.

§3. The Heuristic Approach and Didactic Exposition

Before moving to the core of this “phenomenology of the resurrection” (part III of my argument in this book), I should first clarify what justifies the long journey down the nave that leads into it—the “*précis of finitude*” (part I of the argument)—and the transept that delineates within it the form of a cross: “toward a metamorphosis” (part II). One doesn’t naïvely reach the “joy” of a metamorphosis (part III) without first passing through the unbearable “burden” of what is to be transformed (part I) or without the “strength” of him who, after all, brings about the transformation (part II). In other words, the *transcendental conditions* of the resurrection have to be examined, in order to justify, if not the act itself, at least its novelty. The question of the “type of receptive medium [that Christianity supposes]” remains a decisive one in philosophy (see Kant), as in theology (see Rahner). It is not that we can reduce God to man (the false charge of anthropological reductivism): rather that we need to see in God how he makes himself the measure of human beings (*kenosē*), and how he marks out a route for us toward the divine, starting from the human.¹² Today as yesterday, I have no other route to God except by means of the person I am. And Christ, “having lived our condition of humanity in all things except sin,”¹³ teaches me first to look at myself in my humanity in order to reach *him* in his divinity.

But to follow the humanization of the divine to its logical conclusion does not mean that we have to hypostasize man as a “transcendent being.”¹⁴

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In fact nothing seems more arbitrary, to me and to many others, than some kind of experience, given to us or proffered us, of the Infinite, above all when it is taken to be a kind of requisite deriving from some structure of humanity. Everything seems to indicate, at least when we take our “human condition” seriously (see Heidegger, Sartre, Camus, and Deleuze), that the temporality, which gets called “ecstatic,” is nothing less than a finite temporality of which “the future is closed” and the “foundations nonexistent.” Only the *closed* horizon of our Being-there (finitude) convinces us *in the first place*, at least, that we exist—albeit in the tormented excess of the existence that is imposed on us. “We have not the slightest reason to be here, not one among us,” says Sartre’s Antoine Roquentin. “Every being, muddleheaded, vaguely worried, feels himself unwanted or superfluous [*de trop*] in relation to others. *De trop*: that was the only relation I could set up with these trees, these railings, these stones. . . . I was *de trop* for eternity.”¹⁵ As long as I am not dead but have a singular awareness of my certain future disappearance, I lay stress solely on its exact opposite, on the *burden* of my life and of my present appearance. In short, if we really want to take stock today of the “finitude of primordial time,” we need to stop deriving the “finite” from the “infinite.” It is, conversely, “only because primordial time is *finite* [that] the ‘derived’ time [can] temporalize itself as *infinite*.”¹⁶

But a whole branch of theology seems to have been pulled down in such a radical reevaluation of our *Being-there*, seen simply as “between” birth and death. Creation, the call, redemption, the image of God in man, an opening up toward grace, or aspiration to the divine—all are forgotten. They are replaced only and almost literally by closure (of all futurity) and obsolescence (of all foundation). But the theological enterprise, in the great strength of its dogmatic tradition, will not be definitively wiped out by such a move, far from it. Theology comes back, on the contrary, with the resurrection itself, considered now as a transformation, as a transfiguration precisely of this ontological structure of our Being-there (part one of my argument). On the one hand, we stand on a different footing (the metamorphosis of finitude brought about by the Father and his resurrected Son [part II]); and on the other hand we open up toward a new future (with a new hope that bears up those without hope [part III]).

To consider the resurrection as a “metamorphosis of finitude” comes down then, in the first place, to accepting that there is something to *transform* that is not of the order of sin. It is to risk holding fast either to the restoration of another world (the myth of the golden age) or to fulfillment in this world (completion without change). We cannot in this respect dissent from the well-known Thomist adage, which underlies the strongest of Catholic traditions, that grace “does not destroy nature but perfects it”

(*cum enim gratia non tollat naturam sed perficiat*).¹⁷ I do not take this in the sense that grace could restore the qualities that are missing in nature, or that it perfects nature's admitted potentialities, but rather as suggesting that it *transforms* these qualities at the same time as it puts the finishing touches to them: *perficiat nisi transformans*. Grace perfects nature or, as I would like to add, "at least transforms it." Since I have discussed elsewhere how the structure of finitude cannot be derived solely from sin,¹⁸ I would like to put things in another way here, and suggest that it is the world itself, in this its most fundamental structure, that awaits metamorphosis. Resurrection is not and will not be a simple event of transformation *in* the world, but it is the event of the transformation *of* the world—ontologic and not ontic—supposing that the world, as it is, is entirely contained within the Word resurrected (Col 1:16–17), and modified by the Word (chapter 6, "The Incorporation of the Human Being"). Thus Jean-Luc Marion quite rightly asks: "Do the Incarnation and the Resurrection of Christ affect the *ontological destiny* of the world? Or do they remain *purely ontic* events?"¹⁹ To reply we need to describe what there is philosophically in the structure of this world (part I of my argument) that allows that structure to be theologically transformed by the irruption of the resurrected (part II) and allows it to be phenomenologically described in the accounts of his apparitions (part III).

It is significant then for theology, as has been the case in philosophy at least since Descartes, that it does not confound a heuristic approach with didactic exposition, the one directed toward research and the other toward teaching. What we say, first of all, in a first phase, about the Being-there of humankind (the impassable horizon of human finitude and Being-there) does not necessarily dictate that this will be the *last word*, the last *phase* of truth about human existence (the transfiguration of this same finitude through Christ). The resurrection can be seen as *metamorphosis* or *transfiguration* only insofar as what is to be transformed is first of all analyzed from the starting point of our humanity, and insofar as this is done independently of all consideration of the resurrected Son, or of the Father who created us. What was said at the start is not to be rescinded but *metamorphosed* and *converted* by the Resurrected One—albeit he himself is found at the end to be like One who had always been there, from the start. Far from disqualifying *finitude* (part I of my argument), resurrection as *metamorphosis* (part II) thus gives meaning to it, in the operation of *transfiguration* (part III). And so the resurrection changes everything, even the structure of discourse, above all when it is considered from a philosophical point of view.

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The era of great philosophical systems has of course come to an end, if not with Husserl and Nietzsche at least since Heidegger and numerous contemporary French phenomenologists (M. Henry, E. Levinas, J.-L. Nancy, H. Maldiney). “There when the world becomes *conceptualized image* [*Bild*], systems exercise their domination, and not only in the intellectual world.”²⁰ But the act of systemization persists nonetheless in an influential fashion in contemporary theology, probably under the fertile influence of a type of Hegelian thought. Without entering into any sterile academic disputes, I should like to suggest, with some assurance, that the French method of practicing philosophy, and in particular phenomenology, can also find its place in theology. Only thus can we engender a new way of reading Gospel texts that is not solely restricted to their hermeneutic but that opens up on a *descriptive* and *phenomenological* experience. This is a practice that still awaits, if not its guidelines, at least its full deployment.²¹

Précis of Finitude

Dread of limitation is dread of existence.

—Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*

To propose a “*précis of finitude*” is not to serve up a new summary in the guise of a compendium of philosophy, as though one were furnishing the results for theology and insisting that it renew itself on that basis. It is rather to propose that the contemporary theologian, like the philosopher, needs to take finitude as the first given. Finitude doesn’t summarize a doctrine, but simply sums up the most ordinary existence of all human beings, including that of the Son of God, who was exactly “made man” (*et homo factus est*).¹ One couldn’t in fact hypothesize any further than this, faced with the humanity of a divinity of which (or of whom) at first sight we have no experience. As I have emphasized above (§ 3), the world as the “blocked horizon of our existence” belongs in the first place to our particular mode of being. Finitude [*Endlichkeit*], “the impassable limit of our life,” means that life is completely dominated by care [*Sorge*], and it makes of our Being-there [*Dasein*] a simple “between,” caught between birth and death.² And thought in general has no other option but compliance with this most basic given, at the risk of unceasingly “lying to itself” with a bad faith that would do it little credit. I know myself and I feel myself to be finite, and not to admit this is a way of beating a retreat in front of an evident “fear of existence.”

If philosophy is “fundamentally atheist,” in that it questions the strictly finite modalities of our Being-there (Heidegger), it is in such a position that the believer also must find himself or herself, with the proviso that one accepts, at least from a heuristic point of view, that we come to pic-

ture for ourselves first of all simply the incarnation of a man rather than the image of a God. Kant already foresaw this in his quasi-“Analytic of Finitude,” demonstrating very early on “*the miscarriage of all philosophical trials in matters of theodicy*” where the existence of God is assumed before we have in some way found him. “What else does reason have as a guide for its theoretical conjectures,” Kant states abruptly, “except natural law? For the rest, the philosopher affirms that, whether it is a question of the existence of God, or of the reduction of evil to the level of a first principle, or again of a system of rewards and punishments in the hereafter, these are things that one can very well invoke, but that it is strictly impossible to comprehend.”³

The believer, however, doesn’t just give up. Today, as yesterday, he affirms that his God is “already there” in the world, even though he has no immediate experience of God. The necessity of *understanding* and not simply *admitting* or *invoking*, in contemporary faith even more than in the past, is not a matter of rationalism or fideism, as is often reproachfully suggested to both the philosopher and the believer. Comprehension “is itself the inmost essence of finitude” Heidegger insists, following Kant extremely closely, “insofar as it remains always taken up with finitude.” I do not *understand* the world as “the blocked horizon of my existence” when I try to take some kind of bird’s eye view of it, an endeavor that is as impossible as it is illusory. I remain on the contrary always *taken hold of by*, or *included in* it, as long as I only put it in place starting from my finite Being-there, and consider that it is, properly speaking, impossible to climb out of. The hermeneutic structure of reason thus also becomes its *passion* (in the sense of suffering rather than desire), once it starts considering itself as not only impassable but also insurmountable.⁴

One comes to understand, then, why “modern man” “is possible only as a figure of finitude.” “Our culture crossed the threshold from which we acknowledge our modernity on that day when finitude came to be thought of as an interminable self-reference.”⁵ Impassable immanence as opposed to any supposition of an immediate opening up to transcendence, the avowal of a finite temporality as opposed to its impossible derivation from an eternity of some kind, and the recognition of the *possible depth of man without God*: All these are characteristic features of such a concept of finitude. The believer, like everyone else, will come to question “man, simply man” at the risk of losing—in a supposed aspiration to the divine—what constitutes his shared humanity.

Impassable Immanence

§4. The Immanence in Question

We have no other experience of God but human experience. When I experience God, what sustains me is, at least first of all, God made human. No access opens toward the nonhuman—God, angel, beast, or demon—other than precisely through the human that I am. “We cannot go to other beings without passing through our own being, and we can understand ourselves only by understanding others in ourselves” (Blondel). One might think that all this is well established, in theology at the very least. Some theologians indeed agree today to recognize the “method of immanence” of Maurice Blondel as *the* solution to the problem of the link between the natural and the supernatural: It explains the aspirations of human beings on the one hand and the gift of God on the other. In short, this turn of thought, the object of much misunderstanding in its day, would seem to manifest the “moral courage” of those who look for a “golden mean” between partisans of what we might call “immanent-ism” and the champions of what we might call, on the other hand, “extrinsic-ism.” Blondel’s idea of a supernatural “as indispensable as it is inaccessible to human beings” seemed at one time to solve a problem that would henceforth be taken as closed in theology.¹

What appeared to be intrinsically correct from a didactic point of view (that human beings were created by God and are naturally open to God) is, however, not satisfactory to us from a heuristic point of view (which

would emphasize our experience of the closure of the world and of our own existence). I experience my finitude *in the first place*, even though this may not be the priority of him who first set me here—namely, God himself. Without accepting for a moment the hypothesis of a “nature without grace” (Baius), or of “pure nature” (Cajetan), we can understand that the experience of grace or openness to God is not given *first* (part I of my argument) but only *afterward* (part III). That is to say, it is *mediated* in and through the resurrection in Christ, who holds in him all creation, including us (part II). Although it is absolutely *invalid from a dogmatic point of view*, insofar as it rejects a divine creation, the conjecture of a “pure nature” retains here nonetheless a certain heuristic value. Human beings were not created without grace, but all the same we find ourselves first in nature (or better in finitude)—that is to say, independent of the evidence that will be the revelation of God. In this respect we return to our own humanity along with all of those of our contemporaries who are capable of living authentically without God (§5).²

Contemporary philosophy thus finds, and in the shape of phenomenology in particular, what Catholic theology had thought already settled. The French philosopher Dominique Janicaud asks, “Is there anything that has so decisively distinguished French phenomenology for the past thirty years, since it was first introduced by Husserl and Heidegger, as its *rupture with the phenomenism of immanence*?”³ After the interval of a century it seems that the debate over immanence deserves to be reopened today, not starting from Spinozism and immanent-ism this time (Léon Brunschvicg and Émile Boutroux) but sticking resolutely within the horizon of finitude and the impossibility of going beyond it (see Heidegger). In his time (November 1893), Léon Brunschvicg warned, “Modern rationalism has been led by the analysis of thought to take the *notion of immanence* as the basis and the very condition of all philosophical doctrines.”⁴ A “concealed postulate” operates in the writings of the young Blondel, according to his colleague Émile Boutroux, and works, albeit surreptitiously and more or less shiftily, through the entire philosophy of *L’Action* and thus through much contemporary phenomenology and theology: “The desire of the infinite: Isn’t that the starting point and the principle motive of all your research? And with the infinite in hand, it’s hardly surprising, is it, that you would clear up all the contradictions of the finite?”⁵

