

# The Pre-existence of Christ



A. E. KNOCH

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THE KENOSIS OF CHRIST

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*A Treatise on the Pristine Power  
and Glory of God's Anointed  
before His descent to  
become a Man*

BY

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**Concordant Publishing Concern**  
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Almont, Michigan 48003

## INTRODUCTION

GOD'S INSPIRED WORD is beautifully balanced. His revelation is marvelously adapted to the needs of His creatures. Darkly, at first, it deals only with what is present, but gradually becomes more luminous, as we can bear it, and reveals the past and the future. Christ is a dim shadow in the Hebrew Scriptures. Even at His advent, little is revealed of His higher and brighter glories, except through that disciple who was His bosom friend (John 13:23). It is through Paul that we learn most concerning the secret of Christ. He reveals His future celestial exaltation and His past glories as the channel of creation.

When He is fully revealed to our adoring eyes, we no longer doubt His "pre-existence," but praise and worship Him as God's Creative Original in Whom and through Whom all else has been brought into existence. He was the Effulgence of God's glory and the Emblem of His assumption, with His seat at the right hand of the divine Majesty. He was worshiped by His messengers. To the Father He was the beloved Son, the intimate of His heart. But His greatest claim on our affections is the self-effacing disposition which led Him, being inherently in the form of God, to lay aside His pre-eminence for the form of a slave, and to humble Himself and go down to the accursed cross.

May this supreme exhibition of love keep us from ever denying His inherent dignities, and stir us up to emulate His example and to acclaim His name and fame to every creature in the universe!

## CHRIST'S PAST GLORIES

### GOD'S CREATIVE ORIGINAL

In Colossians Paul reveals the future glories of Christ as the Reconciler of the universe (Col.1:20). That speaks of times to come. To balance this we are entrusted with the marvelous position He filled in the past as the Son of God's love. He not only dominates all space, but occupies all time. He is the Image of the invisible God, Firstborn of every creature, for in Him is all created, that in the heavens and that on the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or lordships, or sovereignties, or authorities, all is created through Him and for Him, and *He is before all*, and all has its cohesion in Him (Col.1:15-17).

*He is before all.* We could easily deduce from the fact that He is the *Firstborn* of every creature that He was born before them. But, like most of our reasoning, it would be false. The title "Firstborn" is a figure, used to indicate the place and portion of the first son who is born in a family, but it is freely used of this preeminence, even if it does not come through literal birth. It may come by adoption. It may be transferred to one born later, as in the case of Joseph instead of Reuben. Pre-existence is not "proven" by the place Christ now occupies, nor is it necessary to prove it. That it indicates its probability, all will admit. That it is certain, we know, because He is *before all*.

All was created in Him. As in Adam all mankind was created, so Adam himself and all the rest of creation were created in Christ. It is impossible to conceive that creation was before Him in Whom it was created. How could Adam and the race, up to His birth, have been in the Babe of Bethlehem? And how much more incredible that all the rest of creation, which existed before Adam was formed, should be in a Man Who did not come upon the scene until four thousand years after Adam! All who really *believe* God's Word must bow before Him in adoration, not only as the lowly Son of Mary, but as the Channel of creation, the highest of all God's creatures.

Christ is God's creative Original. According to the Greek, He is the Original, the Beginning, or the Chief, of every creation of God (Rev.3:14). The basic meaning of *arché* is ORIGIN, and all its forms are to be found under this word in the Concordance of the CONCORDANT VERSION (C.V.). In earliest times, all government was in the family, and the father, who *originated* it, was chief. So the stem came to be applied to the highest of a class, as the *archangel*, as well as the *archetype*, the pattern, or original. But the pattern comes *before* the product, the original *before* the copies. This accords perfectly with the fact that all creation was *in* Him. Adam was the original of all mankind, and all *originated* in him. So Christ is the Original of creation.

The past and future glories of Christ are complementary. The Image of God calls for all that finds fulfillment in Him as the complement of the Deity. His preeminence is based on the past as well as the future. As God's Image He is Firstborn of all creation, and the universe, in heaven as well as on earth, was created *in* Him. As God's Complement, He is First-

born from among the dead, and the universe, in heaven as well as on earth, will be reconciled through Him. No latecomer to the scene is qualified or capable of accomplishing the far more difficult task of reconciliation if he had no hand in creation. To deny one is to reject the other. Let us thank His God and ours, that the future rests in the mighty hand of Him through Whom God has wrought so marvelously in the past.

One of the wonders of the Greek language is its indefinite verb. God *loves*, not *loved* the world. It is a fact, not a mere act. So also with the preeminence of Christ. His glories are permanent. He *was*, indeed, before all. But, far more than that, He *is* before all. This is almost more than our language will bear, for we are not accustomed to such high thoughts or refined expressions. When we are old we look back to powers and honors that we no longer possess, for we are creatures of corruption. Even a president or a premier must step down or heed the call of death. They look back to when they *were* exalted. Yes, even Christ emptied Himself for a season for our salvation. But He never went to corruption, as we do. He *is* the One Who was before all, and this glory is His permanent possession. Let us not rob Him of it!

