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## Kenotic Ignorance or Accommodation

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when the authority of the Scriptures is gone, all that we have is a vague 'I think so.' Human wisdom and speculation is a poor substitute for a "Thus saith the Lord." . . . The Luther commemoration will have done the Church good if it shall bring us back to a contemplation of that soul-stirring truth that the sinner is saved by his trust in the infinite mercy of God, vouchsafed unto us in the death of His eternal Son." (See CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, 1934, p. 398 f.) The Lutheran Church, too, is in danger of losing its Lutheran heritage. Let us heed the words of Dr. C. C. Hein: "To the Lutheran Church the Bible as a whole as well as in all its parts is the pure, infallible Word of God. . . . May Lutheranism preserve to the Christian world its own precious Reformation heritage: The Word of God, the whole Word of God, and nothing but the Word of God." (*The Second Lutheran World Convention*, p. 74.) If we would restore the Church to health, we must maintain and apply "the twofold ruling principle of the Lutheran Church: the Word of God, nothing but the Word of God and the whole Word of God, and grace, nothing but grace and the whole grace." (Walther, *Casual-predigten*, p. 91.) We need it, and the whole Church needs it. "May God grant the whole Lutheran Church, in this land and throughout the world, the grace that she may stand before the world with her escutcheon unsullied, and fulfill, for the good of the whole world, her God-appointed mission: to confess the *sola gratia* on the basis of the *sola Scriptura*." (Pieper, *Lehre und Wehre*, 1927, p. 11.)

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## "Kenotic Ignorance or Accommodation"

By P. E. KRETZMANN

The term kenoticism fills the Lutheran theologian with apprehension, if not with horror. It is a term which has been used by our dogmaticians to designate the false teaching of the *kenosis* of Christ, one not in agreement with Phil. 2:7. From the days of Thomasius, who has been called the father of kenoticism, down through the writings of Luthardt, Gess, von Hofmann, Frank, and others, this insidious poison has been spread in modern theology until the point has been reached where errors concerning the person of Christ, and



therefore also of His office, have vitiated the doctrine of the atonement. The situation is briefly summarized in the following sentences: "The New Theology maintains that, in order to do justice to the true humanity of Jesus Christ, it is necessary consistently to carry out the self-emptying act of the Logos, so that the Son of God, in the act of the incarnation, laid aside the divine attributes of omnipotence and omniscience, together with His divine self-consciousness, and regained the latter gradually, in the way of a really human development. Thomasius, the father of this new *kenosis*, sees the renunciation in the giving up, in humiliation, of the relative divine attributes, *i. e.*, those of Christ's relation to the world, as omnipresence, omniscience, and in the retaining of the immanent attributes of truth, love, holiness, etc., which could be revealed in humanity."<sup>1</sup>

The entire question is discussed at great length in doctrinal theologies of the conservative type, as well as in special articles which have appeared in recent years. Thus all the arguments of the kenoticists with regard to both Christology and soteriology are analyzed in detail in Pieper's *Christliche Dogmatik*<sup>2</sup> as well as in Hoenecke's *Ev.-Luth Dogmatik*<sup>3</sup> and elsewhere. The terms used by the Apostle in describing the mystery of the humiliation of Christ exclude every form of kenoticism, as a careful examination of the text is bound to show. A recent commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians has these significant sentences: "Paul, by the use of the Greek word translated 'being,' informs his Greek readers that our Lord's possession of the divine essence did not cease to be a fact when He came to earth to assume human form. The Greek word is not the simple word of being, but a word that speaks of an antecedent condition protracted into the present. That is, our Lord gave expression to the essence of deity which He possesses, not only before He became man, but also after becoming man. . . . To give expression to the essence of deity implies the possession of deity, for this expression, according to the definition of our word 'form,' comes from one's inmost nature. This word alone is enough to refute the claim of

<sup>1</sup> *Concordia Cyclopedia*, ed. of 1927, p. 384.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. II: 116 ff., 328 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. III: 116. Cp. Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics*, p. 289; *CONC. THEOL. MONTHLY* II: 244—258.



