

THE DOCTRINE OF THE KENOSIS IN PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8¹

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Those participating in Christological controversies that followed the Nicene Council sought to reconcile proper deity and true humanity in the Person of Jesus Christ, but in doing so, they often neglected the humanity of Christ. The Reformers did not solve the problem, but they restored a proper emphasis to Christ's humanity. Subsequent to the Reformation, scholars tended to underplay His deity. Careful attention to the details of Phil 2:5-8 helps to state as well as the human mind can comprehend just what the kenosis involved and hence how His humanity and deity related to each other. He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, and humbled Himself, becoming obedient to death. He stooped to servanthood and death with all the sovereign free will of One whose choices are limited only by His own holy and loving will.

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This passage in the Philippian Epistle has been so closely connected with certain problems of Christology that any discussion of it will be the more complete if prefaced by a brief historical survey in this particular field of Christian doctrine. Such a survey will serve to show the theological importance of the passage, why the

¹This article appeared originally in *The Biblical Review* 13/4 (October 1928):506-27 [abstract at beginning of the article added].

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attention of Christologists from the first was drawn to it inevitably, and how speculations regarding the Person of Christ have finally culminated in several theories, related in principle, which receive their name from a Greek word in the passage, and are based to a greater or less extent upon it.

The dreariest, most barren pages of church history deal with that period of Christological controversy which followed the Nicene Council. Having successfully repelled the Arian assault, the attention of the church had logically shifted to another problem—how to reconcile proper Deity and true humanity in the Person of the historic Savior, Jesus Christ. Over this question discussion ran the gamut of conceivable opinion. Men, according to their bias, became Apollinarians, Nestorians, Eutychians, Monophysites, Monothelites, Adoptionists, and Niobites, until at last they all but lost themselves in subtle distinctions and, bewildered by the dust of battle, actually “fought against their own side.” In the heat of conflict men not only lost their way, but also lost their tempers, and applied to one another certain offensive and unmusical epithets such as “Phthartolatrae,” “Aktistetes,” “Aphthartodecetics,” and “Ktistolators.” It was an unhappy age, of which Dr. Bruce appropriately speaks as “the era of *anatomical* Christology.”

And yet through all this strife, much of which seems so petty to the modern mind, there runs a sincerity of purpose that cannot be ridiculed. Men were bent upon a laudable undertaking—the rationalization of their faith. Primarily, therefore, the responsibility for these centuries of theological conflict may be laid upon the activity of the human mind in its passion for explanation. The pity was that men in their zeal for rationalization often lost sight of the historic facts of faith because they were willing to surrender what they could not immediately rationalize. Furthermore, yielding overmuch to the philosophic tendency of the age, they sought a metaphysical rather than a moral rationale for the Incarnation. As a result, the humanity of Christ was sadly neglected, and by some was reduced to a bare metaphysical shell in order to fit certain *a priori* notions of what Deity could or could not do.

It was left for the Reformation, and particularly for the leaders of the Reformed Church, to recall the minds of men once again to the real humanity of our Lord. To these men the Christ of faith was the Savior of the Gospels; one who had lived, suffered, and died; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, tempted in all points like as we are; a true Savior, who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmity. Yet, with all this insistence upon the real humanity of Jesus, the Reformers yield nothing to the Socinian tendencies of their day. If to them He is “the man Christ Jesus,” He is also nothing less than “God over all blessed forever.” The veil of inadequate and mystifying Christological solutions is stripped away, and men are called back to the more simple faith of the early church. But this return to the primitive faith is also a return to the old problem which had exercised the Fathers, but was never solved by them: How can we reconcile true Deity and real humanity in the historic Jesus?

It may be said with assurance that the Reformed theologians did not solve this problem. Their chief contribution to a Biblical Christology was a determined insistence upon both the humanity and Deity of our Lord, and also a refusal to entertain as valid any view of His Person which failed to pay due regard to all the facts as set forth in the New Testament sources and confirmed by their own personal experience. This position was of inestimable value to the Christian church, not in forbidding further attempts to formulate a rational Christology, but in providing a sure foundation upon which men might work.