#### "THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD"

It is as the *Image* of the invisible God that He is the Firstborn of all creation (Col.1:15). An image of the Invisible is of necessity visible, and, consequently, *a part of creation*. He is also the "Firstborn from among the dead" (Col.1:18). Here we are at no loss. He is not before and apart from the dead. He Himself was dead and He is the first to be vivified (1 Cor.15:23). As the two phrases, "Firstborn from among the dead," and "Firstborn of every creature" occur in the same

passage and are of the same grammatical construction, they must be interpreted along the same lines. God is not only invisible, "God is spirit" (John 4:24), and so is imperceptible and intangible as well. The Son of God is the visible, tangible embodiment of Deity. Only in Him can we see God. All other images are condemned because they are false and dishonor God (*cf* Deut.5:8).

All creation was in the Son of God's love as the tree and its fruits are found in the seed. In Him God created all else, for the whole universe was created in Him. The two paramount points in universal history are the creation and the resurrection of the Son of God.

Absolutely speaking, "there is no other God except One" (1 Cor.8:4). Thus, "for us there is one God, *the Father, out of Whom all is, . . .* and one Lord, Jesus Christ, *through Whom all is . . .*" (1 Cor.8:6). We have here a marvelously exact and concise definition of the relationship which we sustain to God and to the Lord, which, in turn, throws much light on their respective relationship to each other. Briefly put, God is the *Source* and *Object* of all; Christ is the *Channel* of all. Thus it is always found. We are never said to come *out of* Christ, but *out of* God. Indeed, Christ asserts that He Himself came out of God (John 8:42). *All* is out of God (Rom.11:36).

But God never deals with us except *through* His Anointed. Creation began *in* the Son of God and was carried out *through* Him. He has the same place in redemption. There is no conflict, for, while the Son, as the Image of the Father, is entitled to be called God and to receive the same honor as the Father, yet He Himself insists that His Father is greater than all (John 10:29), and is "the *only* true God (John 17:3). *Metaphorically*, since "*God* no one has ever seen,"

and since Christ "*unfolds* Him" (John 1:18), the One "Who is in the bosom of the Father" may be *termed* "the true God" even as He "is" "life eonian" (*cf* 1 John 5:20). While it is true that the One Who is the Expression, Image, Unfolder, Effulgence and Emblem of God is out of the Father, on the other hand, He is the only way *to* the Father, the only means through Whom we may know God. Hence, while all is sourced in *God*, "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," all is channeled through the Son. It is only by clinging closely to the language of the Scriptures that we may hope to gain a clear conception of the relation of the Father to the Son, and of the Son to the Father.

#### THE EONS PURPOSED IN CHRIST

God disposes of *time* as well as *space*. He did not only create the material universe, but planned its entire history from the beginning to the consummation. As in creation, He works through a Mediator, for the purpose of the eons was made in Christ Jesus, our Lord (Eph.3:11). When Christ was born in Bethlehem, some of the eons had already run their course. The purpose had long been in operation. Innumerable details had been carried out, and the pattern had largely been set, so far as the earth is concerned. In fact, His birth was one of the greatest of the factors which should carry the purpose to fulfillment.

The titles of our Lord, and their order, are always significant. "Jesus, the Christ," applies to His humiliation. "Christ Jesus" is used of Him in relation to His exaltation. We acknowledge the *present* power of our Lord, whether as Prophet, Priest, or King, as the Anointed, in Greek, the Christ. The purpose of the eons was made in Christ Jesus, before He humbled Himself. It was not made in the lowly artificer of

Nazareth, Jesus, Who is the Christ, but Who did not take His proper place when He was among us, in order that He might descend to the deepest depths of death and shame for the sake of our salvation.

WE WERE CHOSEN IN CHRIST  
BEFORE THE DISRUPTION

One part of God's purpose was His choice of us in Christ before the disruption of the world (*katabolē*, DOWN-CASTING, Eph.1:4). He was then holy and flawless, God's beloved Son, Who was to be our Saviour, and Whose celestial glories we were chosen to share. The time designated was long before His descent to the earth, and indicates the marvelous basis of all our blessing, which antedates the cause of all our woe. All creation began *in* Him, and now our reconciliation and glory is also deposited in Him. What marvelous grace to find ourselves in Him *before* sin has ruined the universe! What a wonderful token of our future salvation and glory!

THE DESCENT OF CHRIST

The descent of Christ is touched upon by Paul when speaking of His ascension. "Now the 'He ascended,' what is it except that He first *descended* also into the lower parts of the earth? He Who descends is the Same Who ascends, also, up over all who are of the heavens, that He should be completing all" (Eph.4:9,10). For those who have a celestial destiny, the descent of Christ is vital. He is not an earthling, seeking to usurp a place above the heavenly hosts for which He is not fitted by birth or station. He *came down* to earth and ascended to His proper sphere when He faded from sight on Olivet.