Modernism that our Lord emptied Himself of His deity when He became man."<sup>4</sup>

What about the term used in the caption of this article? To our knowledge it has not been employed as yet in print, but it was injected into several oral discussions in connection with the teaching of Christ, specifically also with reference to His use of the Old Testament quotation in John 10:35. The argument offered was in substance this, that Jesus either was not Himself fully informed or accommodated Himself to the ignorance of the men of His day, that He merely followed custom in quoting from an acknowledged authority, but that this fact does not demand our accepting His discourses as infallible, divine teaching. In other words, Jesus, as a human being, was just as well-informed or as ignorant as the average Jew of His day, no more, no less. When He asked questions, for example, it was because He did not know and was not in a position to know.

These allegations are found, for example, in an article which has just come to our attention.<sup>5</sup> In this discussion the evidence is divided into two sections, the question of omniscience and the question of inerrancy. The author blandly states: "The question of omniscience is easily disposed of—it seems evident that in His incarnate state our Lord was not omniscient." (P.97.) Then, taking up the question of the correctness and adequacy of Christ's teaching, the writer remarks: "But what of the authority of the teaching He did give? What weight would He have us put upon His words? . . . He consistently and repeatedly treats the Scriptures as though they were God's Word written. . . . Thus our conclusion is that Christ was not omniscient, but His teaching was wholly true. These are the great positive facts which a Christian must firmly hold if he accepts the authority of Christ. Whatever psychological difficulties may be raised when we try to understand how a person could be inerrant without having omniscience, it is evident that these difficulties are of precisely the same kind as those raised by the phrase 'tempted . . . yet without sin.' It is impossible to under-

<sup>4</sup> Wuest, *Philippians in the Greek New Testament*, p. 69.

<sup>5</sup> J. W. Wenham, "The Authority of Christ as a Teacher," in *Evangelical Quarterly*, VII:91 ff.



stand how temptation could be real to one who had no sinful tendencies to which temptation could appeal. . . . So the evidence of the Gospels makes it clear that whatever effects we allow as a result of the Son's self-emptying, we cannot submit to the authority of Christ and at the same time allow any qualification of His claim to be the Teacher of the very truth of God." (P. 104 f.)

These statements, although partly true, lack the full background of Scriptural authority. It is true, for example, that the essential sinlessness of Christ, the fact *peccare non potest*, placed next to His own Messianic declaration "O God, Thou knowest My foolishness, and My sins are not hid from Thee," Ps. 69:5, and His cry on the cross "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Matt. 27:46, present a difficulty which human reason cannot possibly solve, yet an explanation is found in the imputation of men's sins. The same is true with regard to many another point in the relation between the two natures in Christ, as any sound book in doctrinal theology will show. The same is true in this instance likewise. The statement that Christ in His state of humiliation was not omniscient, that He was subject to human ignorance, or that He accommodated Himself to the ignorance of His contemporaries is one flowing from an erroneous conception of the *kenosis*. Let us see whether the alleged discrepancies cannot be removed in the light of the passage alluded to above, the *locus classicus* on the humiliation of Christ, Phil. 2:7.

The charge of kenotic ignorance or accommodation on the part of our Lord is based on a number of passages, all of them in the Gospels. In Luke 2:52 we have the well-known statement concerning the adolescent years of our Savior "And Jesus increased in wisdom." We might point out at once that v. 40 of the same chapter says of Him that He was "filled with wisdom" (*πληρούμενον σοφίας*), which may mean "filled up" in the active sense, but also "being made full" in the passive sense. Reference is also made to John 14:28: "My Father is greater than I," compared with chap. 10:29: "My Father is greater than all," although this difficulty is readily explainable in view of Christ's humiliation and the declaration in 1 Cor. 15:28. Anyone who cannot see clearly as to the difference here presented is in danger of falling into the error of Marcel-



lus of Ancyra, with his cryptosubordination in declaring the Logos *asarkos* to possess the deity *dynamei*, whereas the Logos *ensarkos* is said to possess the deity only *energeiā*.

The passage which seems to offer the most serious difficulties to those who struggle with the attribute of omniscience in the person of Christ is Matt. 24:36 (cp. Mark 13:32): "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but My Father only," where Mark adds the phrase "neither the Son." To this some would add John 5:30, where Jesus declares: "I can of Myself do nothing." Still others are bothered by the fact that Jesus in certain situations asks questions about persons, things, and circumstances such as an ordinary human being might be expected to put if in need of information. Even John 7:16 has been drawn into the discussion, with Christ's quiet statement "My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me." It will be seen at once that practically every one of these situations concerns the person of Jesus, chiefly in such relationships as would also be involved in His becoming hungry or thirsty or weary or in any other way giving evidence of His being a true human being.