If prior to the Reformation the general tendency was to sacrifice the humanity of Jesus in the interest of certain conceptions of Deity, we may say that since the Reformation there has been a tendency in an opposite direction. Especially has this been true during the last seventy-five years, a period characterized by great critical activity. Like the blind man of the Fourth Gospel, this historical criticism began with "the man that is called Jesus," next advanced to the point of recognizing Him as "a prophet," and finally, in the case of some critics at least, fell down and worshiped Him.

Those who recognized Him as divine solved the inevitable Christological problem by having recourse to some form of *kenosis* theory. In becoming man the Logos "emptied himself" in some respect. Thus, the divinity was made to yield, or rather was adjusted, to the humanity. In adopting this principle of a kenosis as a point of departure in attempted explanation of Christ's Person, men were on safe and Biblical ground, for the New Testament writings undoubtedly teach a kenosis of some kind in their doctrine of the Incarnation. Unfortunately, in the application of this valid principle, men failed to keep their eyes steadfastly upon the historic Person; the kenosis idea became a tool of theological bias, and was used for the construction of strange kenotic Christs bearing but a poor and partial resemblance to the Christ of the Gospel records.

This was the era of the modern kenotic theories, during which, as might be expected, searching and critical examination was given to every New Testament passage that possibly be utilized in their support. The Philippian passage naturally received most attention, being in fact the exegetical cornerstone of the whole kenosis idea. Certain extremists, it is true, simply ignored it in the construction of their Christological schemes; but all those who felt bound in any real sense to the New Testament records rightly understood that no formula could be regarded as valid which failed to gain the support of this important text. One having but a superficial acquaintance with the many different kenotic theories is not surprised, therefore, to find some diversity of opinion among interpreters. He will be scarcely prepared, however, for the actual situation.

Nothing beyond a cursory review of the astonishingly numerous interpretations of this Philippian passage is enough, as someone has suggested, to afflict the student with "intellectual paralysis." This is especially the case in regard to that section (v.7) which speaks of the "self-emptying," or kenosis, of Christ. Some

make of this a mere *skēnōsis*; Deity was veiled, but was limited in no important or essential respect. Others think the self-limitation was real, though very inconsiderable. A third view holds that the Logos, in becoming man, retained full possession of His divine attributes, and that the kenosis consisted in His acting as if He did not possess them. Another school supposes that He actually gave up certain of His attributes, the ones designated by theologians as relative, such as omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. Still others go farther in asserting that He gave up all the divine attributes, so that Deity was stripped to a bare essence. Finally, there are those who, excluding from the passage all reference to a pre-existent state, regard the kenosis as having taken place wholly within the earthly life of the man Christ Jesus.

Such a variety of interpretations might tend to discourage any further attempt were it not for one thing, namely, a hopeful conviction that much of this variety may have been caused by different theological viewpoints which interpreters brought with them to the passage. This is not to say, that we must begin with no assumptions. I feel quite sure that certain regulative presuppositions are essential to any worthwhile exposition of our Lord's kenosis as set forth in this Philippian text. Some of these presuppositions I shall now attempt to state.

1. No interpretation can be accepted as valid which departs in any respect from the historic Person of the Gospel records.
2. Due consideration should be given to the whole stream of Biblical testimony which bears on the Person of Christ. If the Philippian text is worthy of attention, then other texts may not be excluded.
3. The interpreter will logically expect to receive his surest guidance from the writer of the passage, the Apostle Paul himself.
4. It is supremely important that the purpose and spirit of the passage with its context be kept constantly in mind. The writer of this passage is not composing a theological treatise; he is pleading with his Philippian converts for a life of love and self-forgetfulness—"not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others." And as a powerful incentive to this holy end he holds up before their eyes the sublime Self-forgetfulness of the Son of Man, who on their behalf had "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant."
5. If metaphysical difficulties arise, they must yield to the moral requirements of the Incarnation. We ought to be, I think, well past that stage of human thought when such difficulties compelled men to choose between an "Absolute" who could not empty Himself, and a mere creature who had little or nothing of which he might empty himself. Better a thousand times give up our conception of an absolute God than admit he is incapable of any real "moral heroism." For that matter, what God can or cannot do is a question to be settled by what we have good reason to believe that He has done. Therefore, no supposed metaphysical problems should be permitted to reduce the doctrine of our Lord's kenosis to the point where it becomes a mere shadowy, docetic semblance.