"The first man was out of the earth, soilish; the

second Man is the Lord out of heaven" (1 Cor.15:47). How foolish it is to reason from the accounts of our Lord's birth that He was out of the earth! His Father was God! He was out of heaven! And He was not a mere messenger from above, one of the myriads of workers who do God's bidding, or perchance a stray vagabond, thrust out of the elysian fields. He was the *Lord* out of heaven! We may look long and tenderly at the Babe in Bethlehem, or at the Boy at Nazareth, or even at the Man at Capernaum, and see no trace of His celestial rank. Only occasionally, in His earthly ministry, gleams of heavenly glory break through, as when He ascends before His disciples into the empyrean. He could not reveal these things to them before, as they were concerned with His earthly glories, for they would not have understood.

*Rich* was He, before He humbled Himself (cf 2 Cor.8:9). Because of *us* He became poor. When was He rich? Not in Bethlehem, for His parents cradled Him in a manger. Not in Nazareth, for He worked for a living as an artisan. Not during His ministry, for He had nowhere to lay His head. Not on the cross, for they even robbed Him of His clothes. On earth He was *poor*. He was rich *before* this. He left His celestial wealth and station to endure poverty on the earth. If He had no existence then, how could this be?

#### THE FOUNDER OF THE EARTH

The evangel of the Uncircumcision reveals a celestial destiny. Therefore there is special emphasis on the heavenly side of Christ's glories and His pre-existence. But there are passages in the Circumcision writings quite as emphatic, though they may be connected with the earth. In Hebrews (1:10), in speaking of the Son, we read:

Thou, originally, Lord, dost found the earth,  
And the heavens are the work of Thy hands.

Here, indeed, it is not a question of *His existence*, but of the *existence of all else* through Him! Who would insist that He brought both the heavens and the earth into existence before He Himself existed?

#### THE SON MAKES THE EONS

Even in the Circumcision writings, the Son is acknowledged as the One through Whom God made the eons (Heb.1:2). Hebrews is on a much higher plane than the previous writings to the Circumcision, and is concerned with a *new* covenant with *better* promises. That is why our Lord is introduced as the Son, to Whom is allotted all, the Effulgence of God's glory and the Emblem of His assumption (Heb.1:2,3). The eons were running their course long before our Lord descended from heaven to die for our sakes. There can be no question of His existence at their commencement, even as there is none of His presence at the commencement of creation.

#### HIS FARINGS FORTH FROM DAYS EONIAN

Not only was Christ's birth in Bethlehem foretold by the prophet Micah (5:2), but His previous appearances before this are clearly asserted. The same word is used of His birth as of His *former farings forth*. If His arrival in Bethlehem was merely a prediction, then also His previous farings forth. But if the later event was an actual occurrence, so it must be with the former. They were not *foretellings*, but forth *farings*. The stem *tza* occurs over eleven hundred times and is rendered by over fifty words in the Authorized Version, but never by anything remotely resembling either *telling* or *foretelling*. He appeared more than

once, as to Adam and to Abraham and to Moses. The prophet speaks of all of these. Hence it is plural in Hebrew—forth farings.

#### JOHN'S TESTIMONY TO CHRIST'S PRE-EXISTENCE

It is as the *Son* that our Lord is most often referred to before He came down to earth, hence we find that John's account, in contrast to those of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, speaks of His pre-existence. When we refer to His former glories, we do not mean to convey the idea that He was confined to those which afterward belong to Him as the Christ, the Messiah of Israel, but that these glories were inherently His before His ministry to mankind as a Man. His descent into human form was humiliating, and He conformed to this low estate by clothing Himself with lower dignities. In Matthew He is presented as the King of Israel, in Mark as the Servant of Yahweh, and in Luke as the Son of Mankind. All this is confined to the eons and the earth, hence His earlier and higher honors are hardly in view.

But in John He is the Son of *God*. Consequently, every now and then, gleams of His pristine powers shine through the clouds and we get a glimpse of His glories before He condescended to become a Man. Anyone confining himself to the synoptic accounts of His career might be pardoned if he is not impressed by His previous place of power, since they are not concerned with it. But no one reading John's account can fail to be impressed by the frequent allusions to His pre-existence and the rich glories which were His, in contrast to the poor place He took among men.

#### "THE GLORY WHICH I HAD BEFORE THE WORLD"

In the seventeenth chapter of John's account we are

taken into the holy of holies. The Son speaks to His Father and we are allowed to listen to the deep intimacies of Their love. The Son has glorified the Father on the earth and finished the work which was given to Him. He now requests that He be given *the glory which He had before the world*, with the Father (John 17:5). That, in itself, is a small request, for He had laid His glory aside in order to fulfill His earthly mission. We may be sure that His request will be granted and far more, for He has added to these all the value of His mediatorial humiliation and suffering and a dreadful death.