§5. The Preemption of the Infinite

The preemptive right of the infinite over the finite in Cartesian thought seems to have been carried over, like a preferential right gained long ago,

into a large part of contemporary phenomenology (from Emmanuel Levinas to Jean-Luc Marion or Michel Henry) as well as into theology (from Maurice Blondel to Karl Rahner or Hans Urs von Balthasar): “In some way I possess the perception (notion) of the infinite *before* that of the finite, that is, the perception of God before that of myself.”⁶ It is not my purpose to call into question or to oppose what is one of the great strengths of the Catholic tradition: the permanence of the supernatural at the heart of the natural, or the “deformation” rather than the “destruction” of the image of God in mankind after the Fall.⁷ But what counts here, as I have already tried to show (§3), is priority, or rather the *access* of human beings to God, starting from our existences simply as *man or woman*—not knowing or experiencing when all is said or done any more than that, at least first of all. Let us agree that human beings were created in the image and likeness of God. And let us agree that we still carry in us the evidence of that creation like “the mark of the workman impressed on his work”—why not?⁸ But what cannot go without question today is the assumption that our dissatisfaction, or our predisposition toward happiness, is such that human beings have no other “way of being” than for us to open ourselves to God (who becomes thus *necessary*) or that God has no other way than to give himself to human beings (showing himself in the process as *inaccessible*).⁹

In a Christian way of doing philosophy, we too often confuse a “plane of immanence” with the “concept of immanence,” as though the *horizon of finitude* had always to be referred “to” other things, or to a somewhere else that did not allow it any longer to be presented as what it is. Finitude as an access to the Christian path of human beings, though not as the last word concerning that path, demands rather that we have the courage to loiter with all those who are our contemporaries, within the blocked horizon that comes from the simple fact of existing. “*Religious authority*,” Gilles Deleuze complains, talking of Christian theology, “wants immanence to be acceptable only locally or at an intermediary level. It is to be like a *fountain cascading from level to level*, where the water is briefly immanent at each level, but only on condition that it comes from a higher spring and will ineluctably descend lower down.”¹⁰

The fusion, or rather the confusion, of finitude and the finite—found in philosophy and more or less inescapable in theology—probably explains a constant drift from the territory of what is actually transcendence into immanence. Heidegger, forever rereading Kant, hammered at this problem in a way that has been important to me. He says, “It is not enough to cite randomly certain human imperfections to define the *finitude* of mankind . . . this path can only lead us at best to note that man is a *finite* Being.”¹¹ In short, to continue speaking of man being “finite” as a delimitation, a

parceling off, a striving toward an inclusive “Infinite,” in the manner of a Descartes, a Blondel or a Levinas, does not lead to finitude as such, far from it. And it is not sufficient to brandish “the positive infinity of the spirit” against the “defective mathematic infinity” (the indefinite) or the “negativity of the finite” (immediacy), in the hope of stepping over these last two. Only the *positiveness of finitude*, understood as realized within temporality by the future (death), and independent of all considerations of the finite (the insufficiency of man), or of the infinite (the plenitude of God), can tell us what there is of the Being-there of man (*Dasein*)—man described as one whose “future itself is closed” and who exists in his “ownmost nullity.”¹²

One point, however, holds and retains its Christian specificity—at least in the most elementary gift of revelation: The first words of Christianity (the impassable horizon of the finitude of man, or of his Being-there) are not its final word (the transfiguration through Christ of this same finitude). When humankind really can content itself with the blocked prospect of its own existence and simply with its own humanity, and when people can possess precisely that just and worthy faculty to “experience [their] proper being and the possibility of nonbeing without coming to speak of God” (Jüngel), then the Son of Man is not likely to satisfy them. But if the Son of Man can be recognized as far as his appearance is concerned—or, better, as far as his behavior (*schmāti*) is concerned—as a *human being*, he is nonetheless also revealed to us as Son of God who “became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (Ph 2:8). That is to say, he followed (but not exclusively) the most common law of his own corporal perishability. “Even more than necessary” (Jüngel), or in accord with a Desire that “never satiates but simply makes hungry” (Levinas), the Word incarnate revealed in the resurrection, and exclusively in it, that there is *more* in mankind than the pure and simple evaluation of himself by himself. It is precisely at this point that neither a Martin Heidegger, nor a Michel Foucault, nor a Gilles Deleuze would be able to follow us.¹³

The return to, or rather the securing in place, of an *impassable immanence* does not then signify a refusal of transcendence, far from it; it only implies that we must think of both the one and the other differently, think of them better, in the way that phenomenology has today revised these concepts: Immanence must be understood as “strictly confined within the bounds of internal *experience*” (Husserl), and transcendence as an “openness [horizontal] of subjectivity” and no longer as a “relation [vertical] of a subject to an object” which is exterior to it (Heidegger).¹⁴ The debate over immanence is thus far from closed in theology, starting in effect from the renewal of these notions in philosophy. And, at least in the first place, it

would probably be wrong to accuse whoever holds to the pure and simple given of *our* existence *as human* of sin (that is, to accuse someone of the breaking of a pact hypothetically settled beyond what is existentially lived). If the believer sticks simply to appearances as they appear (immanence), he or she will not run off, or only exceptionally, into the illusions of a discourse of the beyond—a beyond that would have to be quite artificial in that it offered no access to one’s own experience (the supposed infinite never being immediately shared out). Such a beyond would cut one off from the ordinary run of mortals (experiencing the anguish of their Being-there rather than, as might be thought, the naïve joy of self-abandonment). We need then along with Maurice Blondel, and not in opposition to him, to develop the method of immanence further—that is to say, we need to *push it to its limits*, just as one works out a thesis in radicalizing it further.¹⁵

§6. Christian Specificity and the Ordinariness of the Flesh

In holding then to the narrow limits of the phenomenon as it presents itself, one relies either on “a method of description of phenomena that is specific to Christianity” (Jean-Luc Marion), or else on ordinary life and the common fleshly humanity of the Son of God (our perspective here). In reality these two paths are far from contradictory: They complement one another. One of them (that of Marion) treats the incarnation, the resurrection, or the adoration of the Eucharist as “exemplary” expressions of a “saturated” phenomenon. The other (ours here) sticks strictly to the ordinariness of the daily life of him who not only joined human beings *like us* but also “*truly became one of us*” (*Gaudium et Spes*). The “banalization of Christ who comes in the shape of an ordinary man” is not then to be immediately “*overridden* by using it as a counterpoint to underline by contrast the extraordinary character of his acts and his conduct” (Michel Henry). What makes Christianity is not solely the *extraordinary* in Christ’s revelation of his glory (which would be an excess of the divine and a deification of the human): It is also and indeed primarily the sharing by the Word incarnate of our most ordinary human condition independently of sin (that is, human finitude and the humanization of the divine). St. Augustine, recalling the advice of his mother, Monica, says she did not say “There where *He is himself*, you are yourself also [*ubi ille, ibi et tu*]” but rather “*There where you are yourself*, He is himself also [*sed: ubi tu, ibi et ille*].”¹⁶

A recall to immanence. As a general beats a retreat without giving up the game entirely, trying to hold his troops within frontiers that can’t be crossed, so there echoes through the philosophical camp and there sounds out on the eardrums of theology the drumbeat of “problems of facticity—

the most radical phenomenology, which starts from below in an authentic sense.”¹⁷ Phenomenology and theology done “from above”—if one goes along with this rather spatializing terminology—will not be convincing without passing first by way of a phenomenology done from below. It was appropriate for Nicodemus, as we have seen (§2), to live and to understand what was meant by being born *from below*, before grasping the meaning of being *reborn from above* (see John 3:1–13). Phenomenology then also needs, if it is to avoid a “rather suspect theological turn,” to “forbid itself any speculation on the preexistence of the Word, on the link between *kenosis* and incarnation, on speaking in tongues, on the hypostatic union, and other questions of this kind.”¹⁸ This is a radical proposition and needs to be taken seriously—not out of respect for some version of Heidegger’s thought (and why worry if it is early or late Heidegger as long as it gives us food for thought today?) but in virtue of the great fundamental given of Christianity: *the Word made flesh*. It is like the disciples on the road to Emmaus seen at two moments that do not represent a contradiction (Luke 24:31–32). No doubt the disciples had “hearts burning” as they went on their way without recognizing Christ except as an ordinary man (phenomenology from below, or the ordinariness of the flesh): But also, as Marion points out, they could recognize Christ as *extra-ordinary* at the breaking of the bread, after which he “vanished from their sight” (phenomenology from above, or saturation of the phenomenon).¹⁹ In short, the *dionysiac route* of the “unthinkable eminence” at a distance that separates and preserves it from the idol can be counterbalanced by the *path of Bonaventure*, of a “god of supreme knowability” in a closeness between man and God, a closeness that is typically Franciscan. There are then two types of “phenomenality,” not in opposition or in conflict but starting off in very different ways: the saturation of divine revelation on the one hand and the ordinariness of the human given on the other. But they come together in agreement over the light of the resurrected. It is given to the former in the splendor of the divine (Denys) and is deciphered by the latter in terms of the poverty of the human: “The profundity of God made man, that is to say, the humility, which is so great that reason fails before it” (Bonaventure).²⁰

Toward a Metamorphosis

Something strange is happening—there is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep . . . God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has *raised up all who have slept* ever since the world began. He took [Adam] by the hand and raised him up, saying, “*Awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.*”

—Ancient Homily for Holy Saturday
(anonymous) in *the Liturgy of the Hours*

Our *précis of finitude*, seen not so much as the condensation of a doctrine but as of existence itself, has enabled us to arrive at three objectives. (1) Immanence remains impassable for all, including Christians. These latter, requiring first from all methods (of immanence) that they are taken to their limit (§4), and then rejecting any preemption of the infinite over the finite, insist finally that we accede to the imperatives of a phenomenology, or a theology “from below” (§6). (2) Taking this route, which is that of the ordinariness of the flesh as opposed to a phenomenology of the extraordinary, requires us then to pass *from time to time* and no longer derive time from a supposed eternity (§7). It requires us to recognize on the other hand that, theologically, there is no creation other than the creation anew (resurrection [§8]). And we need to avow finally that the burden of time is such for us that our temporality is primarily a question of the future—whatever that might imply for us in respect of sin (§9). (3) This two-pronged enquiry into immanence and temporality therefore necessitates a return to what we have referred to as the *drama of atheist humanism*. The *death of Christianity* proclaimed by Nietzsche (“God remains dead”), rather than that of God himself (“God is dead”), bypasses any vision in the form of a “drama” once we stop viewing all *non-theism* as an *a-theism* or *anti-theism*, and once we accept the need for a common grammar and the possibility of love without faith (§10). Rejoining our contemporaries on the basis of our common humanity means considering the implications, as an *a priori of existence*, of atheism, or of the hypothesis of humanity “without God in the

world” (Eph 2:12). We shall refuse nonetheless to allow the “why” of the philosopher or atheist, to prohibit a “why” from the theologian or believer. This follows from the fact that neither the one nor the other (neither atheist nor Christian), at least in the first place and from a heuristic viewpoint, can make the arbitrary position of a God-creator, and the aspirations of human beings with respect to him, into the norm of all true existence. Believers, above all because they partake of humanity and because they see themselves within mankind before professing their faith, do have right of access to “the widest” and “most profound,” that “most originary” of questions: “Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?” One can see here, and it is not simply wordplay, that the summary, or *précis*, of finitude is as precise, as exactly poised as the precision of the watchmaker who coils a watch spring: The spring on one side (*finitude* as immanence and finite temporality) is counterbalance to the strength and force on the other (resurrection as *metamorphosis* of the structure of world and time).

We must not, however, fool ourselves, and this is essential in what follows in this book as throughout all my argument: “Metamorphosis” is not a kind of guarantee of “finitude.” It is not like the *praeambula fidei* of Thomas Aquinas which prepares us for the faith.¹ We must try to avoid an approach that emphasizes a purely intrinsic structure of continuity, like the method of immanence, which *brings things to a conclusion*, or *restores* them as they were before, without truly transforming anything. And at the same time we must avoid a completely extrinsic approach that sees a *Deus ex machina* (as we shall see, the method of Barth or Bultmann), where God is so exterior to the event that there is little or no reason for the *why* of the transformation. We are concerned here again with metamorphosis as a birth, applied *analogically* to rebirth (see the dialogue with Nicodemus); but there is a new perspective this time: “The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is *born* of the Spirit” (John 3:8). In other words, metamorphosis, as with birth, and as it will be with resurrection (§28), happens and is seen through its *effects* rather than as an actual moment of transformation. And it is there that we find the breath of the *Spirit*, as also the lived experience of the *flesh*. They are found not in a basic opposition or on different sides of a struggle but in a bringing to light of the *already born*, which springs from our Being-there, almost despite or in ignorance of it: “I do not know who put me into the world,” Pascal says, passing on to us how he is “terribly ignorant,” “nor what the world is, nor what I am myself.”²

Nonetheless, we shall not give up the search. This learned ignorance concerning birth, like ignorance concerning the carrying out of the resur-

rection, is certainly a constitutive part of the act in question. The early Christian painters hesitated to draw Christ “resurrecting,” preferring to show Christ “appearing,” and in this way they went along with “evangelic discretion,” which said nothing of the act of resurrection itself (the exit from the tomb).³ This not-knowing (of what “actually took place”) does not, however, prevent us from probing the *causes* or measuring the *effects*, at least in the judicial sense in which a lawyer *pleads his case* (for the defense) concerning what *has been done* (or accomplished).⁴ Fully carrying out and “pushing to the limit” the *transcendental conditions of an ontology of the Resurrected One* (see part I, “Précis of Finitude”) means also that we have to take on board, both philologically and theologically, techniques that “our age demands” (§11), that is, a *Cur Deus resurrexit?*—in the double sense of causality (why?) and finality (for what?): “Why [for what] is God resurrected?” (part II, “Toward a Metamorphosis”). We need not draw back at the thought of the extent of the task, as long as we understand what it involves at this point. There is no question, as we go forward, of reviving or reactivating the old disputes of a kind of theology of satisfaction, or theology of glorification, although certainly there will be allusions to these disputes here and there in what follows, in particular as we look at the original position of Duns Scotus (glorification), less well known in practice than that of St. Anselm (satisfaction).⁵ Manuals of theology are full of this, and it is not our purpose to add to them here. To go “toward a metamorphosis” is on the contrary simply to recognize that a “resurrection” of this kind takes place, in Christian terms, and not in a Nietzschean super-resurrection (chapter 4). This resurrection “changes everything” in finitude (chapter 5) and incorporates us in the Trinity (chapter 6). At this cost, and only at this cost, the *précis of finitude* (part I) and the need for *metamorphosis* (part II) come together to make up a *phenomenology of the resurrection*. In so doing they justify the validity of a Metamorphosis of Finitude as a paradigm for, and as part of the deep meaning of, the Christian resurrection.