The passage appears in the American Standard Version as follows: "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God,

counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross.”

The first question concerns the phrase, “existing in the from of God.” Does it refer to a pre-existent state of Christ? To the casual reader such a reference seems perfectly natural, but some have denied it, affirming that the reference is limited to the earthly state of Christ. This was the position taken by certain interpreters, although for vastly different reasons; by some of them to vindicate their doctrine of an omnipresent body; by others to avoid a possible testimony for the Savior’s Deity. Various arguments were advanced in support of this interpretation.

It was said that the subject of the entire passage is named “Christ Jesus,” and that, even granting a pre-existent state, such a title would be inappropriate to designate the Logos prior to his Incarnation. To me this objection has little weight. Even common usage is against it; no one thinks it inaccurate, for instance, to speak of the “childhood of President Coolidge,” though strictly speaking, President Coolidge had no childhood. And the objection fails utterly when we find the Apostle Paul applying the historical Name to the Son of God in other passages where the reference to His pre-existent state is unmistakable. (Cf. Heb 11:26 and 1 Cor 10:4, “the rock was Christ.”)

Again, it has been argued that a disquisition upon the pre-existence of Christ is not within the scope of the Apostle’s purpose, that he is interested only in setting before his converts an example of unselfishness and true humility. To this we can heartily agree, insisting at the same time, however, that this very purpose of the writer is a strong argument for the reference to a pre-existent state. What an example to set before self-seeking Christians—the eternal Son stooping from Heaven to earth on behalf of men! Certainly, assuming that Paul believed in a pre-existent state, it would be hard to explain his failure to employ the idea in a passage like this one. As to the rather shallow objection that such an example would be beyond the power of men to imitate, we may answer that this is to miss the spirit of the passage altogether. The Apostle is not asking for any mechanical imitation of the precise act in which our Lord “emptied himself,” whatever that act may have involved. He is pleading that men shall have in them “the mind” which was in Christ Jesus, and which impelled Him so to act as the passage describes, in the interest of others. Moreover, to exclude the idea of pre-existence from the passage is to render obscure its meaning.

The early Christian church was familiar with this idea, and a reference to it in connection with the act of Incarnation would need no explanation. It was part of the common faith. But if we eliminate this idea, and make the “self-emptying” something that took place entirely within the earthly life of Christ, at once the plea of the Apostle becomes vague and unintelligible. To what particular act in His earthly life could the language of verses 6-7 be applied with any measure of certainty

beyond mere guess-work? And why is there no hint or clue to guide the reader in fixing upon it? True, His whole life was characterized by a constant and gracious “self-forgetfulness,” but the aorist tense here (*eken_sen*) seems to favor a definite act, once for all, and not simply a habit of living. The conclusion, to me, is compelling: The Apostle speaks of the one act which needed no explanation to the Philippian Christians, that sublime and voluntary act of Incarnation wherein the “Word became flesh and tabernacled among us” in servant-form. The high background of this act is set forth in the phrase, “existing in the form of God,” a phrase which not only refers to a pre-existent state, but also has somewhat to say regarding its character.

This pre-existent state is characterized as “in the form of God” (*en morph_ theou*). The general meaning of *morph_* is *external* appearance, that form by which a person or thing strikes the vision. Our English word “form” scarcely expresses its full significance. Quite often we use this term to indicate the very opposite of reality, saying of something, that it is only a form, by which we mean that the external appearance of the thing is misleading and does not truly represent the inner substance or character. Thus, some have argued, Christ was a form of God; He was God-like, but not God. The word *morph_* seems to strike deeper than this. Lightfoot, Trench, Bengel, and others argue convincingly, against a number who think otherwise, that the *morph_*-form is something intrinsic and essential as opposed to the *sch_ma*-form which is merely outward and more or less accidental. Following this idea S.G. Green, in his *Handbook to the Grammar of the Greek Testament*, defines *morph_* as the form which is “indicative of the interior nature.” It is indeed external form, that which strikes the eye, but as such it accurately represents the underlying nature from which it springs.