A deplorable attempt has been made to destroy this passage by explaining the *with* as the equivalent of *predetermined by*, or *prepared for* by the Father. But the *with* is literally *beside*, and cannot bear the sense of *predetermined*, or *prepared for*. There are ten occurrences of *para*, BESIDE, used with the dative case, in John. These are: "they remain *with* Him" (1:39); "the Samaritans . . . asked Him to remain *with* them" (4:40); "What I have seen *with* My Father . . . what you hear *from* your father" (8:38); "the spirit of truth . . . is remaining *with* you" (14:17); "We shall be coming to him and making an abode *with* him" (14:23); "remaining *with* you" (14:25); "glorify Thou Me, Father, *with* Thyself, with the glory which I had before the world is *with* Thee" (17:5); "Now there stood *beside* the cross of Jesus . . ." (19:25). The sense of *beside* is evident in all these and would have been used in the C.V. had English idiom allowed it. Christ had a glory before the world *beside* or *alongside* of the Father.

"ERE ABRAHAM . . . I AM"

Some of the Jews who believed on our Lord, denied His pre-existence (John 8:31-59). He said to them, "If

ever you should be *remaining in My word*, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will be making you free" (John 8:31,32). But they immediately refused His word and prided themselves on their fleshly relationship to Abraham. By their deeds they demonstrated that they had been fathered by the Adversary (8:44) rather than by Abraham, who *believed* God, and walked with Him.

What especially stirred their ire was His statement concerning Abraham, as though He had seen the patriarch Himself. "The Jews, then, said to Him, 'You have not as yet lived fifty years, and you have seen Abraham!' Jesus said to them, 'Verily, verily, I am saying to you, *Ere Abraham came into being, I am*'" (8:57,58). Here the matter of Christ's "pre-existence" is presented as clearly as it is possible to put it. The apostate Jews insisted that He did not exist in the time of Abraham. They were sure that His existence dated no longer back than fifty years. He, however, calmly assured them that it goes back *before* Abraham, more than two thousand years, at least. And, instead of limiting His existence to that time, and saying, *I was*, He opens the door to untold vistas of the past by saying, "*I am.*"

Did they believe Him? Did they receive Him? His deeds proved that He was a real son of Abraham. He kept God's word, as Abraham did. But He also exposed their hypocrisy and unbelief. Instead of falling before His feet and worshiping Abraham's Lord, they pick up stones that they should be casting them at Him. May we not be like these Jews! Our guilt would be ever so much greater than theirs, for we have been given light that they never had. We may not take up literal stones to kill Him, but we do even worse when we deny His primeval dignities.

What was before Abraham? It has been suggested that our Lord was *chosen* before Abraham's day. Certainly. But the word *am* or *be* is by no means the same as *choose*. One could never put *choose* in place of *be* in a translation. It should never be done in a version unless our object is to corrupt the Word of God. Let everyone try it out and be convinced. Did John the Baptist say, I did not *choose* the Christ (John 1:20)? Did our Lord say, I *choose* the Bread of life (John 6:35)? Did He *choose* the Light of the world (8:12), the Door of the sheep-fold (10:7), the Shepherd ideal (10:7), the Resurrection (11:25), the true grapevine (15:1)? No, indeed. He *is* all these, and woe to him who seeks to rob Him of them, or to deny that, before Abraham, He *is*! We might say He *was*. But this is expressed by *ere*. And the sense is not that He *was*, and is no more, but He continues to be.

“THE BREAD WHICH DESCENDS OUT OF HEAVEN”

The manna in the wilderness was a type of Christ. Even as it came down from above, so He came from heaven. He is the Bread which descends out of heaven (John 6:58). But even the disciples found this a hard saying and they murmured among themselves. Did He explain it to them, saying He did not mean that He really had come down from above? That would have kept them from leaving Him, and we may be sure that His heart yearned over them, and He did all that He could to hold them. Instead, He repeated the thought in plainer words, and they left Him.

“WHERE HE WAS FORMERLY”

“If, then, you should be *beholding* the Son of mankind *ascending* where He was *formerly*—?” (John 6:62). When did He ascend? After His resurrection

our Lord said to Miriam, “*not* as yet have I *ascended* to My Father. Now go to My brethren, and say to them that I said, ‘Lo! I am *ascending* to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God’ ” (John 20:17). Was this not to heaven? And, after forty days, “while they are looking, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him up from their eyes.” “This Jesus Who is being taken up from you *into heaven* shall come” (Acts 1:9-11). Then it was that they *beheld* Him ascend, not when He was roused from the dead, but later, to the place where He had been *formerly*.

How could He put it more plainly? At His ascension He did not go to a place unknown to Him, a region He had never seen. He returned to a place and a position which He had already occupied before He laid His glory aside and sank to the level of humanity on the earth. His proper place was not down here, among the degraded dregs of creation, but high above the celestial hosts, upon the universal throne. They should have worshiped the One Who had stooped down to their level in order to bring them back to God. They should have rejoiced that His degradation was only temporary, and that He would once more regain the glories He had laid aside.