On the other hand, we have a long list of passages in which Christ Himself or the reporting Evangelist testifies to His divine wisdom and to His omniscience in His relation to others, in His office as Teacher, or Prophet. In John 2:24, 25 the holy writer testifies: "Jesus did not commit Himself unto them because He knew all men and needed not that any should testify of man; for *He knew what was in man.*" If this means anything at all, it clearly states that Jesus was familiar with the thoughts and opinions of men by virtue of a supernatural ability which He possessed. This is in full agreement with John 1:48,50, where Jesus revealed that He knew the character of Nathanael even at a distance, not merely by a judgment arrived at when He saw the man approaching. In the story of the woman of Samaria, John 4, the entire narrative shows that Jesus possessed divine wisdom and omniscience, since He read the thoughts of the woman and was in possession of knowledge which had not been transmitted to Him by others. We have the same situation in Matt. 9:4, where the Evangelist notes: "And Jesus, *knowing their thoughts*, said." He did not merely read their thoughts in



the expression of their faces, but He was aware of them by virtue of the knowledge which He possessed.

It is particularly significant that we find so many passages asserting the full possession of the deity, of the essential co-equality of Christ with the Father, in the Gospel of John, which according to the Evangelist's own testimony was written to prove that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. In the scores of passages which testify to the godhead of Jesus we find also a large number that clearly teach the omniscience of Jesus, His possession of divine wisdom also in the state of humiliation. In John 5:24 Christ tells the Jews: "He that heareth My Word and believeth on Him that sent Me hath everlasting life," a statement which certainly indicates that Jesus claimed full authority for His teaching. Nor is this declaration modified in any fashion by His explanation in John 7:16 "My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me," since this passage and others like it simply state the full co-ordination and co-operation of the Father and the Son. In other words, there is no independent activity in the matter of the teaching which must be done in bringing salvation to men. Just how far the authority of Jesus extended in the matter of His teaching is plainly shown in John 6:63: "*The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.*" The fact that Jesus claims inherent power for His teaching immediately distinguishes His proclamation of the truth from that of a mere human prophet, as we see from the similar line of argument used by St. Paul in 1 Cor. 2. Paul humbly declares that the words which he taught were those which had been transmitted to him for that purpose by the Holy Ghost, while Jesus speaks with independent authority.

In order not to become repetitious, we shall merely quote most of the other passages in the Gospel of John which assert the same truth. "But now ye seek to kill Me, a man that hath told you *the truth, which I have heard of God* [since He Himself was the Logos in the bosom of the Father]. . . . If I say the truth, why do ye not believe Me? . . . If a man will keep My saying, he shall never see death." Chap. 8:40, 46, 51. "He that rejecteth Me and receiveth not My words hath one that rejecteth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the Last Day." Chap. 12:48. "I am the Way, *the Truth*, and the Life. . . . He that loveth Me not



keepeth not My sayings; and the word which ye hear is not Mine, but the Father's which sent Me." Chap. 14: 6, 24. "If ye abide in Me and *My words abide in you*, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." John 15:7. Cp. v. 15. "He [the Spirit of Truth] shall glorify Me; for He shall receive of Mine and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are Mine; therefore said I that He shall take of Mine and shall show it unto you." Chap. 16:13-15. "I have given unto them *the words which Thou gavest Me*; and they have received them and have known surely that I came out from Thee, and they have believed that Thou didst send Me. . . . I have given them Thy Word." Chap. 17:8, 14. "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice." Chap. 18:37. These passages clearly prove that, by virtue of the essential relationship and equality which obtained between Jesus, even in His state of humiliation, and the Father, He made use of the fullness of His divine wisdom and omniscience in His function as a Teacher, or Prophet. Every word of His teaching was true, not merely by derivation, as in the case of the Prophets chosen by God as His instruments, but by virtue of His possessing the fullness of the deity also in the matter of omniscience, so that He was in full command of this attribute and exerted it in His prophetic office without diminution or restriction.