Resurrection and the Over-resurrection of the Body

§13. The Debate with Nietzsche

An appeal to metamorphosis—or to the transformation of the self—is by no means restricted solely to Christianity. In fact it is in the work of the sworn enemy of Christianity, Friedrich Nietzsche, that the dispute over metamorphosis offers the most food for thought, at least in relation to the setting up of arguments on both sides of the debate. If we want to unravel the theme of the resurrection, then, the debate with Nietzsche on the topic that is summoned up here is not just optional: It is probably more arduous and more basic than the debate over the “death of God” (§10). One cannot but be astonished, to say the least, at the *theological swerve* toward the topic of the death of God, which is not that recent (see Vahanian [1962], Robinson [1963], Cox [1965], Hamilton [1966]),¹ and which, moreover, reaches complete deadlock on the topic. Deconstructive Nietzsche is not the key to all his thought. Apart from the Orthodox theologian Nicolas Berdiaev, whose radical intuitions on the topic of the “Overhuman” and “creation” as the “work of man” have not received enough attention, there have been relatively few theologians who have tried to pick up the challenge implied by such topics in Nietzsche’s thought.² However, the *metamorphosis of the young convalescent shepherd* in Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* recalls, in several respects, what we find in the *metamorphosis* or in the *resurrection* of Christ. Zarathustra prophesies: “Far away he spat out the head of the snake—and then sprang up. No longer shepherd, no longer human—one transformed

[metamorphosed], illumined, who *laughed!*³ Peter at Pentecost says, “God raised him up [*amistēmi*], having freed him from death” (Acts 2:24). While Mark says in the episode of the transfiguration, “And he was transfigured [literally metamorphosed—*metamorphō*] before them” (Mark 9:2). And so we find the same, or almost the same (along with, as we shall see, major differences) in the vision of the enigma of Zarathustra, and in the resurrection of Jesus: a standing up and transfiguration of man into Overhuman on the one hand (Nietzsche); a raising up and metamorphosis of man into God on the other (Christianity). The analogy between Nietzsche’s writing and scripture could not be clearer.

Let us say it is there for anyone who looks. And a transcription or, better, a transposition by Nietzsche of the New Testament revelation is neither a question of chance nor accidental. We have only to think of the comparison between St. Paul’s vision on the road to Damascus and the revelation, to Nietzsche on the road to the lake of Silvaplana, of the idea of eternal return (*Ecce Homo*, chapter on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, §1).⁴ Rather than a simple affair of vocabulary or of doctrine, or of fights in philosophy, what is at stake here is the “Christianity” of Christianity—its essence and its credibility: the resurrection itself. The recent statement and argument of the French Nietzsche scholar Didier Franck is directly to the point: “The [Christian] resurrection of the fleshly body in a spiritual body, of the earthly body in a heavenly body, does not do justice to the true power of the body. It is a *false resurrection* or a resurrection to a *false life*. . . . It is by *God’s power of resurrection* that the *power deployed in the eternal return* must be measured.”⁵

How then does the idea of the eternal return offer for our contemporaries an alternative to the above-mentioned Christian resurrection? And what is the real capacity of resistance of the latter (Christian resurrection) in the face of the assaults of the former (the Nietzschean eternal return), other than accusing it simply of being a “drama”? This is the challenge we have to take up, less to attack Nietzscheanism because it has usurped our metamorphosis than to test the mettle of our own Christianity, in particular the Kantian version, against the severity of the blows landed on it. To take up such a challenge is a matter not simply of refusing to flee the question but also of accepting a debate from which both parties will emerge, if not cleansed, at least convinced that the contest was worthwhile. What makes up the triple attack by Nietzsche is an accusation (a) of the passivity of the subject, (b) of the will to go on and on, and (c) of the projected uniformity of the body—all to be found in the Christian version of metamorphosis, and therefore in the resurrection. But:

(a) despite the singular contrast between the discretion of the apparitions of the resurrected Christ (to Mary Magdalene, for example) and the fracas when Nietzsche's young shepherd spits at and conquers the heavy black snake (against the vain temptation of immortality), the business of reviving or "recovering" oneself (*anisthamai*) comes up for one, as it does for the other. The shepherd, like Christ, appears "metamorphosed" (*metamorphō*) or, rather, transfigured. The difference between Nietzsche and St. Paul is not then in metamorphosis as such; metamorphosis is insisted on by the one as much as the other: It is in the *actuality* through which it operates. "You need to learn to stand up *by yourselves*," Nietzsche says, "or you will fall."⁶ The metamorphosis of the shepherd is *active* and not passive, or received from another (the Father); it is "auto-transformation," a victory of *one's own will* over death. It does not celebrate the resignation and what is, all things considered, apathy toward death, the apathy found in stoicism, but it raises the *ego* to the highest degree of its "all-powerfulness" and its mastery over the self (heroism). Allowing that you are to some degree capable of "living in such a way that you must desire to revive," Nietzsche rails that you will wish not simply for the return of the events that constituted your life (from "the slow spider that crawls beneath the moon" to "the moonlight itself") but also and above all the "return of yourself" and of your present way of "deciding your life." And so, "when you return one day," the philosopher goes on, "it will not be to lead a new life, but to lead *the same life*—identical with what *you decide* upon now, in the smallest as in the greatest of things."⁷ It depends less, according to Nietzsche—in this respect disparaging what we know as the Christian resurrection—on the prospect of a new life, better or equal to the present one, than on the desire for a *return of the will itself* and of the body of decisions that constituted it. It depends on the force that makes my life rather than on the simple events that make it up. "I shall return to life eternally, not to another life, but to *this same life* and this same world and at the moment *I decide*, and this *eternal resurrection shall be my way of life*." It suits him thus to oppose the Christian dogma of the resurrection of the body (§15), with its "will to powerlessness" and inability to "*stand up by oneself*," to his Nietzschean eternal return, seen as what "permits the Overhuman to *act for himself, to get up and to rise up*, to return to life actively and not to be resuscitated *passively*." The Nietzschean raising up in the law of the eternal return must therefore be seen as an *over-resurrection*—that is to say, "resurrection of the *self by the self*, resurrection of the body to and by itself."⁸

(b) The accusation of a *will to go on and on*—in other words, of a *flight from the world* by Christian resurrection—carries on the auto-affirmation

of the subject that is part of Nietzsche's over-resurrection. According to Nietzsche, the same will to believe and a quest for the stable are what innervate Christianity and Judaism as well as the whole of the philosophical tradition: "Life is based on the presupposition of a belief in something *lasting*—the resort to logic, rationalisation, systemization as auxiliaries of life." What is true of Descartes, the *cogito* as "something already constant," applies first of all to the prophet Isaiah in Judaism ("If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all" [Isa 7:9]). And it applies to St. Paul in Christianity ("You stand only through faith" [Rom 11:20]). In other words, and in the terms of the evangelist Matthew this time (Mt 7:24), the disciple who "built his house on rock" in reality showed himself unable to tolerate the sand, only organizing a *cosmos* out of fear and flight from *chaos*. "The necessity of the formation of the flock lies in fear," Nietzsche maintains, and, "from its Jewish character, Christianity gave Europeans this Jewish sickness that turns inward toward itself, the idea that interior anxiety is the human norm."⁹

Nietzsche's courageous idea of the *will to return*, contrary to a popular, but false, interpretation, refuses to perpetuate such a *desire to go on and on*. Rather he returns to the dogma of the resurrection of *bodies*, precisely because he cannot accept the idea of the destruction, or putrefaction, of all fleshly matter, of the making eternal of a temporality that dies because it is not eternal, of the giving a chance to the earthly or material body by transforming it into a celestial or spiritual body (1 Cor 15, 44). He insists that "to transfer the purport of life outside life is to take away the purport of life." Where the Christian is driven, on the one hand, only by *fear*—in his will to go on and on—and on the other hand by a wish to escape and make an irresistible leap into another world, the Nietzschean Overhuman shows both *courage* in his assumption of perishability and an *attachment to the earth* in his love of the moment as a "unique form of all life."¹⁰ The eternal return has its source in what is the sole imperative for Schopenhauer: "the present" as "the form of life or reality"; it has its source in his *nunc stans*, or "eternal noon," as the sole form of the manifestation of the will.¹¹

(c) In its apparent opposition to Christianity, the whole business becomes more serious or, rather, weightier. A certain Christian idea of the uniformity of the body, Nietzsche says, must be overcome by a new way of regarding the body, this time less archaic and dated. A debate that was once characteristic of Platonism, as of a certain tendency in Christianity, and that maintained the "immortality of the soul" in contrast to the "destruction or degradation of the body" (soul-body), shifts now to a contrast between a *certain type of corporality* that is opposed to *another type of corporality*: active corporality (Nietzsche) versus passive corporality

(St. Paul). In other words, in the shift, which the Nietzschean dialogue permits us, from surpassing metaphysics (Heidegger) to the overcoming of Christianity (Franck), the debate has all at once centered on a face-to-face (or *body-to-body*) confrontation. It is a body-to-body confrontation that Christianity would be wrong to ignore, in focusing solely on its rejection of immortality—as though simply criticizing the perpetuation of the soul could rescue the notion of the resurrection of the body. Nobody doubts that the resurrected body in Christianity is different from the immortal soul in Platonism. It has become trivial nowadays to affirm this.¹² But what Christianity has not faced up to, and what it must envisage facing up to, if only to oppose the notion, is that the mode of corporality conferred by resurrection may be no less than a new “metaphysical interpretation” founded, (1) on the one hand, on a *naturalization* and *substantification* of the body, and (2), on the other hand, on a *making uniform* and an *integration* of all bodies into one sole body.

(1) The naturalization and substantification of the body in St. Paul derives, according to Nietzsche, from two arguments. First, the metaphor of the seed used by the apostle to explain the resurrection of the body: “Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies” (1 Cor 15:35). This classically conserves the notion of corporality as permanence by virtue of its being the “substratum” and makes death nothing but a “passage.” For the dead to regain life there has to be something that *remains*, be it by burying (the seed), that will spring up. And for a metamorphosis to take place, it is also agreed that the time limit can’t be the end of the world but just the moment of *the negation of a new affirmation*, which guarantees it dialectically an *assumption* and a *passage*. We can recognize here Hegel’s famous dialectical scheme that ensures, or almost always ensures, “theological” understanding of the resurrection—and of which one is unsure sometimes whether it actually derives from the paradigm of germination in St. Paul or just applies in this case. A second argument springs from the previous one, but this time, rather than in dialectical mode, it is purely oppositional and nihilistic. The notion of the “glorious body” is, according to Nietzsche and his commentator Didier Franck, nothing but the negation of the “fleshly body.” That of the “future eternal life” is the negation of the “fleshly life of the present”: “What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable” (1 Cor 15:42). The “god” that Paul creates is thus the “negation of god” for Nietzsche in a conception that this time is not Hegelian but negative—*Deus, qualem Paulus creavit, dei negatio*. And the Christian dogma

of the resurrection of the body paradoxically has no other end in his view but the “dis-incorporation” of all bodies. In short, the body remains (would remain) always at the level of a substratum for St. Paul, who, “having perhaps learned his Greek too well,” was not able to give metamorphosis its true sense of being “over-resurrectional.”¹³

(2) As to the making uniform of all bodies into one sole body, Paul affirms that “there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). To affirm this with him will thus be the same as incorporating the “self of the believer” in “another than himself,” in the form of a unity of “equal members.” It will be to lose oneself in a single will of *equalization* and *uniformity*, although they are what, in the affirmative power of *constructed hierarchies* and *intensification*, make up what is singularly human in each body: racial difference (Jew–Greek), political difference (slave–freeman), sexual difference (man–woman). As we shall see later (§15), to accept, as the Christian system maintains, that one does not resurrect oneself by oneself leads (must lead) to giving up on oneself as subject, as well as to giving up on the power of mastery over one’s own body. And that is supposedly done by resigning one’s power in a cowardly way to another, who progressively dissolves away our energetic impulses.¹⁴ Having reduced and assimilated all the active powers of their corporality into a single passive corporality, believers will (must) renounce their own powers at the same time as they renounce their difference: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ” (1 Cor 12:12). Such a formula consecrates (would consecrate) the loss and the fusion of the great self of the body into the single undifferentiated body of the Church, of which Christ only is the head and all believers the submissive members.¹⁵

It will be apparent that the Nietzschean eternal return is not simply content with proposing another model besides that of Christian resurrection. It throws out a *challenge* to it and calls into question the legitimacy of Christian aims as well as the Christian version of metamorphosis: The evident obsolescence of the one (the Christian sense of the resurrection) makes possible and lies behind the novelty of the other (“the eternal return” in the Nietzschean sense of that term). The characteristics that, according to Nietzsche, mark out negatively the features of a resurrected Christian corporality are that (a) the subject barely takes responsibility for himself;

(b) the will to go on and on is an escape from the world; and (c) archaic notions of corporality are found in a renunciation of the self and of one's own distinctive drives. And so, according to my understanding, another reading of corporality in St. Paul is necessary, if not to defy Nietzsche at least to take up his challenge.