“HE WHO DESCENDS OUT OF HEAVEN”

“The first man was out of the earth, soilish; the second Man is the the Lord out of heaven.” He is the Celestial One, Whose image we shall wear (1 Cor. 15:47-49). Thus He is also presented in John’s account. If Nicodemus is not believing concerning *terrestrial* things, how should he believe when our Lord speaks of the *celestial*? John declares, “And no one has ascended into heaven except He Who descends out of heaven, the Son of Mankind Who is in

heaven" (cf John 3:12,13). " 'He Who from above is coming is over all. He who is of the earth is of the earth and of the earth is speaking; He Who is coming out of heaven is over all. What He has seen and hears, this He is testifying . . . ' " (John 3:31,32).

As the true Bread out of heaven, He was foreshadowed by the manna. This did not come up from the soil, as human food usually does, but came down from above. So "the Bread of God is He Who is descending out of heaven" (John 6:33). He said, " 'I have descended from heaven' " (cf John 6:38,41,42,50,51,58). Both the manna and Christ literally descended from heaven. In this they are *alike*. The contrast is not in their source, but in their character and the kind of life that they impart. The contrast between terrestrial and celestial is literal.

## THE KENOSIS OF CHRIST

THE supreme example of self-abasement set before us in the Scriptures is the descent of Christ from the form of God to the death of the cross, from the zenith of celestial glory to the deepest depth of earthly degradation. We are exhorted to cultivate His humble disposition, so contrary to all our own ambitions and counter to the spirit of the world about us, that we may emulate Him in devotion to the welfare of others, though it involves our own humiliation. In the course of this exhortation we are reminded of the *kenōsis* of the Christ, that which changed Him from the form of God to the form of a slave. The Authorized Version does not really translate, but substitutes the oratorical paraphrase, He "made Himself of no reputation." The Revisers courageously give the bold but literal root rendering, He "emptied Himself" (Phil.2:5-11).

This simple statement would never have caused the untold confusion which still seems to surround it, if the commendable zeal of the early fathers and the Nicean council against the Arian faction had not led them to invent a creed, calculated to clear up its meaning. The supposition that men could express clearly and concisely what the Scriptures had failed to clarify is repugnant to anyone who has imbibed but a modicum of the self-effacing disposition which is in

Christ Jesus. The early fathers of the church not only fought for their own superiority in the church but their councils actually considered their creeds superior to the inspired utterances of the Scriptures.

These earnest men would probably have excused themselves on the ground that the creed was *in accord with* the Scriptures, hence not in conflict with the sacred writings. They desired a condensed summary of its teachings. They flagrantly ignored the exhortation to have a pattern of sound words (2 Tim.1:13) and finally settled on expressions which they themselves were reluctant to allow. One such was the Greek word *homoousion*, literally, LIKE-BEING, or like-estate, as descriptive of Christ in the form of God. This by no means settled the point, for it was far more susceptible to devious interpretations than the text it was supposed to explain. As the dogmas of the Nicean creed still dominate the theology of the day, especially as regards the *kenōsis* of the Christ, we give it as it was first issued by the council.

#### THE NICEAN CREED

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things, both visible and invisible; and in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only begotten, *that is to say of the substance of the Father, God of God and Light of Light, very God of very God*, begotten, not made, *being of one estate [homoousion]* with the Father, by whom all things were made on earth; who, for us men and our salvation, came down and was made flesh, made man, suffered and rose again the third day, went up into the heavens, and is to come again to judge the living and the dead, and in the holy Spirit . . .

This was much modified by succeeding councils, for it did not prove to be as satisfactory as they hoped. Indeed, when we come to examine it, what is there in it? Most of it is a jumble of scriptural phrases, to which we can offer no vital objection except the absence of

their contexts. The non-scriptural phrases (which we have italicized to make them prominent) are also unscriptural and irrational. They have been "explained" for more than a millennium, yet no one knows what they mean. They are still repeated as though of far greater sanctity than the words of God Himself. What is the "substance" of the Father? How can God be "of God"? What is Light "of Light"? What is "very" God "of very" God? What is the "one estate" (or substance) of the Father?

We do not bring up these questions to answer them, but to press the point that they cannot be answered. All acknowledge this. Some seem to think that this alone proves that they are true, as though God is more intent on mystifying His creatures than on revealing Himself. We desire to make the definite charge that these false, futile additions darken counsel by words without knowledge, and must be repudiated rather than acknowledged, if we are ever to have any satisfactory insight into the past or future glories of the Son of God. To confine our investigations to the sacred text should ordinarily be sufficient. Yet earnest and honest truth seekers have become so saturated with the errors of the creeds, that they, unconsciously no doubt, view the oracles of God by the light of these human speculations and theories instead of allowing the human accretions to wither away in the light of divine revelation.