If this be the significance of the term, then to say that Christ Jesus was “existing in the form of God” is to affirm that He was very God manifesting Himself in some external form through which he could be known, probably to the inhabitants of Heaven, for what He truly was. This meaning of *morph_* in verse 6 is further confirmed by its usage in verse 7 where we are told that Christ took the “form of a servant.” Are we to understand from this assertion that He became a servant only in external appearance, and not in fact? Very few would be willing to accept such a representation; certainly none of those who wish to limit the word in verse 6 to mere external form. They have insisted more than once upon what we gladly accept, that the Savior was true man and in all respects a true servant of God on behalf of men. But if the phrase, “form of a servant,” can be taken to indicate a true servanthood, surely no one may consistently forbid us to find true Deity in the phrase, “form of God.”

Returning now to the general meaning of the word *morph_*, an external form which strikes the vision, let us ask this question, Does the invisible God possess such a form? Are we to take the meaning literally, or is the reference only to those divine attributes in the exercise of which intelligent beings may know that God is

God? The latter idea is undoubtedly present, and is the important one, as I shall try to show below under a discussion of verse 7, but I do not believe that the more literal meaning should be excluded. “No man hath seen God at any time.” True, yet we read that “Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel” went up into the mountain, and “they saw the God of Israel.” And we have the cry of the prophet Isaiah, “Woe is me . . . for Mine eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts.” Whom and what did these men see? I am inclined to believe they saw the Son “existing in the form of God,” that form which strikes the vision and is at the same time no mere *eidos*, or superficial resemblance, but which is rather truly indicative of God’s inner nature and invisible substance.

The Apostle now proceeds to set before his Philippian converts the mind of Him who was originally existing in the form of God. This mind is revealed in two sublime self-renunciatory acts, the one described as a *ken_sis*, the other as a *tapein_sis*. In the former He “emptied himself,” stooping from God to humanity; in the latter He “humbled himself,” stooping from humanity to death. The kenosis is further exhibited from two distinct viewpoints: First, from the pre-existent state of Christ—“He counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped”; and second, from his earthly state—“taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men.”

The phrase, “being on an equality with God,” is exegetical and explanatory of the phrase, “existing in the form of God.” The only question is, whether these two phrases are exactly equivalent, or whether the former adds to the latter the important idea of actual historical manifestation. This second interpretation is very suggestive and is not lacking in considerations which support it, but I prefer the first as more in harmony with the entire viewpoint of this article. In the mind of the writer, then, to exist “in the form of God” is to be “equal with God,” whatever else may be in the latter phrase. Absolute equality with God was the possession of Jesus in His pre-incarnate state. But, when the need arose in the world for a Savior, He did not regard His being equal with God “a thing to be grasped” as a robber might grasp an object not his own. This “equality” with God was so surely and incontestably Christ’s own possession that he could with “royal un-anxiety,” lay it aside for a season for our sakes, being fully assured that it would return to Him once he had accomplished our redemption. In all this there is a blessed contrast between the mind of the Son and the mind of the great adversary of our souls. The latter once counted the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped as a robber grasps at that which is not his own. Being in the form of a servant, this “son of the morning” said in his heart, “I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God . . . , I will make myself like the Most High.” But the only begotten Son, “existing in the form of God” and possessing full “equality with God,” counted all this not a thing to be grasped, “but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men.”

Here we have the positive side of the kenosis. There are not three steps, as

the Authorized Version seems to indicate, but only one step, in which the Logos “emptied himself.” This self-emptying act is further qualified by two participial phrases. The first exhibits the great ethical end of the kenosis: Christ emptied Himself to become a servant, the Servant of Jehovah. He therefore takes servant-form. But there are various servant-forms; angels are *douloi theou*. So the second clause specifies the nature of His servant-form: He took not on Him the nature of angels, but was made lower than the angels, “becoming in the likeness of men” (*en homoi_mati anthr_p_n genomenos*).