§14. Corporality in St. Paul

One would be hard-pressed to find in Nietzsche's writings a harsher critique than the one he directs at Christianity—something that once again calls into question any (false?) strategies that aim to retrieve his philosophy for Christianity (§10). "It is necessary to say here *whom* we feel to be our antithesis," the author of *The Anti-Christ* drums into his readers. And he specifies as his antithesis "the theologians and all that has theologian blood in its veins—our entire philosophy."¹⁶ Paul, "the epileptic" under the false sway of the "Holy Spirit," is incapable of living as a "free spirit" and triumphs or *takes revenge* against the relentless system of atonement in Jewish law, a system under which he is, by his own account, incapable of living and being his real self: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I want is what I do" (Rom 7:19). The resurrected Christ intervenes, then, according to Nietzsche, and appears to the apostle on the road to Damascus, like a *deus ex machina* come to proffer a law that Paul prefers, after all, to *abolish* rather than to *fulfill*. In order not to come to terms with it, the Apostle of the Gentiles, an "exhausted Jew," thus frees himself from himself, as from his own weakness, and as from the race that he cannot stand (neither Jew nor Greek). The corporality of the resurrected Christ, far from heralding a surpassing of the self, leaves its "metamorphosis" at the stage of a kneeling camel ("Thou shalt"), without reaching even that of a roaring lion ("I want") and even less that of the child who "says yes."¹⁷

The force of this attack is unequalled in the literature of thought, and it will be something if we come to understand and confront this particular "drama" without necessarily setting ourselves up in opposition to it (§11). At the threshold of such a confrontation, then, we find the profound sense (and the great merit) of corporality in St. Paul, which needs to be analyzed, and which leads us very precisely along the route of the *distinctively Christian* significance of metamorphosis. As we have seen, St. Paul opens a body-to-body confrontation at the heart of the philosophical and theological debate, "according to the flesh" (*sarx*) and "according to the spirit" (*pneuma*). He does this in a way that is radically distinct from the Greek dualism of body (*soma*) and soul (*psychē*). We need to take account of this

if we are to go ahead in the face of his charges against St. Paul, which we can't put off and thus let drop.¹⁸

(a) The first point in favor of St. Paul's version of corporality is that he makes the resurrection and our relationship with God the site of a close relationship with the "body" (*soma*): "The body is . . . for the Lord, and the Lord for the body," according to the First Letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 6:13). The Letter to the Philippians adds: "Christ will be exalted now as always in my body" (Phil 1:20). The body as "openness to the self" is thus at the same time "openness to God" or, more strictly speaking, "openness to God which, as such, is the openness of the self to the self." We can add Leibniz's words to those of St. Paul himself: "God is *closer to me* than my body is. . . . My body is *my own* because it is the *property* of my God."¹⁹

(b) The second point in favor of the corporal in St. Paul is that "flesh" (*sarx*) and "spirit" (*pneuma*) appear principally as lived modalities of the "body" (*soma*) in the Pauline epistles, just as "stone" and "flesh" are modalities of the "heart" in the prophet Ezekiel: "I will give them one heart. . . . I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh" (Ezek 11:19–20). For those who live "according to the flesh" (*sarx*), by analogy "their god is the belly," Paul insists in addressing the Philippians (Phil 3:19). While those who live according to "the Spirit [*pneuma*]" live according to God (1 Cor 2:11). "The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God" (Rom 8:7). This does not imply that the flesh is in revolt against the Spirit but that it is itself the *rebellion of the body*, which is turned against God and so turned back toward itself. And we "walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit [*pneuma*]" (Rom 8:4). It is not that we must flee the path of the body but that "the Spirit" shows us the way of the body eminently and positively oriented toward that of which we "are the members" (1 Cor 12:12). In distinguishing, then, between the "*physical body*" and "the *spiritual body*" (1 Cor 15:44), St. Paul distinguishes "*two relationships* of man with God, *two ways of being of the body*. The antagonism between the mortal flesh and the living spirit has *the body for its site*."²⁰

(c) The third point in favor of the corporal in St. Paul is that the distinction of different kinds of flesh is made not according to their substance but according to their quality, or their "glory" [*éclat*]. The First Letter to the Corinthians tells us that the "flesh for human beings" is different from the "flesh . . . for animals" or "for birds" or "for fish" (1 Cor 15:40). Their difference is not that of substance (terrestrial or celestial), as we shall see later (§15), but rather of quality or "glory": "There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the *glory* of the heavenly is one thing, and *that* of the earthly is another. There is one *glory* of the sun, and another of the

moon, and another *glory* of the stars; indeed, star differs from star in *glory*” (1 Cor 15:40–41). In short, and contrary to the charge that is sometimes laid against St. Paul,²¹ the body in the resurrection is thought of in terms not of substance or ontology but of “glory” and of different modes—that is to say, phenomenologically. Life and death, then, must be “thought of above all not in the *biological* or *Greek sense* (throughout the Bible) but in relation to the word of God, which places before all men *a choice* of the one or the other. ‘See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity’ (Deut 30, 15).” And in this sense, according to St. Paul, “What you sow does not come to life unless it dies” (1 Cor 15:35). This is said as if to underline that the resurrection only indicates a *new relationship of the human body with the body of God*—Christ “*head* over all things for the church, which *is his body*” (Eph 1:22–23). And so the flesh and the glory are “*corporal qualities* whose changes do not destroy the body. A body can *cease to be flesh* in order to become *in glory* without losing its *being as a body*, and my body can be resurrected different from what it was.”²²

The features that constitute and characterize Pauline anthropology, those on which the Christian dogma of the resurrection of the body is founded, are (a) the body (*soma*) as site of a relation with and openness to God, (b) the flesh (*sarx*) and the spirit (*pneuma*) as modalities of the body (*soma*), and (c) the distinction between the kinds of “flesh” (*sarx*) according to the quality of their glory rather than according to their substance. And it is from these features also, I believe, that we can arrive at a possible conceptualization in terms of the metamorphosis of finitude. So we may conclude, according to the famous but rarely expressed tripartite formulation of Paul, that “your spirit [*pneuma*] and soul [*psychē*] and body [*soma*] may be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 5:23).

It is apparent at least that the spirit (*pneuma*) here remains a modality of the body (*soma*) while at the same time, and exceptionally this time for a quasi-Greek model, it indicates a modality of the soul (*psychē*). After all, the number and quality of the quantifications of “body–flesh–spirit” or “spirit–flesh–body” are not important here. The essential feature of the Pauline system is that the flesh (*sarx*) always appears as a *manner of being* (admittedly negative or turned away from God) of the body (*soma*). And this *manner of being* does not condemn the body (*soma*), which for this reason also is identified with Christ, who is the Church.

As for the *resurrection of the body*, then, we can return to a hypothesis that is modern but nonetheless rooted in the Pauline analysis (§29), to say that it is less its substance as such that concerns us than the *modalities of*

its being, or of its movements (Husserl), according to how they are turned toward others (following the spirit) or turned in on the self (following the flesh). Christ resurrected and appearing to his disciples is recognized by them less through his fleshly structure (which is hardly recognizable or even unrecognizable, since it is not recognized by everyone immediately, and not in the same way). He is recognized through lived experience, or the *manner of being* of his body, which is quasi-familiar to them: “Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’ Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ because they knew it was the Lord” (John 21:12). In the same way and, as we shall see, in an analogical fashion (§29), it is through the manner in which I experience my body today that I shall be able to recognize the manner in which tomorrow it will live in God, because that is what constitutes it today (the flesh [*Leib*], in Husserl), and that is also what will constitute it tomorrow (*resurrection of the flesh* without which the symmetry of the philosophical [*Leib*] to the theological [*the flesh resurrected*] would be simply fortuitous). Giving us “flesh” (*sarx*) as “true food” (John 6:55), God gives us at the same time his *manner of being through his body*, something that believers proclaim themselves able to share, welcoming divinely the fleshly mode of the being of God in his metamorphosis or resurrection (chapter 9).

Neither John nor Paul, nor any apostle or evangelist, has then *denigrated* the body. They see it rather as the *fleshly mode* of God. Only a false Neoplatonic reading of the New Testament has led to the mistaken belief of a disparagement of the flesh in the Christian system: “If there had been no *resurrection of the flesh*,” the theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar underlines, “gnosticism would be correct, along with other forms of idealism such as those of Schopenhauer and Hegel, according to which the finite must actually perish to become spiritual and infinite. But the *resurrection* makes sense of what poets say in a definitive way. The *aesthetic schema* that allows us to grasp the infinite in the figure of the finite—seen, understood, seized upon spiritually or whatever—is the truth. That is why we have to choose between myth and revelation.”²³

§15. A Phenomenal Body-to-Body Confrontation

The *positive characteristics of corporality for St. Paul* (the body as connection to God, the body and spirit as modality of the body, and the distinction of different kinds of flesh according to their quality of “glory” [§14]) will serve, then, as a main theme in refuting, or rather in questioning, the limits of Christian metamorphosis according to Nietzsche (which include passivity of the subject, the will to go on and on, and the projected uni-

formity and substantification of the body [§13]). A veritable “phenomenal” body-to-body confrontation takes place between St. Paul and Nietzsche, not so much to extract the soul from the body and thus make it abstract (immortality) as to consecrate a *certain Christian type of resurrected bodiliness*—according to the spirit (*pneuma*) or in the way of openness to God—and thus to make that resurrected bodiliness incarnate here.

(a) Certainly one cannot hold to the idea of an “auto-resurrection” or “over-resurrection” of the self in Christianity. As opposed to the heroism and activism of the philosophical subject claimed by Nietzsche, the Gospels maintain clearly a quasi-defeat and passivity of the believing subject, incapable of raising himself by himself. But what is true for human beings in our relationship with God is also true in exemplary form of the relationship of the Son with the Father. I have tried to show, in *Le Passeur de Gethsémani*, the triviality of the proposition according to which “nobody resurrects himself” [“God raised him up” (Acts 2:24)]. It derives not only from our recognition of the immanence of a difference, or alterity, as the basis of all identity but also from our humble and necessary acknowledgment of the annihilation of the self in corruptible flesh. It is annihilation also for God in his quality as Son of Man. And it is an annihilation that takes place to the extent that an *other* (his Father) takes on, for his Son first of all, and for the whole of creation with him, the decision to bring about a raising up or recapitulation.²⁴ Nietzsche’s argument against St. Paul, which takes Paul to task for one of the characteristics of Pauline corporality, then rebounds against Nietzsche himself. In demanding a raising up of the self by the self, the philosopher envisages here the modality of the “body” according to Paul’s notion of the “flesh.” He makes the *in-curving* of the self in its own self-overcoming (*sarx*) the site of a renunciation of any appeal to *openness* to the other—to any such appeal that might lead to escape of the self (*pneuma*). But the spirit in Christianity (*pneuma*), as the “connection” of our bodies (*soma*) to God, finds in the order of the *resurrection* what Thomas Aquinas already affirmed of the *creation*: “Creation places something in the thing created according to relation only [*secundum relationem tantum*].”²⁵ As we have seen already (§7), creation is a *new creation* only as far as the resurrection, as a *relationship lived in our own corporality with the resurrected God*, gives us “faith” in creation as an *originary relationship*. It is something of which we do not in the first place have any experience—except precisely in and by this metamorphosis (of resurrection) performed in us through God.

(b) The will to go on and on, as a “wish for belief and wish for stability” is not, as I have tried to show (§13b), solely a prerogative of Christianity (as in the “man who built his house on rock” [Mt 7:24]). It is found in

Western philosophy in general (in the concept of substance or *cogito*, for example), and not least in Judaism (“If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all” [Isa 7:9]). What is particularly characteristic of “Christian flight,” however, according to Nietzsche (and in this he has understood Christianity better than a good number of our contemporaries, including many Christians), is not simply the desire to escape. That is a mistaken accusation that draws falsely on instances such as that of St. Theresa of Avila, or St. John of the Cross, and on statements like St. Theresa’s: “Life on earth is a continual bereavement: The true life is only in heaven. Allow me, my God, to live there.”²⁶ Christian flight, more commonly, is true to the body-to-body struggle instituted by Nietzsche against St. Paul. It consists less in a flight of the spiritual from the material (Plato) than in a dogma of resurrection that does not accept the destruction or putrefaction of the flesh (giving an opportunity and a spiritual body to the earthly or material body [see 1 Cor 15:44]). The *escape from the tomb* has for too long in Christianity been taken as *the raising of a biological body* (something we see represented in Gothic sculpture and, on the other hand, something that explains much contemporary silence about resurrection of the body). According to Nietzsche, this Christian view comes down to denying or refusing to accept the familiar law of entropy, which applies to all living things. Plato himself could not deny the evidence (putrefaction of the body/immortality of the soul). And this is unlike the interpretation in St. John’s Gospel (nonputrefaction, or reconstitution, of the body itself): “Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God. . . . Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all *who are in their graves* will hear his voice and *will come out*—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life” (John 5:25–29). The accusation of “flight,” which seemed easy to block, by the simple rejection of Platonism in the Christian affirmation of the body (no escape into the spiritual outside the bodily), shows itself here to be weightier, even implacable. A refusal of a flight into the spiritual by an authentic Christian would not witness an attachment to the bodily but rather a nonassumption of *biological corporality*—a wish to be transformed without either letting oneself be putrefied or losing sight of the body. One wonders how this can be done—I can only say for the moment that what follows in this essay attempts to give an answer to the problem (§30). Does it really make obsolete any perspective on the raising of the body if we invoke evidence of human putrefaction? Without a veritable distinction at the heart of corporality (between the organic body [*Körper*] and the body of lived experience [*Leib*]), the Christian today does not know what to say about the resurrection of the body (or the flesh). But what revives of me,

as I have said above (§14), and as I shall discuss further (§29), is not my biological or organic body but the *manner* that I have of living through this same body. In short, the body that is most truly my own, but that is the property of God more than myself (§14), is what God resurrects at the heart of my inner self. And so one cannot be satisfied with a purely biological interpretation of the body in Christianity. The “dead body” that appears from the tomb is, according to John, not so much our mortal and cadaverous *body* as our *flesh*, which allows our being either to be attentively connected, or to be deaf, to the “voice” of the Son of God (§30).

(c) The accusation against St. Paul, and thus against Christianity in general, of the making into a substance or *substantification* of the body founders probably of its own accord, or at least in light of the third trait of the corporal that we have brought out: the difference in quality or glory of the body. Paul was far from proposing a reification of the body: The apostle to the Gentiles wrote in a way that is truly distinctive of a whole Greek tradition that he had certainly learned (and we should not say here “learned too well”).²⁷ In his writings a veritable *phenomenality of the flesh resuscitated* is brought into play.