A collection of creeds is an interesting and instructive exhibition of human incapacity. With hardly an exception they are *unscriptural* in every place in which they are *non-scriptural*. Even when they present fragments of the pattern of sound words, these are isolated from their special setting and divorced from their true application. I see no harm in a series of

propositions, expressed in scriptural language and kept in their proper place, to indicate the dominant ideas which a group of saints desire to declare and defend. But I would insist on two essentials: the words must be "sound" or scriptural, and the context must be indicated. In this way they are linked up with the divine oracles themselves and the deplorable confusion fostered by the creeds can never occur.

The rational reaction to the Nicean creed should be somewhat as follows: As it was made in the heat of controversy, mainly to oppose Arian teaching, it probably fails, in going to extremes in the opposite direction. The desire to emphasize the deity of Christ led to statements unwarranted by the Word. The causes which called forth the creed were by no means ideal. Its effects also have been most unsatisfactory. Instead of clearing up the matter once for all, it has been the fruitful source for innumerable and unprofitable speculations, until the verdict has been given that it not only *has not been*, but *cannot* be understood. Then the subject is conveniently relegated to the occult by calling it "the *mystery* of the Godhead."

This is a most mischievous "mystery." It is not only unknown to the Scriptures but altogether contrary to the whole purpose of revelation. God has written a book and has sent His Son in order that He should *not* be a mystery. He desires to be known by means of His various revelations in our Lord Jesus Christ. If this is a "mystery," beyond mortal minds, then His whole purpose is a failure. There are secrets in the Scriptures which men could by no means know until the time of their revelation. These are called "mysteries" in some versions. But the relation of Christ to God was never made a secret. Failure to understand it is not due to

God's hiding but to human faithlessness and lack of spiritual perception.

We cannot help having a deep sympathy for the early fathers in their effort to understand what they professed to believe. Faith is not credulity, and craves the consent and cooperation of the mind. While it is intensely "rational" to believe God, even when we cannot understand Him, it is the height of credulity to believe men when their statements clash with the evidence of our senses or the operation of our intellect. If the Nicean creed were inspired by God, nothing would be more reasonable than to believe it, though its statements transcend reason. Being of men, it cannot be superrational, and must be irrational.

The Nicean creed drove the church into the darkness of the middle ages. The Reformation revived the subject of Christ's humanity and deity, and sought to reconcile them on the same lines as the early fathers, who never solved the riddle. Beginning with the same misconceptions, modern theologians have been no more successful. They cloud the issue with creedal presuppositions which effectually keep them from actually considering the Scriptures. Some have made close, scholarly, consistent studies of Christ's *kenōsis*, which should have made the subject clear. But even they are forced to conclude that the solution is as far away as ever. Their eyes are darkened by the "truth" with which they approach the subject. Their light is darkness. No wonder the Scriptures refuse to unlock with such a key!

A thoughtful consideration of the matter should suggest to them that their creedal assumptions are the cause of all the confusion. It is these that prevent the Scriptures from shining forth. But, like apostate Israel, there is a veil on the heart of Christendom and its

orthodox leaders. Evangelical Protestant expositors are more enslaved by the "infallibility" of the ancient fathers than others are by the decrees of the Roman pontiff. If they could only see that the course of the church is to be down and not up, then they could readily understand that its councils are more likely to be wrong than right. They are by no means a court of appeal from the Scriptures.

Besides the intellectual paralysis induced by creedal tradition, the subject is heavily handicapped by unsound words and phrases. Much is made of the two "natures" of Christ, and we are continually referred to His "Person." Nothing concerning these can be found in the Word, but the church council at Chalcedon declared that these two "natures" are perfectly and organically united in one "Person," yet are distinct. We are told that we must neither "confound the natures nor divide the person." We would reply that the best way to do this is to ignore them both, yea, rather, deplore them both, and rigidly exclude them from the problem, for they are false factors which will lead us off into an inextricable maze and mental mist.

In Paul's exhortation he presents for our emulation two distinct acts of Christ, the *kenōsis* and the *tapeinōsis*, the *emptying* and the *humbling*. The first describes His descent from the form of God to the form of a slave; the second His descent from the fashion of a man to the fashion of death most detestable to man and most obnoxious to God—the death of the cross. As He was in the form of God before He took the form of a slave and a human frame, the *kenōsis* is the inspired term for the change which accompanied His incarnation. Hence it has been made the focal point for the discussion of His "nature and Person."

First let us define our terms. What is the literal meaning of *kenōsis*? We may at once discard the common rendering "made Himself of no reputation." The words do not at all represent the Greek, and they have acquired a sinister tinge akin to *disreputable*, which is far from the spirit of the passage. We may be sure that Christ did not commit some sin, some offense, in order to lose His reputation. It is appalling to think that devout and sincere followers of our Lord, who would lay down their lives for His Word, are content to support and circulate such an inconsistent and suggestive translation of this passage.

