



Excerpt from 'In The Name' | **Jean-Luc Marion**

...We have thus wound up with a complete reversal of the initial problematic. But to observe this by examining the theological tradition of mystical theology and reconstructing its logic is one thing. It is quite a different matter to describe the phenomenon to which it is trying to do justice. The remaining task then is to conceive the formal possibility of the phenomenon which seems to demand an "absence of divine names" and our entering into the Name. Let this be noted: We have said "to conceive its formal possibility" and nothing more than this possibility, since phenomenology cannot, and therefore must not, venture to make any decisions about the actuality of such a phenomenon, this is a question entirely beyond its scope. Phenomenology is to make decisions only about the type of phenomenality which would render this phenomenon thinkable. The question is to be formulated in this way: If that with which the third way of mystical theology deals in fact is revealed, how should the phenomenon be described, such that we do justice to its possibility?

Let us suggest a response. If one admits, with Husserl, that the phenomenon is defined by the inescapable duality of appearing and what appears and that this duality is deployed in terms of the pairs signification/fulfillment, intention/intuition or noesis/noema, one can imagine three possible relationships between the terms at issue: (i) The intention finds itself confirmed, at least partially, by the intuition, and this tangential equality defines adequation, therefore the evidence of truth. (ii) In contrast, the intention can exceed all intuitive fulfillment, and in this case the phenomenon does not deliver objective knowledge on account of a lack. The first case would correspond to the first way, kataphasis, which proceeds through a conceptual affirmation that justifies an intuition. The second would correspond to the second way, apophasis, which proceeds by negating the concept because of an insufficiency in intuition. Husserl (in this following Kant) admits only these two hypotheses and thus remains stuck within the horizon of predication, and therefore of a possible "metaphysics of presence." But, a

third possibility still remains. (iii) The intention (the concept or the signification) can never reach adequation with the intuition (fulfillment), not because the latter “of an object, comprehension in the strict sense, does not come from a deficiency in the giving intuition, but from its surplus, which neither concept, signification, nor intention can foresee, organize, or contain. This third relation between the two inseparable facets of the phenomenon, the saturated phenomenon can perhaps allow us to determine the third way, where mystical theology is accomplished. In this third way, no predication or naming any longer appears possible, as in the second way, but now this is so for the opposite reason: not because the giving intuition would be lacking (in which case one could certainly make a favorable comparison between "negative theology" and atheism or establish a rivalry between it and deconstruction), but because the excess of intuition overcomes, submerges, exceeds, in short saturates, the measure of each and every concept. What is given disqualifies every concept. Dionysius states this to the letter: "It is stronger than all discourse and all knowledge and therefore surpasses comprehension in general and therefore [is also excepted from] essence”.

Indeed it is precisely by means of this undoing of the concept and intentionality that the theologians reach denomination. For example Athenagoras: "On account of his glory, he cannot be received; on account of his greatness, he cannot be comprehended... described." The undoing of knowledge here arises explicitly from an excess, not from a lack. Likewise John Chrysostom: "We therefore call him the unutterable, the inconceivable, the invisible, and the incomprehensible, he who conquers the power of human language." Excess conquers comprehension and what language can say. We have already heard from Gregory of Nyssa: "[T]he uncreated nature . . . surpasses all signification that a name could express." This text describes a shortcoming, one that results from a lack of utterable signification, not of intuition. In short, God remains incomprehensible, not imperceptible, without adequate concept, not without giving intuition. The infinite proliferation of names does indeed suggest that they are still there, but it also flags as insufficient the concepts that they put in play and thereby does justice to what constantly subverts them. Consequently, the third way cannot be confused with the sufficiency of the concept in the first way nor with the insufficiency of intuition in the second; rather, it registers the ineradicable insufficiency of the concept in general. The denomination which puts us in the Name has nothing in common with one or the other possibility opened by predication and nomination.