We need to separate this out through a close reading, which is at once complex and difficult, of the First Letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 15), in order to speak of *our* “condition as resurrected.” Everything starts with a configuration of *alterity*, of which a distinction among the kinds of flesh (*sarx*), rather than among bodies (*soma*), makes the specificity apparent: “Not all flesh is alike,” certainly, but also “there is one flesh for human beings, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish” (1 Cor 15:39). Moreover, the positive alterity of the kinds of flesh (*sarx*) is then coupled with the difference of bodies (*soma*). “There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies” (1 Cor 15:40). This implies that only the living animal can call itself fleshly (*sarx*), in that it comes to terms at least with certain movements and lived experiences of its own body (of human beings, of cattle, of birds, or of fish). The letter adds immediately: “But the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; indeed star differs from star in its glory” (1 Cor 15:40–41). To put it in another way: The *difference of bodies* (heavenly and earthly) is coupled this time with an *otherness of “glory”* in their phenomenal intensity (the glory of the sun, the moon, the stars, and the stars among themselves). This otherness (of glory) is found in earthly and heavenly bodies (“the glory of the heavenly [bodies] is one thing, and that of the earthly is another”), even though that of the heavens above (the sun, the moon, the stars) appears to serve as a paradigm for that of the earthly (earth, mud, or silt). In

short, a close reading of the text of St. Paul does not deny the *earthly body* a phenomenal corporality but rather gives it a model in heavenly bodies. The otherness of the kinds of flesh (human beings, cattle, birds, fish) is not touched by any kind of phenomenality (or glory) except to the extent that the flesh of mankind itself—and solely that of mankind—unlike animal flesh (cattle, birds, fishes), is given the attribute of the glory of bodies (earthly and heavenly). The flesh of human beings thus phenomenalizes a light that, if it does not come from the body itself (as it does in the case of the heavenly bodies), shines nonetheless (*phainomenon*) by the body and through the body. “So it is (*autōs kai*) with the resurrection of the dead.” (1 Cor 15:42)—Paul explicitly describes *human beings* here by analogy with heavenly bodies but as remaining nonetheless earthly.

A reading of the resurrection of the dead thus emerges from the Pauline corpus that is neither solely Hegelian (dialectical) nor nihilist (of pure negation) but is phenomenological (or “phenomenal”). In this reading, the *glory of the body* alone is what makes the resurrected being. To say, in effect, that it is “thus” for the resurrection of the dead is not simply to use the metaphor of the seed or the sower, as though it contained in it, and only in it, what there is in the resurrection (1 Cor 15:42–44); it is, rather, to take up again what was said about the glory of the heavenly bodies (sun, moon, stars), to apply it this time to what is par excellence an earthly body (the mortal body). But it is to do this within the differentiation of different flesh that now properly defines it: *mortal* pointing here to human beings and not to cattle, birds, or fish (1 Cor 15:39–41). In short—and we need to understand this so as not to add to the complexity of a passage that is often left out of discussions exactly because it is complex—the current emphasis on historicizing the metaphor of the seed in accounts of the resurrection should not allow us to forget that it is as much, if not even more so, the *phenomenological glory* of the resurrected body that constitutes it. Moreover, the medievals who attributed to the resurrected body not only the characteristic of incorruptibility (*incorruptibilitas*) but also that of clarity (*claritas*), subtlety (*subtilitas*), impassibility [that is, incapacity for suffering, not subject to pain] (*impassibilitas*), and agility (*agilitas*) had the right idea.²⁸

The body-to-body confrontation of St. Paul and Nietzsche thus appears to be properly *phenomenal*, this time in the etymological sense of the term (*phainomenon*), insofar as the resurrection implies a metamorphosis of transfiguration (glory) and not solely one of “transformation” (the seed). The fleshly battle of giants between Nietzsche and St. Paul, opposing one type of corporality with another, shifts, then, in my view, to the advantage of the apostle. It is he of the two (and Christianity with him) who makes

the body—fleshly (*sarx*) or spiritual (*pneuma*)—the actual site of *phenomenality*, and not unilaterally that of strength or impulse. Irenaeus tells us that “the *light* of the Father burst into the *flesh* of our Lord. Then *in shining from his flesh*, it came into us, and so man acceded to incorruptibility, *enveloped* as he was by this light of the Father.”²⁹ Let us hope that our flesh, like all flesh, be found worth to convey *him* (the Resurrected One)—to show him as himself to himself first of all, and let us hope for us to carry on, ourselves hidden.

Phenomenology of the Resurrection

Corps mort *et qui seront jugés!*

(Bodies that are dead *and will be judged!*)

—A. Rimbaud, *Une Saison en enfer*

Cur Deus resurrexit? Why is God resurrected? Or better, why does the Father transfigure our finitude in his Son, who carries it within him? We have already sketched a reply to this question, as far as is possible: (a) The Son *suffers* the burden of death “quite simply,” and forwards it to the Father without ever breaking his filial relation, even when his feeling of being abandoned is at its strongest (see *Le Passeur de Gethsémani*). (b) The Father *receives* from the Son this ordeal of our finitude as the closure of the world and of time (chapters 1–2). (c) Fully informed *spiritually* of what our suffering and our death implies in *fleshly* terms (the accomplishment in the Trinity of the apperceptive transposition of the other), the Father makes the decision, through the *power* of the Holy Spirit, to raise his Son, and us in him (chapters 4–5). And so he *transfigures* our relation to the world and to time(s) (chapters 6–7). The Father has always *known* our finitude, as constitutive of our created being (birth, aging, death), but he has not *undergone* it, as long as his Son has not taken it on board and transferred the responsibility to his fatherly being. The incarnation, however—or, better, the resurrection—does not follow creation *chronologically*, except in the temporal deployment of our discourse. On the contrary, *ontologically* the resurrection takes precedence and makes the event of the transformation of the world the keystone of all Christianity and the principle of all new creation (§7). *For God*, in fact, who is constituted originally as *pathos* (Origen), the fleshly ordeal of the Son is always the spiritual ordeal of the Father who transforms, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the structure of

the world as such. But *for us*, having no other experience than that of our finitude, it was appropriate to start by analyzing the triple closure of the world, of time, and of man without God (part I, “Précis of Finitude”). We then went on to describe its transformation in God (part II, “Toward a Metamorphosis”). Finally we come to draw from it phenomenologically the new structure (part III, “Phenomenology of the Resurrection”). Through the *description* of this world transfigured, as is witnessed in the narrative of the Gospels (part III), it is then the whole philosophical structure of the world (part I) that finds itself phenomenologically raised up in the metamorphosis of the Resurrected One (part II). What answers now to “impassable immanence” (chapter 1) is “the world become other” (chapter 7); what answers to the ending of “from time to time” (chapter 2) is now the passage “from time to eternity” (chapter 8). And what answers to the impossible “drama of atheist humanism” (chapter 3) is the necessary, or at least supplementary, hypothesis of a “body for rebirth” with God (chapter 9). And so we shall live, one and all of us, in “bodily anticipation”—less with the expectancy of a soul in search of its own body than in the common construction of a bodily world for human beings with God (conclusion).

A Flesh for Rebirth

The “knowing [*con-naissance*] of God,” rather than the eternal (John 17:3), leads us, then, to ask about our own births—our *spiritual* birth, of course, but also our *bodily* birth. I myself can relate to my own birth today (a) through my consciousness (given my difficulty in being born), and (b) through my body (given the impossibility of my not having been born).

(a) First of all, in my consciousness, and in what language tends to speak of as an absence. In a certain way I was not there, or at least I have the impression of not having been there. My birth, however, is the ordinary event of my life—from which all my life stems. Nothing remains *consciously* of what happened, and yet I really did go through it, because I was born. But I can’t ever relate to my passage through my birth except in terms of the past. How then can I speak about it, given the gap that is my quasi-absence during this event from which I issue?

(b) Next, by my body, where “speechless experience” forces me to recognize that in, *terms of the flesh*, I was in some fashion present. Not this time because I *know it*, but undoubtedly because I *feel it*. The flesh that constituted me as an infant—*in-fans*, or without speech (*in-fari*)—is in fact that same flesh through which I silently elaborate a world, or rather my world. It’s perhaps best just to get on with it, to let it be, this flesh of a human being—given that it is through this body that, without speech, I relate to the world—before all selfhood and yet as the foundation of my

subjectivity: “We were all infants before we became adults.”¹ To be born is thus to carry in one’s body the actual evidence of the act of birth.

And what is true of birth is even truer of the resurrection. I *do not know* what has been, but I *know in the past*, in part at least, that I have been through it, when I see myself “born again” or discover myself transformed (consciousness). Moreover, I *feel in the present* what took place then, not because I speak it but because since this rebirth I set up the world (the body) differently and silently: “Now none of the disciples *dared to ask* him, ‘Who are you?’ because *they knew* it was the Lord” (John 21:12).

In our argument so far we have seen how the “world become other” (chapter 8), through the metamorphosis of God and of man in him (part II), necessitates a return to the “impassable immanence” of a world without God (chapter 1). It was the passage “from time to eternity” (chapter 8) that permitted us to pass through that closure that goes “from time to time” (chapter 2). The “flesh for rebirth” (chapter 9), which suggests that the key question is that of the *transfiguration of human beings* rather than of the world or time, now brings us to ask again about the “supposed drama of atheist humanism” (chapter 3). Not that we found we had to deny the necessary solidity of mankind without God, whether we were talking of the “death of God” or the “death of Christianity” (§10). Nor that we needed to return to the disdain of “atheism as seen by the theologian,” which continues to refuse to admit that one could “see otherwise” (§11). And again it is not that “the refusal of a ‘why’” makes us think that the believer relaxes on a “soft pillow” of certitude while the atheist remains always in uncertainty (§12). It is rather, simply, that the “rebirth (of the flesh)” opens up this time onto *another way* of being “born to oneself”—or, better, of accepting one’s self, first in terms of consciousness (§28), next by the flesh (§29), and finally in glory (§30).

§28. Birth and Rebirth

The *phenomenology of the communion* with saints in our Christian relation to the world (§24), and the *phenomenology of joy* in the believer’s relation to time (§26), now leads us to a *phenomenology of birth*, as a way of talking about our resurrected relation to mankind in general as well as to ourselves—as much through our own consciousness (§28) as through our own bodies (§29). For, we should remember, following in this the precept of Jesus to Nicodemus, we are not “born from on high” except *in the way* in which we are “born from below”—following an analogic, and not a dualist, reading of the body and the spirit (§2): “What is born of the flesh

is flesh, and what is born of Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). The phenomenological characteristics of the *act of birth* therefore characterize *de facto* the act of *rebirth*, outside which, as I have argued above (see introduction), the term *resurrection* remains only an “empty word,” or a *flatus vocis*, lacking a veritable existential situation to describe.

To be born is then, first of all, to be connected to one’s birth *by consciousness*, because no one has ever seen himself or herself being born (a time lag that no ultrasound scan or film can fill in). *Access to my birth* is therefore a detour, or rather a return, to a world “already there”—which I could *naturally* believe was there before me but which I have to recognize *phenomenologically* was born only along with me. To come into the world, or to be given birth, is not then to inscribe myself *in* a world, but literally, according to the French expression, to be “*mis au monde*” (put in the world), or to “*bring a world into being*.” This “world” is not “the world that is already there”; it is “the subjects who make it up, and who make up the constant already-being, who are there” (§24b).² I cannot have *any direct access* to my birth because no one has ever seen himself born; but I can ask, on the other hand, from those who *gave birth to me* or *saw me* born—my mother and father—for an attestation of the truth of this birth, at least to verify that origin. My birth “shows me that my origin does not show itself,” and it “forms me, *as though* it showed itself” for those who were present then, and also because it determines what I am. Birth, seen in terms of consciousness, is thus *paradoxical*, in that it remains always (a) *obscure* or unclear from the point of view of the “being who is born” (myself), and (b) *clear* from the point of view of those “giving birth” (my parents)—all of which will follow also in the act of “rebirth” or of “resurrection.”³

(a) From the point of view of the “being who is born” or of the engendered one, birth remains always *obscure*, or unclear. I have no perception of it, nor any memory of it. I may know very well that “I was born” but, consciously at least, my body retains no *trace in perception* of this birth (the gift of flesh and bones). One can say to me, or write a document that “bears witness,” that in such and such a place, or on such and such a date, I was born; but as for me, I have no *memory* (the gift that makes things present to me) of the event, other than through hearsay or basic knowledge: birth certificate, chatter and gossip, and photographic records. In short, the unclearness of my birth is such that I “lose myself” (Husserl), because I am without sensible or emotional landmarks, at least when I rely on my consciousness.⁴

What is true of birth, in the obscurity of the *act of being born* for the one who is born, is true also of the mystery of the *act of being reborn* for the one who is reborn. I experience only the effects of my rebirth, or my resurrec-

tion, and never the reason for it, nor the goal. It is not that my rebirth or my birth is without reason or goal, but that neither reasons nor goals (that is, my parents, my love for my neighbor, the search for blessedness or for God, etc.) are fully sufficient to justify it. Whether it was wished for or not, my birth (and rebirth) seems to me always *something for which I cannot take responsibility*, in the sense that “it happens to me impersonally, even before I could begin to take responsibility for it in the first person.”⁵ An inescapable connecting thread for the discussion of the resurrection (§2), the reply that Jesus makes to Nicodemus is unambiguous on this point: “The wind *blows* where it chooses, and you hear the *sound* of it, but you do not know *where it comes from or where it goes*. So it is with everyone who is *born* of the Spirit” (John 3:8). Far from any suggestion of spiritualism, the dialogue does not drift here towards some kind of evanescence of the Holy Spirit, but on the contrary pursues an *analogy* between birth and resurrection. (“Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above’” [John 3:7].) What is true of *the mystery of rebirth from on high* (resurrection) is also true for *the obscurity of my birth below: for which I cannot take responsibility* and which I register only through its *effects* (“you hear the sound of it”). The *reasons* for such births cannot be pinned down (“where it comes from”) and the *ends* cannot be seen (“where it goes”). But all this attests to the fact that nonetheless a birth *happened*, and *happens* again when I encounter God (“the wind blows where it chooses”). *The effect of my (re)birth*, or my way of relating to it, is what makes my (re)birth (existential)—at least as much as “those” who brought about my birth or rebirth (my parents or God).