All are agreed that the literal meaning of the Greek word *ken* is EMPTY, hence the Revisers translate "emptied," which the CONCORDANT VERSION modifies to "empties," because it is a question of fact, not of time, as indicated by the use of the indefinite verb form. There is no strictly literal example of this meaning of the word in the Scriptures. The nearest we can get is used in the phrase "send away empty" (Mark 12:3; Luke 1:53; 20:10,11). In Mark we have a slave sent to farmers to collect the rent for his master. He expects to carry away some of the fruit of the vineyard, but they dispatch him "empty"—without any grapes. We have the same illustration in Luke 20:10, 11.

In most of its other occurrences English idiom forbids the use of the word "empty." Instead, the Authorized Version uses "vain" or "make void." The latter phrase is, perhaps, as close as we can come to the idiomatic meaning of *kenōō*, the word we are studying. There is no better way to assimilate the true meaning of "He empties Himself" than to consider every other passage in which the word occurs. In Romans 4:14 we read: "if those of law are enjoyers of the allotment, faith *has been made void* [literally,

*emptied*], and the promise has been nullified." An "empty" faith would, in this case, be one without any effect.

In 1 Corinthians 1:17 we read: "For Christ does not commission me to be baptizing, but to be bringing the evangel, not in wisdom of word, lest the cross of Christ *may be made void*" (or *empty*). The Authorized Version gives the thought here in its rendering, "lest the cross of Christ *should be made of none effect*." If it were "emptied," the result would be the same as if there were no cross at all.

In the two remaining passages, 1 Corinthians 9:15 and 2 Corinthians 9:3, Paul is concerned that his boasting should not lack results. In the latter instance he has been boasting that "'Achaia has been prepared a year past'" (2 Cor.9:2). If, after all, they should not be ready, then his boasting would be "empty." In these passages the idea is referred to the past, hence they are not as helpful as the other occurrences in fixing the meaning of the word.

Now we are ready to make the application. If faith "emptied" had no effect whatever, and the cross "emptied" totally nullified any results flowing from it, then when Christ, in the form of God, "emptied Himself," or "made Himself void" (as in other passages), He made the form of God of none effect, *He carried nothing that was His in that form into the form of a slave*.

This is the scriptural answer to innumerable theories as to the extent and character of His *kenōsis*. The bare word "empty" must be enriched by its usage in the Scriptures before we fully comprehend its force in this passage. Perhaps a more colorful and accurate rendering would be, "He *vacates* Himself." We should not ask, "Of *what* did He empty Himself?"

The passage fails to specify the details because it includes all. Naught that He was in the form of God was transferred into the form of a slave. He retained only Himself, or as a theologian would express it, His personality. The effect on the form of God on the form of a slave is expressed by the literal "empty" and the idiomatic "void" or "none effect."

This conclusion "empties" the *kenōsis* of its imaginary value in determining the two forms in which He is found in this passage. The form of a slave was not merely a veiling of the form of God. It was no mere limitation of His powers. It was not acting a part. He did not retain all His supposed "attributes" except "omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence," as some assert. The very variety of these theories should be sufficient proof that they have no substratum of truth. The difference between the two forms must be gathered from the qualifying words. One was the form of *God*; the other of a *slave*. These suggest a contrast rather than a continuation.

Our conclusion is in happy harmony with the import of the passage. The disposition which is in Christ Jesus is one of complete humiliation. Applying it to our conduct, we are not asked to limit it to a few of our greater dignities. The specific statement is a decided negative: "*not* each noting that which is his own." This is seen in the lesser example, Paul, who could say, "I am deeming *all* to be a forfeit" (Phil.3:8). He had much indeed, in the flesh, of which he was proud. He gave it *all* up in order to be found in Christ. He had the disposition of Christ Jesus.

#### THE MEANING OF "FORM"

Nowhere, in this passage, do we find the influence of the creeds more powerfully present than in the

attempt of many orthodox theologians to give the word "form" a special and extraordinary significance. In fact the Nicean creed did little else than to repudiate the word "form" and substitute "substance" (or *homoousion*, "like-estate"), and add other confirmatory phrases. Form refers to external appearance. They insist that it must include internal essence. We ourselves were carried along with this traditional view, notwithstanding the concordant evidence against it. The following passages constitute the scriptural evidence:

*morphē*, FORM

- Mk. 16:12 He was manifested in a different form to two of them  
 Ph. 2: 6 being inherently in the form of God  
       : 7 taking the form of a slave

*morphoō*, FORM

- Ga. 4:19 until Christ may be formed in you

*morphōsis*, FORMING

- Ro. 2:20 having the form of knowledge and truth in the law  
 2 Ti. 3: 5 having a form of devoutness, yet denying its power

Leaving the Philippian text out of consideration, only one of these passages will allow the popular idea that "form" is intrinsic and essential, and is "indicative of the interior nature." In Galatians Paul is certainly speaking of an inward work of grace, not a mere outward copy. He desired to see Christ formed *in* them. This passage satisfied us, at one time, that the word "form" meant more than what strikes the eye. We failed to note that this sense is conveyed by the word *in*, not by the verb *form*. Its presence is against our supposition. *It would not be needed if form itself meant an inward work.* It proves positively that "in" is absent from its meaning.