Such in general was the kenosis of our Lord, and we may now enquire whether it be possible to define more specifically its content. Of what primarily did the Son of God empty Himself when He entered upon His earthly history? The passage before us does not supply the details needed for a satisfactory answer. All it affirms is that Christ Jesus was originally existing in “the form of God,” and that at a certain point in time He emptied Himself, taking “the form of a servant.” Of His existence in servant-form we know somewhat, having the Gospel records to guide us. Regarding His existence in God-form our knowledge is more limited. If we could fix upon the exact significance of this phrase, “in the form of God,” the problem would be solved, because in the kenosis this “form” was exchanged to be in the form of a servant. If we knew all that it meant to be in the form of God, we would then know what our Lord gave up in order to take the form of a servant. Everything in fact depends upon how we define the “form of God.” I have already discussed to a limited extent the possible meaning of this phrase, and shall attempt now to investigate it more exhaustively.

In the first place, the form of God must not be identified with the essential nature of God. Many of the Fathers did so identify them, probably out of a desire to gain this Philippian passage as a witness to the Deity of Christ. The motive was praiseworthy, but in permitting it to sway their exegetical judgment they got into a Christological dilemma from which they were unable to extricate themselves without either admitting that God could cease to be God, or on the other hand explaining away the reality of the kenosis. In the main, as we might expect, they chose the latter way out. The form of God in this passage is not the nature of God. God-form certainly presupposes a God-nature, but is not essential to it. Verse 7 draws a similar distinction on the human side of the kenosis; there is here a servant-form and also a human-nature. A man may cease to be a servant, but he cannot cease to be a man. Likewise, Deity may change form, but not nature.

I have suggested above that this “form of God” may include a reference to the divine attributes. For it is through the exercise or function of these that, from an external viewpoint, God appears most truly as God. In this functioning we find, in the deepest sense, the *morph_* of God. The Logos, then, in putting off this form, must have experienced to some degree a limitation as to His exercise of the divine attributes. The question is, What was the nature and extent of this limitation? He could not, as some suggest, have actually surrendered the divine attributes, for they

are functions potential in the very nature of God. Granted that the *active* functioning might cease for a time. Still the *potentiality* remains. To suggest that this might also be given up is to say that God may cease to be God.

But such an idea is repugnant to reason, and surely cannot be discovered in the Scriptures. On the contrary, our Lord during the days of His flesh very definitely asserts His possession of divine power when, referring to the laying down of His life, He declares, "I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." It will not do, either, to say, as some others have said, that the Logos gave up the *use* of the divine attributes during the period of His earthly life, though if interpreted rightly this statement might be accepted as a true account. It is better to say with Dr. Strong that Christ gave up the *independent use* of His divine attributes. This leaves room for those exhibitions of divine power and knowledge which appear during His earthly ministry, and at the same time modifies in no essential respect the doctrine of the real kenosis.

We may say, then, that the eternal Son, existing in the form of God—robed with the glory of Deity in its external manifestation, possessing and exercising all the incommunicable functions of the true God—counted not this being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but with loving condescension emptied Himself, taking servant-form; and as a result of this one act His whole earthly life became the life of a bond-servant, in which he does nothing, speaks nothing, knows nothing *by Himself*: but all is under the power and direction of the Father through the Holy Spirit. In this sense, during His earthly sojourn, the "external glory" was utterly laid aside. "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not." But there was another, an *inner* glory: and this glory, of which the external glory had been indicative, was still present, though veiled by the servant-form. He did not—it is not too much to say that He could not—empty Himself of this. And to those who came to know Him because their eyes were enlightened by the Spirit, His blessed inner glory became apparent in spite of the veil of flesh, so that they could witness that, "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father) full of grace and truth."

The two phrases, "in the likeness of men" and "in fashion as a man," might seem to suggest an unreal, docetic view of Christ's humanity if we were dependent upon these alone for our doctrine of the Incarnation. Fortunately we have the whole testimony of the Gospel records to guide us in the interpretation of these expressions, and this testimony affirms that the humanity of our Lord was real. The Apostle's reason for speaking as he does in this text is not to insinuate that Christ was not true man, but probably to remind his readers that there is after all a difference between the man Jesus and man who is a sinner. Sinfulness is not a *necessary* characteristic of humanity, though it happens to be a *universal* characteristic of the humanity that we know. Because this last is so, men are in the habit of regarding sinfulness and humanity as correlative terms. Who has not heard that hoary-headed excuse for the sinner, "Well, he is only human"? We have here, I think, a sufficient explanation of

Paul's use of such terms as "likeness" and "fashion" in his reference to Christ's humanity; it is the guarded language of inspiration upon a theme where a misstep may invite confusion. (Compare the careful phrase in Rom 8:3).