To this self-testimony of the Lord we must add that of men who testified concerning His authority in teaching as being essentially that of divine omniscience. John the Baptist says of Christ: "He that cometh from above is above all. And what He hath seen and heard, that He testifieth. . . . He that hath received His testimony hath set to his seal that God is true. For He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God; for *God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him*." John 3:21-35. Cp. v. 11 a. Unmistakably clear is also the testimony of Peter in John 6:68, 69: "Thou hast *the words of eternal life*. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." And according to John 21:15-17 Peter spoke the full conviction of his heart when he stated: "Thou knowest that I love Thee. . . . Lord, *Thou knowest all things*." St. Paul likewise cannot be said to speak of Christ only in His state of exaltation when he



writes down the testimony sustained by inspiration of the Holy Ghost: "In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. . . . In Him dwelleth *all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.*" Col. 2:3, 9.

A close examination of these clear passages of Scripture, together with the cumulative effect of their cogency, compels the conclusion that subordination as taught by the kenoticists is contrary to Scripture. The solution of the mystery of His humiliation and its implications is found in the passage referred to above: Christ did not consider the fact of His being equal with God, His essential co-equality with the Father, as a prey, or booty, to be constantly paraded before the eyes of men, but ἐκένωσεv ἑαυτόν, He divested Himself of the continuous and full use of the divine qualities as transmitted to His human nature. He did not always use His omnipotence; for example, in providing a meal for Himself and His disciples, but He ordinarily procured His food as any human being does in his daily life. He did not ordinarily make use of His omnipresence, but moved about with a body which He placed under the limitation of time and space. Yet His omnipotence appears time and again in His miracles, and this attribute was associated with His omnipresence at His will, as we see from John 6:21. Throughout the Gospel narratives it is clear that Christ was in full possession of His godhead, but that He at His will declined to use these attributes.

This is true in particular of His wisdom and omniscience in His prophetic office. So far as *His person* was concerned, He did not divest Himself of the *possession* of His divine wisdom and omniscience, but of its *continual use*. He sat in the synagog school at Nazareth with the other boys, as He did in the Temple hall at Jerusalem, because in His state of humiliation His divine will placed Him under the obligation of being found in fashion as a man. He wanted to be in all things like unto His brethren. But this is not true of Christ in His capacity as Teacher of the truth. He was, as Nicodemus frankly stated, a teacher come from God. In His prophetic office every word of Jesus was a word of divine wisdom, every statement that He made was in full accord with His divine omniscience. It is contrary to Scripture to teach any *kenosis* which postulates the nonpossession of any divine attribute in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The emphasis is



on His choosing not to use any of His divine attributes rather than on any alleged inability to do so. The *Logos*, the eternal Son of God, became flesh, a true human being. But while He was endowed with a true humanity, the disciples nevertheless saw and gave testimony of His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten Son of the Father, full of grace *and truth*.

## Homiletics

### Outlines on the Standard Epistle Lessons

#### FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Rom. 12:1-5

Jesus is the Savior not only of the Jews (shepherds—Christmas), but also of the Gentiles (wise men—Epiphany). Jesus is *our* Savior, and we have learned to know Him as such and believe in Him. Now we should also *serve* Him. To do this, the Apostle encourages us in today's Epistle lesson. He admonishes us to lead a holy life. The language he uses is somewhat unusual, yet very significant. He says,

**BRETHREN, PRESENT YOUR BODIES A SACRIFICE  
UNTO THE LORD**

Let us learn

#### I

*What kind of sacrifice we should bring unto God.*

a. "Brethren, present *your bodies* a sacrifice unto God" (v. 1). To the Gentiles in the congregation at Rome this was perhaps unusual language even as it is to us, but not so to the Jews in that congregation. The Jews in the Old Testament were accustomed to bring sacrifices and to offer them in the Temple. The sacrifice which we are to bring unto the Lord is not a sacrifice to atone for our sins; that sacrifice was brought and offered by Jesus our Savior. The sacrifice which we should now bring unto Him is our very body (that, of course, includes the soul, of which the body is the agent of action); that is, we should give our whole selves in service unto the Lord (2 Cor. 8:5).