And so it was possible to say, in a way that was precisely prophetic, concerning the coming of the Savior, that “a child *has been born* for us” or that a son has been “*given* to us” (Isa 9:6). And this indicates not the being-ness of the birth as such (§26c) but rather the act by which the “fait accompli” of the birth in the past (he “*has been born*”) serves as a basis for our rebirth in the present: “No one can enter the kingdom of God without being *born* of water and Spirit” (John 3:5). The double inversion of temporality (he “has been born” in the Old Testament [Isaiah] without, however, having been born yet in the New Testament [at Bethlehem]) and of causality (I judge the effect of his birth on me without being able to assign any kind of reason for my own birth)—this inversion serves as a touchstone that can clarify some of the *obscurity* surrounding my own birth as it surrounds my own resurrection. Thus, while I had believed, along with Nicodemus, that I was born “once and for all,” only to be then reborn a “second time,” I discover now that I was not truly “born” (in the past) until I could be reborn (in the present). And while I thought, again along with the wise Nicode-

mus, that I was made through some cause (the “womb of my mother”), so that one could *work back from effect to cause*, I find, on the contrary, that my self is “reborn,” once I have made out the meaning of my act of birth from my originary *relation to my origin* rather than from my *origin* itself, or from my birth certificate. My birthday doesn’t remind me of my birth as a *natal event* (the act of being born) except insofar as I celebrate it with others as the *advent of a nativity* (a way of relating to, and waiting for, my birth that I respond to as though I were waiting for the birth of another in myself). In the famous words of Angelus Silesius: “If Christ were born in Bethlehem a thousand times, and not in thee thyself, then art thou lost eternally.”⁶

(b) From the point of view of *those* who engendered me (and not solely from that of the *me* who was engendered), the obscurity of “the being who is born” does give way to a certain *clarity* in “giving birth.” I need *witnesses* of my flesh, for my birth certificate, and also for my rebirth (baptism and resurrection). First of all they are needed because only a mother in the pains of her womb will be able to confirm that it was from her that I was taken. What “is born of the flesh is flesh” (John 3:6), to the degree that only “another flesh” (my mother) can certify the fleshly *origin* of my being. Not that my mother could *give reasons for* my flesh or, even less, for my existence. (One would be no less fleshly for not having been wanted.) But only she can vouch, in a quasi-visceral fashion, for the fact that my being was begotten. Further, nobody knows better than she does that *I was born*, because it was *through her* that I was placed in the world, or phenomenologically “thrown” into the world (§24a). When it comes to my name, my father can probably attest to and authenticate it. Of course a child will sometimes take the surname of his or her mother, especially in the acknowledged absence of the father; but it is nonetheless true that the *custom*—the name (family name) of the father being given to the child—doesn’t simply indicate a *wearing away* of a society that has to keep renewing itself. On the contrary, it confirms a *line of descent* in which the mother gives the flesh and the father the name. While *the mother begets the flesh, the father proffers the word*.⁷

This “clarity of giving birth” in the view of those who attest to it (the witnesses) can be claimed *analogically* for rebirth or resurrection.

(i) First of all, because the corpus of the New Testament certifies its pertinence as far as birth is concerned. A mother in her *visitation* trembles at the joyousness of her *flesh*—“When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child *leapt in her womb*. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 1:41). The father remains silent until he has discovered the *name*: “[Zechariah] asked for a writing tablet and

wrote, ‘His name is John.’ . . . Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God” (Luke 1: 63–64).

(ii) Next, this clarity can be claimed because birth serves as a paradigm of rebirth for those who undergo it. The Resurrected One himself looks for “witnesses” for his own metamorphosis—less to guarantee his metamorphosis than to assure us of our own. “What we have heard, what we have seen with our own eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life— . . . we *have seen it and testify to it*” (1 Jn 1:1–2).

(iii) And finally, the clarity can be claimed because the tradition, at least in its Catholic version, consecrates the Church itself as the “mother,” almost the fleshly mother, of the faithful. *Viscerally* begotten by the ecclesiastical body that incorporates him or her, the believer traditionally receives his heritage from the Father (the summons or the name), and from the mother the flesh (the Church): “If we are born to possess the temporal heritage of a human father,” St. Augustine tells us authoritatively, in a commentary on Nicodemus, “we must be born from the *womb of a fleshly mother* [*nascatur ex visceribus matris carnalis*]; but to gain the eternal heritage of the Father who is God, we must be born of the *womb of the Church* [*nascatur ex visceribus ecclesiae*].”⁸

If it is then obscure for me as to how it is accomplished (impossible to capture in memory, impossible to determine its reason and authenticated only in its effects), the act of birth and of rebirth is nonetheless *clear* for those who are on the receiving end and who can confirm that it has taken place. The “one who is born,” begotten by suffering “flesh” (of the mother), and described verbally by a name that gives a meaning to him or her (from the father), bestows then on the “reborn” a spiritual conception by another mother (the Church) and gives a summons to the service of another Father (God himself). In a way, this is to be conceived without conception—because on the one hand *spiritual rebirth* goes beyond a simple fleshly begetting, and on the other hand it goes beyond our capacity for comprehension. It is at the heart of the Church and does not depart from the mode of *fleshly birth* given by my parents, but it “re-gives” it to me, performed *otherwise*. “Completely naked before all the spectators, Brother Francis declares to his father, Bernadone: ‘Up to now I have called you *father on earth*; henceforth I can say with assurance, ‘*Our Father, who is in heaven*,’ because it is *to him* that I have given my wealth and my faith.’”⁹

But the facts are not so neat and tidy, albeit there is a certain clarity in “giving birth.” Irrespective of all theory, a practical question asked by Nicodemus remains, and it is not the least significant of his questions: “How can these things be?” (John 3:9). Once the hypothesis of a *return* has been excluded, in the act of birth (“enter a second time into the mother’s womb” [Jn 3:5]), as in rebirth (the myth of the Golden Age or the restoration of the unchanged Garden of Eden), the need to restore to life (“You *must* be born from above” [Jn 3:7]) is not a guarantee of its realization. This, at least, is the case for Nicodemus—in contrast to the good thief: “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43 [§25]). As far as rebirth is concerned, the gap between Nicodemus and the good thief in fact reproduces the gulf between *possibility* and *realization*. While one of them asks about the transcendental conditions of rebirth—“How can these things be?” (John 3:9 [Nicodemus])—the other implores for its realization, never mind the conditions: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42 [the good thief]). The future, already effectuated in the second (“when you come”), is excluded by the hypothetical sense of the first (“How can these things be?”). The objectivity of my rebirth or resurrection is not in question here, I should like to emphasize: first of all because I am not the one in control of what happens, and second because, *phenomenologically speaking*, I make up my world not starting from the beings who are in it but through my own lived consciousness (§24b). The great enigma, and the sole problem that I can resolve here, because it is also my problem, remains that of the *relationship* I have to the possibility of my rebirth, indeed to its actualization. Between Nicodemus (pure possibility without actualization) and the good thief (actualization independent of all possibility), we find the amazingly phenomenological attitude or appearance of Mary “mother of God,” or *Theotokos* (that is, possibility already become actualized).

One can in fact also *describe philosophically* what is lived through in the consciousness of this “virgin” (young woman) of Nazareth (Luke 1:27), at least as far as the revealed text gives it to us: “Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I am a virgin?’” (Luke 1:34). The *possibility of the incarnation* evidently hangs here on its actualization, and on the *fiat*—the “Let it be done”—of the one who receives the announcement. But the act of incarnation becomes in a way actualized after its acceptance by Mary—in the same way that the acceptance of our resurrection is even more so, through a “yes,” at the very moment of our own metamorphosis (§25). The question “How can these things be?” (John 3:9), asked by Nicodemus, is on a different level from that of Mary’s “How can this be?” (Luke 1:34)—and marks here the gap between these two figures.

- (1) The first question (from Nicodemus) placed in an interrogative present (“How *can* these things be?”) supposes in fact that they won’t be done, or at least that they can’t be done in the eyes of the wise man of Israel. The actualization of his own rebirth “from on high” considered, it is true, from the starting point of a “down below” toward which one does not return (“the womb of his mother”), seems marked rather by the stamp of doubt than by confidence in its realization. Surely it would be impossible to imagine, or at least difficult? This provokes the legitimate annoyance of Jesus at the position of the Pharisee who, far from not understanding and, in fact, precisely because he understands only too well, makes a show of not wanting to follow what has been said: “If I have told you about earthly things and you *do not believe, how can you believe* if I tell you about heavenly things?” (John 3:12).
- (2) The second question (Mary’s), with a future-perfect implication this time, (“How can this be?”), supposes rather that the thing will take place, or even that it has already done so, in the eyes of the “virgin” of Nazareth. The “How can this be?” has already taken place (for Mary) in that it avoids the question of possibility in Nicodemus’s “How can these things be?” and establishes the future as achieved or *accomplished* action by God, in which temporality simply rolls out actualization. Mary, in the form of an anti-Nicodemus, takes as *already realized* the possibility of the incarnation in her, while the teacher of Israel takes his own rebirth to be, if not unthinkable, at least *unrealizable*: “The angel thus tells nothing to Mary that she has not already dreamed of and even hoped for. . . . The only news that he brings to her is that she is chosen among all others.”¹⁰

The questions posed by Nicodemus to Jesus therefore turn on the conditions for possibilities that could lie behind rebirth. “How can these things be?” he asks, because, knowing already (John 3:11) the conditions of his birth from below, he does not believe in the actualization of his rebirth on high. Mary’s question to the angel Gabriel is concerned solely with the consequences after the fact. “How can this be?”—but, in any event, it will be—since (at the moment) “I am a virgin” (Luke 1:34). Nicodemus enquires about the *conditions* for the *possibilities* of the realization of an impossibility (rebirth *in vitam* or resurrection *post mortem*), while Mary enquires solely about the *modality of actualization* of what she has already rendered possible in her question itself (the incarnation in her). *That the impossible can be made possible by God* is what Mary believes about the

incarnation. And it is what Nicodemus seems to deny, and yet still to understand, as far as the resurrection is concerned. “Nothing will be impossible with God” [*ouk adunatēisei para tou theou*]: These words of the angel Gabriel come at the end of the episode of the Annunciation (Luke 1:37). And Jesus takes up the theme again in front of his disciples who are overcome with their own disappointment (after the departure of the rich young man): “For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible” (Mt 19:26).

In order that my “rebirth” or “resurrection” be *believable*, in the terms that I deal with it in my consciousness, here then also we find the truly *unbelievable*. It is not solely, as we have seen, that Christ would be resurrected—such an actuality hardly has real meaning for me except insofar as it reaches also to my life as one of the resurrected (see introduction). What counts here is that God himself makes *possible*, and even *realizable*, what man legitimately holds to be *impossible*: the transformation of the blocked horizon of his immanence (chapter 1 / chapter 7), the Assumption and the crossing of the closure of time by eternity (chapter 2 / chapter 8), and the rebirth not in opposition to atheist humanism but by it and beyond it (chapter 3 / chapter 9). The resurrection is not then simply of the *Resurrected One*, even though it is that in itself (*in se*), and even independently of us. It is also, at least for us (*pro nobis*), but not uniquely for any one of us, the authentication of the faith through which we believe him to be resurrected. The truly Christian miracle is, rather than the miracle as such, that we are *able to believe* in the miracle. In the same way, the resurrection in its authentic meaning is what is given to us *to believe in*, at least as much as it is a resurrection in itself. “But these [signs] are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah . . . and that *through believing* you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). For me, that is above all what to be resurrected or reborn implies today: *to believe in Christ’s resurrection as a given, or something addressed to me*. It is not something I cause “to be” by my belief but nonetheless something that I let “show forth,” however incredible it may seem. “The final miracle,” according to Jean-Luc Marion, “is above all that *I believe in the miracle*—the *Resurrection* in which all Revelation is realized. And nobody can receive this miraculous faith without already entering, with his flesh and blood, into the unique Resurrection.”¹¹

§29. The Fleshly Body and the Body Resurrected

Is what is believed in the consciousness also believable *according to the flesh*? The question deserves to be put because we make up the world through

our bodies rather than through what we speak; we make it up through “dumb and descriptive experience” rather than through “our hermeneutic and verbal meanings.” And it is thus that our world becomes birth, sexuality, and death (§1). The impossibility of believing, nowadays even more than previously, in the “resurrection of the body” (“I believe in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting” [Apostles’ Creed]), derives very probably from the lack of a *contemporary anthropology* that would fit a body capable of being transformed. Certainly, as we have seen (§15b), the period of the Fathers of the Church and of the Middle Ages understood the resurrection in the most literal way as “to come out” of “their graves” (John 5:28–29) and thus as the rising up of the biological body. The impossibility of believing this anymore—something we all agree on today when we read Gothic church portals in a strictly symbolic way—is what makes us now come back to the problem, not so much to deny it as to trace out the lineaments of a new conceptualization. The *fleshy body* and the *resurrected body* are certainly one and the same body, supposing that we understand by “flesh” not our bodily substance (*Körper*) but the manner in which we live and experience our bodies today, as living bodies (*Leib*) that influence us and by which we are influenced. “Thus purely in terms of perception, physical body and living body [*Körper und Leib*] are essentially different. . . . [Being related] ‘through the living body’ clearly does not mean merely (being related) ‘as a physical body’; rather the expression refers to the kinesthetic, to functioning as an ego [egologically] in this peculiar way, primarily through seeing, hearing, etc.; and of course other modes of the ego belong to this (for example, lifting, carrying, pushing and the like).”¹² In other words, and borrowing some examples from Michel Henry this time, “climbing up that sloping lane, the pleasure of a cool drink in the summer, or the pleasure of a light breeze on the face” are all of the order of the *flesh* and not just of the *body*. That is because they affect me in *my own way* (my ego-logical way) of living through my body. It is a way that belongs to nobody except me, and never mind whether there is objectively a slope of the lane, or coolness of the drink, or a lightness of the breeze.¹³ My flesh is that *through which I experience my own body phenomenologically*, and not the simple biological and molecular substratum that can be cured, or repaired, or modified.

