
The Kenosis of the Son

“Kenosis” is a Greek term found in Philippians 2:6-8 and refers to the self-emptying of God the Son in becoming incarnate – “Christ who despite being from the beginning in the form of God; did not seize equality with God, but emptied/nullified (*ekenosen*) himself, assuming the form of a slave. Bearing the human likeness, sharing the human lot, he humbled himself and was obedient, even to the point of death, death on a cross!”

“He assumes the poverty of my flesh, that I may assume the richness of His Godhead”

The Word of God Himself – Who is before all worlds, the Invisible, the Incomprehensible, the Bodiless, Beginning of Beginning, the Light of Light, the Source of Life and Immortality, the Image of the Archetypal Beauty, the immovable Seal, the unchangeable Image, the Father’s Definition and Word, came to His own Image, and took on Him flesh for the sake of our flesh, and mingled Himself with an intelligent soul for my soul’s sake, purifying like by like; and in all points except sin was made man.

Conceived by the Virgin, who first in body and soul was purified by the Holy Spirit (for it was needful both that Childbearing should be honoured, and that Virginitly should receive a higher honour), He came forth then as God with that which He had assumed, One Person in two Natures, Flesh and Spirit, of which the latter deified the former.

O new commingling; O strange conjunction; the Self-Existent comes into being, the Uncreate is created, That which cannot be contained is contained, by the intervention of an intellectual soul, mediating between the Deity and the corporeity of the flesh. And He Who gives riches becomes poor, for He assumes the poverty of my flesh, that I may assume the richness of His Godhead. He that is full empties Himself, for He empties Himself of His glory for a short while, that I may have a share in His Fulness.

What is the riches of His Goodness? What is this mystery that is around me? I had a share in the image; I did not keep it; He partakes of my flesh that He may both save the image and make the flesh immortal. He communicates a second Communion far more marvellous than the first, inasmuch as then He imparted the better Nature, whereas now Himself partakes of the worse. This is more godlike than the former action, this is loftier in the eyes of all men of understanding.¹

His kenotic descent is for our purification

As the “form of a slave” he comes down to the same level as his fellow-slaves; receiving an alien “form” he bears the whole of me, along with all that is mine, in himself, so that he may consume within himself the meaner element, as fire consumes wax or the Sun ground-mist, and so that I may share in what is his through the intermingling.²

¹ Or. 38.13, (NPNF², Vol.7, p.349a-b)

² Or. 30.6 (*On God and Christ*, p.97)

Our offering of ourselves is a response to Christ's self-offering

Let us offer ourselves to God as a gift, His most precious possession and most proper to Himself; let us give back to the Image what is made after the Image. Let us recognise the principle of our being, let us honour our archetype; let us recognise the power of the mystery and for whom Christ died.

Let us become like Christ, since Christ became like us. Let us become gods through Him, since He became man through us.

He assumed the worse that He might give us the better; He became poor that we through His poverty might be rich; He took upon Him the form of a servant that we might receive back our liberty;

He came down that we might be exalted; He was tempted that we might conquer; He was dishonoured that He might glorify us; He died that He might save us; He ascended that He might draw to Himself us, who were lying low in the Fall of sin.

Let us give all, offer all, to Him Who gave Himself a Ransom and a Reconciliation for us.³

Kenosis & Christology

Seeing as Christ had set in the human body a piece of heaven, when he saw it blasted with heart-gnawing evil, and the twisted dragon lording it over men, he did not, to raise again his portion, send yet other aids to treat the disease (for a little cure is inadequate against great illnesses);

But, emptying himself of his heavenly glory as the unchangeable Image of the heavenly One, both humanly and not after human custom, in the hallowed womb of a maid inviolate he took flesh (amazing! To washed-out minds incredible!) and came, both God and man, two natures gathered into one: one hidden, the other open to mankind;

Of these, the one is God, the latter was created later with us, at that time when, in the womb, God was mingled with things human. He is one God out of both, since the human is mixed with the Godhead, and, because of the Godhead, exists as Lord and Christ.⁴

The kenosis of the Son as enabler of our Theosis

[The Son] was actually subject as a slave to flesh, to birth, and to our human experiences; for our liberation, held captive as we are by sin, he was subject to all that he saved. What does the lowliness of Man possess higher than involvement with God, than being *made* God as a result of this intermingling?⁵

³ *Or.* 1.4-5, (NPNF², Vol.7, p.203b) (Modified)

⁴ *In Praise of Virginity* (Poem 1.2.1, 139-154) in *On God and Man*, pp.93-4

⁵ *Or.* 30.3 (*On God and Christ*, pp.94-5)