To the New Testament writers Christ is a real man made "in all things like unto his brethren," yet we are not to forget there is a difference; we are sinners, but He is "holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners." Aside from this there is no limit in His kenosis. He becomes partaker of "flesh and blood"; is born of a woman under the law; grows in wisdom and in stature; is often hungry and weary; meets temptation, not as God, but as man, "being tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin"; learns "obedience by the things which he suffered"; knows not the day of His second coming. Yet these limitations, self-imposed as they were, do not open the way for any dishonoring views regarding His trustworthiness as a teacher; they do not make of Him the fallible Jewish rabbi of modernism. Such inferences from the kenosis are hasty and superficial.

When He took upon Him servant-form, the Son of God came to be the *perfect* servant, to reveal the ideal servanthood. But the perfect servant must render a *perfect* service. Not many will care to affirm that our Lord failed at this point. He Himself could say: "I do nothing of myself, but as the Father taught me, I speak these things. And he that hath sent me is with me; he hath not left me alone; for I do always the things that are pleasing to him" (John 8:28-29). And again: "For I speak not from myself, but the Father that sent me, he hath given me commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak" (John 12:49). "Which of you convicteth me of sin?" (John 8:46). There is no room for fallibility here, whatever view we may take of Christ's humiliation. On the contrary, as Bishop Moule has pointed out, the kenosis itself becomes the *guarantee* of His infallibility. Whatever He was before entrance into human existence, by His "self-emptying" He becomes the perfect bond-servant of Jehovah, who does nothing and speaks nothing from Himself, but speaks only what the Father "commands," and does "always the things that are pleasing to him." Therefore, in the days of His flesh, the Son of Man may be trusted without reserve in every statement He has been pleased to make, for His words are in every instance the very words of God.

The great ethical end of the kenosis was servanthood. This conception arose in the messianic prophecy of Isaiah; it was announced from the lips of our Lord Himself, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many"; it was exemplified throughout His whole earthly ministry, which might have been appropriately summed up in His own words, "I am among you as one who serveth." This is a prominent idea in both steps of His humiliation as set forth in the Philippian text. In the first step, as God, He had emptied Himself, taking the form of a *servant*. Then, as man, he humbled Himself, becoming *obedient* unto death.

An impressive thought in both of these steps is the perfect *freedom* and *voluntariness* of the Son of God. No theory of the kenosis can be true which brings

Him into an earthly state where it is impossible for Him to assert “equality with God.” Room must be left for a “voluntary perseverance not to assert equality, on the part of one who could do otherwise.” He assumed servant-form and died upon the cross for us, not because of any compulsion external to Himself, but according to the free and loving choice of his own will. “He was no Victim of a secret and irresistible destiny such as that which, in the Stoic’s theology, swept the gods of Olympus to their hour of change and extinction as surely as it swept men to their ultimate annihilation.” When He stooped to servanthood and death He did so with all the sovereign free will of One whose choices are limited only by His own holy and loving will. “He emptied *himself*.” “He humbled *himself*.”

This voluntary perseverance in that mind which led Him first to the kenosis and finally to the cross has an important bearing on the problem of His self-consciousness. It implies a certain continuity of self-consciousness throughout all the changes incident to His earthly state. He knew, while on earth, of His pre-existent state: He was aware of the mind which had actuated Him in exchanging the God-form for the servant-form: and He purposed to have “that mind in him” down to the last act in the great drama of redemption. “I *know* whence I came, and whither I go,” He says to the Pharisees. And drawing near to the hour of death, He repels all suggestions of any possible change in His own eternal purpose by declaring steadily, “But for this cause came I unto this hour” (John 8:14; 12:27).

But the writer of the Philippian letter will not permit us to forget that, even while our blessed Lord was acting in the manner of a sovereign (for such He was), He was also acting in filial obedience to the Father’s will. In humbling Himself, He became “*obedient*” unto death. Not that He was obeying death when He died—death had no claim upon Him—but in dying He was obeying the Father whose bond-servant He had come to be. The thought is that He obeyed God so utterly as to die. Does not all this take us back in memory to that moment of the ages when the Son, entering into the world, announces, “Lo, I am come; in the roll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do thy will, O God”? Does it not take us back to Gethsemane there to behold His agony and hear His triumphant cry, “Father, not my will, but thine be done”?