Certainly, and this we have at least suggested above (§14a), the unilateral transfer of the phenomenological flesh (*Leib*) into theological body (*resurrectio carnis*) is not something that can be taken as a matter of course and is even a kind of mistranslation. In theology, the “in-carnation” does not in the first place imply a “becoming flesh” (*Verleiblichung*) of mankind or of the Son of God; it is rather God’s “becoming man” (*Menschwerung*), or his

entry into the historical process. In this sense, the Christian incarnation is closer to a “becoming body” (*Verkörperung*) in its historical solidity than it is to a being *taken into the flesh* (*Verleiblichung*) as a kind of taking on of the self by the self. Moreover I should like to emphasize, and I have elsewhere dealt with the topic in the context of a more technical debate, there is “no flesh without the body,” either in phenomenology or in theology. If we insist too firmly on the *incarnation* as the subjective life-experience of the body (*Verleiblichung*), we are liable to forget its *incorporation* as the substance of the whole body (*Verkörperung*). And we then neglect “animality” as a “psychic” dimension of the Word incarnate (§18a). “Thus,” Husserl says, “to elucidate how the flesh [*Leib*] becomes the physical body [*Leibkörper*] is a fundamental problem that we must think through from its basis.”¹⁴ Tertullian knew to recall all this in his theology, which precisely lends “body” to the angels so that they can appear (*caro*) and, on the other hand, gives a “body” to Christ so that he can be incarnate (*corpus*)—that is to say, so that he can be born and die. “Christ, along with the angels, *appeared bodily* [*in carne processerint*]. No angel [however] ever came down to be crucified, to know death, to be resurrected from death. The angels never had that kind of reason for *taking on bodies* [*angelorum corporandum*]. And that is why they didn’t become incarnate [*non acceperit carmen*] through the route of birth. As they had not come *to die*, neither had they come *to be born*.”¹⁵

In short, it will be evident, despite the complexity of this debate, that an insistence on the “resurrection of the flesh” (*Leib*) as a summing up of the lived experience of our bodies (or of the body’s *openness and turning toward God*—the body, that is, “according to the Holy Spirit” in St. Paul [§14]) does not imply a denial of the reality of the substantial and material *body* (*Körper*) in the Christian incarnation. The incarnation of the Word is in fact all the more anti-Gnostic since it can hardly be suspected of “angel-ism”—unlike certain phenomenological interpretations of Christianity today.¹⁶ It remains the case, however, as we shall see, that a total identification of the *biological body* with the *resurrected body*, beyond the single case of the incarnation, leads to major aberrations. For if God incorporates himself, or “makes himself objective body” (*Verkörperung*) in his *incarnation*—“she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger” (Luke 2:7)—he becomes in a way “more and more” “flesh as it is subjectively recognized” (*Verleiblichung*) in his *resurrection*: “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” (John 20:29). What was at stake along the way that Christ took was not simply showing people that he had a body like us—albeit that was what the argument with the Gnostics was about (incarnation)—but that he revealed “in

his flesh” a *certain way of living through his body*. It was in this way of living that he was resurrected and therefore that we shall be resurrected also. “They knew it was the Lord” (John 21:12) on the shore of the lake or at the inn in Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35), not by his body as the Resurrected One, objectively wracked with hunger for earthly food, but by his *subjective and corporally alive manner* of being open to the Father as to mankind, of distributing the “fish” or breaking the “bread,” which becomes a true meal only through being shared. True corporality, today as yesterday, before as after death, is not in our corporal and biological substance—important though that is in our *incorporation*—but in the *way* we live, accept, and receive this in our own *incarnation*. The *experience of our bodies* is what makes our *flesh*. And our *flesh* is how we truly appear to ourselves and to other people. This lived experience is really what constitutes us *today* “in a truly ego-logical¹⁷ way” (Husserl) and, in Christianity, what will be resurrected *tomorrow* (“resurrection of the *flesh*”). “What resurrects in me, precisely what starts to resurrect after death itself, is *my rebirth to others and to the world*,” says Fr. Varillon, speaking more pastorally but nonetheless appropriately. “It is for man, in his *body and soul*, a *new way of existing*. Certainly in *his body*, because it is *through the body* that man has his relation to others and to the world.”¹⁸

In fact, if the apparitions of Christ when he was resurrected are considered simply from the point of view of the natural attitude, and so from the ordinary angle of *biological and substantial corporality* (*Körper*), they seem to owe more to the *ghostly*, or even to the *fantastic*, than to the hypothetical mystery of the resurrection. That is a mystery concerning which we often say nothing, because we don’t know what to say. Moreover, the disciples got things wrong, interpreting the body of flesh of Jesus as a simple molecular body. They did this during his life (e.g., when they saw him walking on the water) and after his death (e.g., on his apparition to the Eleven): “When they saw him walking on the lake, they thought it was a *ghost* [*phantasma*] and cried out” (Mark 6:49). Or again, “While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them. . . . They were startled and terrified and thought they were seeing a ghost [*pneuma*, in the popular sense of the word ‘ghost’]” (Luke 24:36–37). And probably “there was” something or other—and “there still is”—to be “terrified at,” or to be “fearful at,” in the corporality of the Resurrected One. That is especially true if one sticks to the *physical* sense of the term (*Körper*) at a *corporal* level, and it applies whether we are talking about the “ghostly apparition of a dead body” (discerned in the stigmata) or the “reincarnation of the soul of a dead person” (discerned in his repeated invitations to follow him). We can see it simply from the details of his corporality. (In such

narratives the descriptive naïveté of children, as of phenomenologists, has much to teach us.) Taken simply as *body*, and in the absence of all *flesh*, the resurrected God is he who magically defies all the most ordinary laws that apply to the appearance of a phenomenon: (a) from the point of view of recognition, (b) in its manifestation, and (c) according to its solidity as much as its weight.¹⁹

(a) First of all, from the point of view of our recognition of the phenomenon—that is to say, the way in which we register it in (subjective fact): Christ is (i) perhaps not recognized when he ought to have been recognized (the disciples at Emmaus); (ii) perhaps he is *recognized without it being possible to say to him that he has been recognized* (on the shore of the lake).

(i) *Not recognized when he ought to have been recognized*: First of all, he has different “appearances” or “forms” (*morphè*) in his apparitions, thereby defying the most ordinary law of the *morphologic conservation of the identity*: “After this he appeared *in another form* [*en etera morphè*] to two of them, as they were walking into the country [the road to Emmaus] (Mark 16:12). It was possible to walk physically with him, having heard him speak, and having more or less parted from him three days before on the gallows at the scene of the crucifixion (Luke 24:14), and still not recognize him. What, then, was this form “without form,” or his being with such “another form” that it was not recognized? How could their eyes be “kept from recognising him” (Luke 24:14) if he had not become in some way or other altered beyond recognition, “unrecognizable”?

(ii) On the other hand, he is *recognized without it being possible to say to him that he has been recognized*: It is thus that he appeared afterward to his disciples on the shore of the lake—as though it would have been necessary to say one recognized someone when one had always known him: “Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ because they knew it was the Lord” (John 21:12). What is this strange game of hide-and-seek? Did he take on there yet another “other form,” visible only to certain eyes, just to give a good result to any inquiry that would bring things out into the open? Or did he keep the “same form” that they all recognized, so that they didn’t see why they had to keep quiet about it? These questions, which are often seen as simply childish, are, however, still there for us when we read the text. And if we don’t dare to put them, we give up on all hope of coherence or understanding. For, however unbelievable it may be, the resurrection will not become “credible” unless

it has to some extent become intelligible. To go beyond the natural viewpoint and substantial corporality—which nonetheless force us quite legitimately to put these questions—becomes necessary, then, not only for phenomenology but also for theology.

(b) From the point of view of the phenomenon, then—that is to say, of him who appears (objective figure)—things are not any more instructive and are even frightening. His resurrected corporality this time *defies* the most ordinary (or transcendental) conditions for the appearance of a phenomenon: (i) the principle of the *localization of the body* in the opening up of the space in which it appears; (ii) the principle of *noncontradiction*, in the non-succession of his apparitions; and (iii) the principle of the *permanence of the substance* in the disappearance of the phenomenon that has appeared.²⁰

(b. i) In fact the Resurrected One, in his body, first shows himself to different people in several different places. He is able to go from one end of Jerusalem to the other, even beyond, at a speed that defies all speed (and we mustn't be shy about the naïve child, or the descriptive phenomenologist in all of us, who questions this—such questions help us through the problems). He appears to Mary Magdalene at the tomb; he shows himself on the country road (Emmaus), and to the Eleven at Jerusalem “as they were sitting at the table” (Mark 16:14). The *non-localization of his body* transgresses the limits of “here” and “over there” and seems to pass through what are, for mankind, impassable barriers.

(b. ii) But there is more and better—according to St. Paul this time, long after the death of Christ: “Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died” (1 Cor 15:16). We touch the limits of logic here. It is quite acceptable that he should appear in different contexts—that is to say, in different places (the tomb, the road to Emmaus, Jerusalem) and to different people (Mary Magdalene, walkers, disciples). But to say that he appears *at the same time and in the same way* to more than five hundred brothers “at one time” seems to be ignoring ordinary precision and to be denying through and through the *principle of noncontradiction*.²¹

(b. iii) The *mirage* or the *miracle* in the manifestation of this phenomenon (depending on whether we stick to a philosophical or a theological point of view) reaches its height in the *apparition–disappearance* at the inn on the road to Emmaus. “Then their eyes were

opened, and they recognized him; and he *vanished from their sight*” (Luke 24:31). The disciples who had been walking with this man, undertaking a journey where they felt the weight of moral and physical fatigue (a Sabbath road), see the body of their companion disappear at the moment when in fact it becomes clear to them who he is (“they recognized him”). As long as the corporality remains substantial here (*Körper*), we stay in the fairy story, even—to exaggerate a little—in Walt Disney. There is no *permanence of substance* in the disappearance of the phenomenon that has appeared. We might say that the techniques of the cinema have now accustomed us to the play of appearance and disappearance, from Charlie Chaplin to *Alice in Wonderland*, *Mary Poppins*, or *Fantômas*. For us now, contemporaries accustomed to this *virtual* world, and even for Christians who are worried about the problem of the *virtual*, what can there be that is *real* in apparitions of the Resurrected One if, in response to the problems, we reduce all reality to the simple *objective appearance* of a body? What is *this* body, or *this type of corporality*, which appears to several people (non-localized), at the same time and in the same way (logical contradiction), only to disappear under their eyes (non-permanence of the phenomenon)? A true reflection on the sense of *our own corporality*, as on that of the *corporality of Christ*, seems here to be called for, at least to rethink a debate that theology has often neglected.

(c) From the point of view of the *solidity* and *weight* of all physical phenomena—that is to say, the simple structure of all visible phenomena according to the laws of *our* world (e.g., in Newtonian physics)—resurrected corporality seems just to complete the fairytale. That is, if and only if, taking our heuristic path (§3), we do not suspend our “natural attitude” or abandon our objective in order to enter into other types of phenomenality. The double principle of (i) the *solidity*, and (ii) the *weight*, of all bodies seems in fact to be denied in the corporality of the Resurrected One. (i) With respect to its *solidity*, his body “goes through walls,” as children like to emphasize. They identify this sometimes innocently, but not always quite daring to believe that they should, with certain of their favorite heroes (Harry Potter with his magic formulae, or Bilbot the Hobbit with his magic ring). “The doors of the house where the disciples had met being locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them. . . . A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them” (John 20:19, 20:26). (ii) Moreover, after the apparition this time, he defied even the *law of gravity*, in an *ascension* that the child in all of us will identify as a

purely (celestial) “elevation.” He seems simply to have suspended the single criterion of the objectivity and materiality of all bodies, to make his own unique reality. “When he had said this, as they were walking, he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9). It is true that the sobriety of the text here cuts across the luxuriance of apocryphal accounts, but it is not enough to render things credible unless we have embarked on a serious consideration of the meaning of corporality. The question is not to know if our *fleshly body* would be capable today of defying all the laws of the solidity and weight of bodies—we don’t have experience of a *flesh* (proof of the self) without *body* (biological support). The question we have to ask ourselves is simply what the apparition of a “flesh” (test of the self), not totally reduced to its corporality (physical materiality), would actually be like. Not that the body of the resurrected Christ would be immaterial (which would imply angelism or Gnosticism) but simply that what is resurrected of him is his *way of living this materiality or, in other words, his body*, which is the *fleshly and relational* modality of his being (his divine being) in this world. And probably it is the same for us, that resurrection involves our way of living this materiality, or our bodies. The resurrection is therefore a *raising* and a *metamorphosis* not of our *dead bodies* (*Körper*) but of our *way of being in the world and in time through our flesh* (*Leib*). It is a weaving together here below, “silently” and “most intimately,” of one with one another (as in birth, sexuality, and death). To forget this, and not to try to think it through, is to push Christian corporality into a *physical challenge* to the *solidity* and *weight* of all bodies. But a challenge of that kind would be totally foreign to the sense of the Christian notion of “to resurrect,” and it would stop us from daring to think about, or even to envisage, resurrection.

Not recognized when he should be recognized (by the disciples at Emmaus); recognized when he is not told that he has been recognized (in the apparition on the shore of the lake); appearing at the same time and in the same way to many people in different places (to Mary Magdalene at the tomb, to the Eleven at Jerusalem, to the disciples on the country road, and to five hundred brothers at one time); defying the law of the solidity of bodies by passing through walls (in the apparition to the Eleven and then to the Twelve); rising finally from the earth in a quasi-levitation against the force of gravity (at the ascension). The corporality of the Resurrected One in his appearances remains, at the least, incomprehensible as long as it is identified with our simple substantiality. However, Christ says of himself, and he makes himself known by it, that it is really his *mortal body*,

with stigmata, that is resurrected (“Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side” [John 20:27]). The resurrected body is what is woven with the *texture* of our own bodies: “Look at *my* hands and feet; see that it is *I myself*. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have *flesh and bones* as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39). Is this to say that the body resurrected “in flesh” (*sarx*) and in bones (*ostea*) has in some way or other our molecular corporality, which would be as substantial as it is material (*Körper*)? Here we must be silent. Not because we give up *speaking* of the resurrection of the flesh but to signify the sense of an *absence* (of the body), in view of another *mode of presence* (of the flesh [or *lived* body]). We are presented with *another way* of being in the world (see chapter 7), in time (see chapter 8), and with other comparable facts of our own corporality (see chapter 9).

§30. Withdrawal of the Body and Manifestation of the Flesh

Although I take the challenge of his *body*, which makes us see *his flesh* (or *lived* body), seriously, I don’t want to suggest that during the life of Jesus (the walking on the water), or after his death (the apparition to the Cenacle), when they recognized the appearance of the resurrected flesh, the disciples were “simple” enough to see a “ghost” (*phantasma*, Mark 6:49) or a “spirit” (*pneuma*, Luke 24:37).²² To attribute such “simple-mindedness” to the apostles is first of all to belittle their confusion, to which the resurrected Christ himself responds (Luke 24:38). And it is to suggest that it is just a matter of course to go from a natural attitude (objective vision of the body) to the phenomenological *epochē*, or bracketing off (lived experience of the body). What is true of phenomenology with regard to the *reduction*, or the bracketing off, of the objectivity of the body is even more true in theology for *conversion*, which needs the resurrection. We come back here to Meister Eckhart, who understood this, and who expressed it, when he described, in the visit of Jesus to Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38–42), a kind of prefiguration of our mode of being resurrected. Martha, in contrast to what is commonly believed (that is, that Mary alone would choose “the better part” [Lk 10:42]), has in fact a kind of superiority over her sister Mary. She doesn’t stay *there* sitting (objectively) at the feet of the Savior and listening to him but lets herself be inhabited (subjectively) by him. She remains *detached* from him and is therefore capable of making her way elsewhere *with* him—in the kitchen(?)—because he is *in her*. When Martha asks her sister Mary for help, it is not that she jealously wants her to do something for her, but rather she invites her lovingly to flee that mode

of objectivity in which the Resurrected One does not (and will not come) to live. “Martha says, ‘Lord, . . . tell her to help me then’” (Luke 10:40). It is as though she were saying: My sister thinks that she can do what she likes as long as she *is sitting next to you* by way of consolation. Make her see that now, if it is true, and order her to *get up* and *leave you*.²³ Martha has in a sense understood the resurrection before the raising up of the resurrected Christ—before the women who come later, before Peter and John, before Mary Magdalene, and before those who come successively to the empty tomb.

The resurrection is not simply the *manifestation*, or the appearance, of another mode of presence of the *flesh*. It is also a disqualification, or rather a *withdrawal*, of the substantiality of the *body*. This is what St. John discovers, the disciple “whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23), on looking first into the interior of the tomb: “He bent down to look in and saw [*blepei*] the *linen wrappings lying there*, but he did not go in” (John 20:5). Simon Peter, arriving next, goes in to confirm what has happened and makes a more clear-sighted observation. He “went into the tomb. He saw [*theorei*] the *linen wrappings lying there* and the *cloth* that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but *rolled up* in a place by itself” (John 20:6–7). What did they see, the one and the other? Nothing. Or rather *nothing of the body*, of the cadaver that for them was still the body’s beingness. It would have been proof, had it had been there, that that they were still looking only in the mode of corporal objectivity. The linen wrappings “lying there,” or the cloth that was “rolled up in a place by itself,” do not witness certainly to the reality of the resurrected Christ—others will believe his body “taken away” (John 20, 13), or that they “stole him away while we were asleep” (Mt 28, 13). But these things remain nonetheless the sole objective reality of the possibility of the resurrected Christ. Raised by the Father or stolen by men, his body (*Körper*) is no longer there, and that everyone not only believes but actually sees.²⁴ What remains to be seen—that is to say, his flesh (*Leib*) as the mode of being of his body—is seen by nobody at this point, probably because they have never yet completely *seen* it, in the *true sense* of his incarnate being. We need to renounce *objectivity*, and therefore renounce what is simply the materiality of our bodies, to reach the resurrected Christ: “*Flesh and blood* [what we have called here the *body* (*Körper*)] cannot inherit the kingdom of God,” St. Paul reminds us (1 Cor 15:50). *The objectivity of the disappearance* (of the body) signals, then, the *disappearance of objectivity* (of all reified bodies in the resurrection). The world and time have not thus become “other” (see chapters 7–8) except insofar as our own bodies, metamorphosed in the Word (see

chapter 6), were already “other”—fully *flesh* or inhabited by the lived experience of the transfigured body (see chapter 9). “[You have] clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being *renewed* in knowledge according to the image of its creator” (Col 3:10).

The renewal of a fear of the body, when the flesh shows itself, is what the gardener first communicates to the grief-stricken Mary Magdalene. “Noli me tangere.” “Do not touch [hold on to] me” (John 20:17). Not in the sense that the resurrected Christ would become untouchable but insofar as his *flesh* already can’t be grabbed hold of, like a being in the world, like a body among bodies, or a thing among things. Mary would like to “take him,” because someone has “carried him away” and she doesn’t know where “you have laid him” (“If you have *carried* him away, tell me where you have *laid* him, and I will *take him away*” [John 20:15]). The terms she uses are those for the objective seizing of the body (*Körper*). But Jesus insists that she does not touch him or “hold on to” him (*aptō*) as long as he has “*not yet* ascended to the Father” (John 20:17). The awaited ascension (ascending to the Father) does not signify simply a “raising of the body” in which he is hauled up (§29) but the conversion of the “earthly body” (physical body) into a “heavenly body” (spiritual body) (1 Cor 15:44 [§14]) that, throughout the forty days of apparitions, the lived experience of the body is going to reveal to us as the resurrected Christ: “The fact that according to the Gospels the Resurrected One shows himself *not as glorified*, but still in the *process of ascending*, evokes the *assimilation* of the condition of life of someone who is baptized to that of Christ.”²⁵

When the *body withdraws* and the *flesh becomes manifest*, it is then that he *shows himself*. It is not the disciples who by some kind of hallucination, a communal one, produce the phenomenon of the Christ resurrected. A religion such as Christianity, that refuses any reduction to a supposed “magic,” needs to be suspicious about a subjective or purely hallucinatory character for these apparitions of the resurrected. But being on guard against the “relativity” of the phenomenon of the resurrected Christ does not necessarily lead us to conclude in favor of its objectivity. That would be to misread the difference between an *objective* phenomenon and an *objectal* phenomenon—something that counts not just for phenomenology but also and above all for the corporality of the Resurrected One. It is one of the basic insights of Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations* (and of all contemporary philosophy), which theology cannot turn its back on, that all phenomena appear *in* and *through* one’s consciousness. “For me the world is nothing other than what exists and lives *through my consciousness*.”²⁶ But the phenomenologist insists that the nonsolipsistic consciousness is

always “consciousness of *some thing*,” “something of the *real existence* of this object.”²⁷

In other words, and this is even more true for the accounts of the apparitions, there is an “objectness” of phenomena that cannot be reduced to a simple *objectivity* (though this does not imply that it is a narrative fabrication). Jesus appearing to “more than five hundred *brothers and sisters* at one time” (1 Cor 15:16), it was to these “brothers and sisters” and thus to the disciples that he made himself seen. Far from showing himself to Pilate or Caiaphas objectively in the form of a *proof*, or materializing himself subjectively, like a *ghost*, to some of the faithful who were rendered inconsolable by his death, he waited rather for the personal conversion, in terms of *faith*, of those who would accept him because they recognized him and were “born” anew through him (§28). “That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’ When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the lake” (John 21:7).

To say of “something” or rather of “someone”—for example, when I recognize the Lord as he appears to me—that he appears in my consciousness does not mean, phenomenologically speaking, that my consciousness produces this thing (which would imply absolute idealism) or that the thing exists in itself outside me who sees it (which would be objective realism). It signifies simply that there are *in me* things or, rather, *apparitions* (*Erscheinungen*) that become phenomena in the form of acts, and not beings. It implies that I recognize them in the *way* that I have of apprehending them rather than in their substantiality: “I frequently choose the most imprecise expression of objectness [*Gegenstandlichkeit*],” says Husserl, “because it is not simply a question of *objects* in the narrow sense, but also of the *state of things*, of characteristics, of real [*reale*] forms, or members of categories, etc.”²⁸ What counts in the Resurrection is not the thing itself—that same “flesh” and those “bones,” which say simply that it is a question of him in “flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39), or “in person” (*Selbstgegenbenheit*). What really counts is the *way* or the *act* by which the *Resurrected One* offers himself to me.²⁹ It is not I who construct the phenomenon by which the resurrected appears to me, but rather he—the Resurrected One—who takes the initiative that “shows *itself in itself*” or “is bright (*phainestai*)” becomes “manifest, visible in itself.”³⁰

The initiative of his appearance guarantees me against my own fantasies, inasmuch as I receive him *there* and *when* I don’t expect him: That is to say, the apparition comes *from him* rather than *through me*. Thus he is *the* “phenomenon”—exactly as *phenomenon* is defined (*Being and Time* §7).

The phenomenon, strictly speaking, “appeared first [*ephanē*] to Mary Magdalene” (Mark 16:9), and “after this he appeared [*ephanerōtē*] in another form to two of them” (Mark 16:12), and “later he appeared [*ephanerōtē*] to the Eleven” (Mark 16:14), and then “showed himself [*ephanērōsen anton*] to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias” (John 21:1), etc. These are various modalities that make up the auto-manifestation of the self by the self (*phainesthai*), the phenomenal mode of being of the resurrected Christ—and of all phenomena in general, if we suppose that, phenomenologically and in Christian terms, everything depends at once on the *he* who manifests himself and on the *I* who welcomes his apparition: “This life *was revealed* [*ephanerōtē*], and *we* have seen it, and *testify* to it” (1 Jn 1:2).

In these kinestheses (or bodily movements), or in his *specific way of appearing*, the mode of being of his body and therefore of his *flesh* is, then, that by which the disciples recognize him in his resurrected being. And it is that by which we ourselves also recognize ourselves and are recognized by one another.

The *resurrection* is thus also basically an *incarnation*, in that a faceless Christ or, perhaps better, Christ as we wish to see him allows himself to be recognized in his *fleshly mode of being*, so that we shall find him again in the image of our neighbor.³¹ Evidence for this comes from Christ’s address (i) to the disciples on the shore of the lake, (ii) to Thomas in the Cenacle, and (iii) to Mary Magdalene in the garden of the Holy Sepulcher.

(i) First, to the disciples: The invitation to “come and have breakfast” (John 21:12) is not that of a *hungry body*, which, after all, one could not really see as belonging to a resurrected being. It is that of *flesh transfigured*, which recalls that it was expressly made to *give*: Jesus came and “took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish” (John 21:13). (See §29.)

(ii) Next, Thomas: He who wished to see the *body*: “the mark of the nails in his hands,” or the opening made by the sword “in his side” (John 20:25). Thomas sees the flesh here, when the Lord precisely proposes to him to hold on to this first corporality: “Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God’” (John 20:28).

(iii) Finally, Mary Magdalene: She “saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus” (John 20:14). She does not know until words are spoken to her and she is called by her name. And then it is not because of her (Mary in her being-ness) but because of him (the “Teacher” in his modality), who turns to her again and

confides in her once more in his voice: “Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to him in Hebrew, ‘*Rabbouni!*’ (which means *Teacher*)” (John 20:16).

As he is (i) not hungry in the apparition on the shore of the lake, (ii) not yet with wounds healed in the apparition to Thomas, (iii) not simply disguised as a gardener in the apparition to Mary Magdalene, the corporality of the Resurrected One is not, or is no longer, of the order of the *materiality of his body* (§29) but rather of the *expressivity of his flesh (his lived body)* (§30). “God raised him on the third day and allowed him *to appear* [*emphanē genesthai*],” St. Peter explains to the centurion Cornelius, “not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead” (Acts 10: 40–41).

In his *incarnation* by his manner of being in the world through his *body*, the Word thus lived and prepared his *resurrection* as a full and total revelation of the mode of being of his *flesh*: by *sharing* once again through eating and drinking with them (the disciples), by making himself *recognized* in his fleshly texture as in his wounds (Thomas), and by *calling* by her name she who would, in another way, inherit his voice (Mary Magdalene). His “becoming body” (incarnation) thus anticipates his “becoming flesh” (resurrection)—which this time bears witness, and in an exemplary fashion, to the narrative of his bodily glory, or of his transfiguration: “And he was *transfigured* [*metamorphoō*] before them, and his *face shone* like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling *white*” (Mt 17:2). The *metamorphosis* accomplishes here a “transformation,” not like a “cracking or breaking” of corporality (Bultmann [chapter 5]), nor simply as an “incorporation” of the whole of the man in God (chapter 6), but this time as an epiphany, full and entire, of “lived bodiliness.” Only an epiphany of this kind could have been equal to the “weight” of such a phenomenality. We wait then for the return of Christ at the end of time, for the accomplishment of time, when mankind will manifest the plenitude of this revealed glory (*kabod*) in his “[lived] body transfigured.” The Son of Man, having espoused to the end our flesh in movement (*kinesthesia*), to the point where he makes himself recognized as the Resurrected One, consecrates thus his corporality as the expressive and abiding site of his divinity: “For in him the whole fullness of deity *dwells bodily*” (Col 2:9).