In the death of Christ there was a marvelous blending of *sovereign choice* and *utter obedience*. He humbled Himself unto death; yes, but He was also obedient unto death. Speaking of his approaching death, our Lord Himself blends these two things in a striking passage from chapter 10 of John’s Gospel. “I lay down my life,” He says, “that I may take it again. No one taketh it away from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (“power” in each case in Greek is *ἐξουσίαν* [*exousian* (transliteration added)]. R.V., marg., “right”). Certainly this is sovereign choice. But let us read on: “This commandment received I from my Father.”

Several years ago, while I was engaged in a study of the Philippian Epistle, a letter came to me bearing news of the death of a friend and former classmate who

had laid down his life for Christ in foreign missionary service. He had been a brilliant student, was wealthy in his own right, and at the completion of the seminary course he was married to a beautiful and talented young woman. In this country he might have had everything ordinarily desirable to men—business success, comfort, ease, and luxury. But there was in him the mind of Christ; if I may dare to use the words reverently, he freely “emptied himself” of all these prospects, becoming a servant of the cross in Egypt. There, having given what he could in service, he was obedient “unto death.”

But the free obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ rises above all human comparison. He was indeed obedient unto death, but more than that, *even* unto the death of the cross. After all, the death of my friend was only a joyful “loosing away upward” to be with the Christ whose he was and whom he served. There were no pangs, no sting, in death for him. How different was the death of the cross! That was a “death of unimaginable pain and utmost shame, a death which to the Jew was a symbol of the curse of God, and to the Roman was a horror of degradation.” Nor was this all. It was a death in which all the pent up wrath of the law against human sin would fall upon the blessed head of Jehovah’s Servant, a death in which He must plumb the depths of “a soul that’s lost.” None of this was hid from His eyes. Having counted the cost, for our sakes “He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, *even* the death of the cross.”

NOTE

One determining factor in various interpretations of the Philippian passage has been the central problem of the Incarnation, namely, what is the relation of the divine to the human in the historic Christ? The Apostle Paul certainly must have known that his statement would raise this problem but, like other New Testament writers, makes no attempt to solve it. In the main, the writers of Scripture are content to assert the reality of the two natures in Christ, without attempting a rationalization of their doctrine. Perhaps it is wisdom to leave the matter as they left it. One hesitates to enter a field of controversy where so many well-intentioned men have slipped into errors ranging from an Apollinarian denial of any human soul in the Savior to the Nominalistic doctrine of two wills and two minds—in fact, two persons. But the church has been compelled to enter this field by reason of the deviations of those who oftentimes were numbered among her own sons. At Chalcedon (451) the church declared that in the Savior there are two natures, one divine and the other human. These two natures are perfectly and organically united in one Person, yet they remain distinct, each retaining its complete integrity. We must neither “confound the natures, nor divide the Person.” The seat of personality in this Person is the Logos, the eternal Son.

The main criticism of this formula, from the standpoint of the older psychology, was how Christ could have but one personality, if in Him there were two

distinct natures, namely, the human soul and the Logos-spirit. Did not the soul of a man constitute a personality in itself? The ancient church never wholly succeeded in answering this rather formidable objection, but nevertheless wisely refused to alter the formula. Her position is now being vindicated, I believe, by the latest pronouncements of modern psychology. The personality—also the mind—we are told, is not metaphysical, but is *built up* by the interaction constantly taking place between the living organism and its environment. I cannot, of course, accept this statement *in toto*. There is certainly a metaphysical basis for both mind and personality. But with this reservation, the account seems to be true, and may be of service in aiding us toward an understanding of the Person of Christ. The Logos, in becoming flesh, was united with a true human soul in the body born of the Virgin Mary. This soul on the human side provided a basis for the possible building up of a human mind and personality, and the building up process was perfectly normal in all respects, except that it took place around and in vital union with the Logos-spirit now emptied of His divine form. (Dr. Strong seems to suggest the above view of personality when he says, “Nature has consciousness and will only as it is manifested in person.” *Systematic Theology*, p. 695)