The other occurrences are most helpful and

suggestive, for in each case there is a decided contrast. In Romans (2:20) the word form is used of the opposite of reality. The Jews did not actually possess the knowledge and truth in the law. All they had was the outward form. This usage of the word should be conclusive, yet it is no more so than Paul's description of the men in the "last days" who have a *form* of devoutness, *yet deny its power*. If that "form" is not superficial, lacking the corresponding inward grace, it certainly would not be devoid of power. What could be more conclusive than these two contrasts? In each the form is in contrast to the reality. It does *not* correspond to that which is within.

We must recognize that our Lord's descent from the form of God to the form of a slave is not the only change of form which He experienced. On the holy mount He was transformed (*metamorphoō*, Matt.17:2; Mark 9:2). After His resurrection He was manifested in a different form to two of them (Mark 16:12). A careful consideration of these incidents will lead to the conviction that there was no intrinsic change in Him on these occasions. His face shone and His garments became white as the light, but there was not the least indication of inward alteration when He was transformed.

After He rose from the dead, He was seen by Mary Magdalene. He was evidently the same in appearance as before His death, for she eventually recognized Him even though she was not expecting to see Him alive. But when He accompanied the two disciples to Emmaus, He assumed a different *form*. For the purpose in hand there was no necessity for Him to make any essential change in His "nature" or essence. All He needed was an appearance which they would not recognize. Indeed, they partially pierced His disguise,

for their hearts responded to that which came from within Him, which the outward form failed to affect.

For our purpose it is sufficient to insist that our Lord is not confined to the two forms of which the apostle speaks in Philippians. After He appeared in the form of a slave He was temporarily transformed before some of His disciples in the midst of His ministry, and He assumed an unusual form after His resurrection. We might insist that His subsequent appearances in glory, such as blinded Saul of Tarsus, and caused the beloved apostle to fall at His feet as dead, are still different forms, suited to His new glories. Certainly He is no longer in the form of a slave. In His future unveiling He will be invested with a form in keeping with the might and majesty of His universal empire.

But one more occurrence remains. This is found in the passage itself. At first sight it seems to contradict all that we have learned concerning the true meaning of the word "form." Our Lord took the form of a slave. Are we to understand that He became a servant only in appearance, not in fact? All are agreed that Christ was the ideal Servant. He was not merely clothed in the garb of service, but He served. He Himself assures us that "the Son of Mankind came, not to be served, but to serve . . ." (Matt.20:28); Mark 10:45). Paul gives Him the title "Servant of the Circumcision" (Rom.15:8). There can be no question that Christ is the supreme Servant of God and of men. Why then merely assume the *form* of a *servant*, as it is usually translated?

The solution is simple. He did not take the form of a *servant*, but of a *slave*. The Revisers insert "bond-servant" in their margin. Nor is this a trivial distinction. And it is maintained throughout the Greek Scriptures. Nowhere else in the more than one hundred and

twenty occurrences of the word slave (*doulos*) is it ever applied to our Lord. He was a slave extrinsically, not intrinsically. He appeared as a slave, but He was never in bondage. His own characterization of slavery was never true of Him. "The slave is not aware what his lord is doing" (John 15:15). His was intelligent, voluntary service.

The Greek word for slave or bond-servant (*doulos*) has a more definite and specific signification in the Scriptures than in the Septuagint. There it was used for the Hebrew *obed*, any sort of service or servant. It is certainly not confined to bond service, for it is used of Jacob's service for his wives (Gen.31:41). It is translated *till* and *dress*, in reference to Adam's farming and gardening (Gen.2:5,15). It is frequently called upon to denote the service of the tabernacle. It is the true Hebrew equivalent of our *serve* and *servant*. During the three hundred years between the Septuagint and the Greek Scriptures, the Greek word *diakonia* assumed the meaning of *service*, and forced *douleia* into the specific sense of involuntary servitude. It is often rendered *bond* (1 Cor.12:13; Gal.3:28; Eph.6:8; Col.3:11; Rev.13:16) in antithesis to *free*. Our Lord was never in bondage, however He may have given that impression by His appearance.

Moreover, the expression "slave" falls far short of indicating what He really was. Even "servant" deals with nothing more than His work. It does not tell us Who the Servant is. As a matter of fact, all will agree that His service was *not* that of a slave but that of a Son. If "form" indicates the inward reality, He should have appeared as the Son of God. If we apply the evidence of this phrase logically, we must admit that, actually, He was far, far above a slave, and, therefore, when He was in the form of God, He must have been

far, far above God. But if the "form" is *assumed* in each case for the purpose of divine revelation, all is clear. It is not the function of Christ to display Himself, but to reveal God.

To put the matter bluntly, the form of God was not an outward indication of what He was Himself, but a representation of His God. The word "form" is out of place if we simply mean that His external appearance was consistent with His internal essence. That would not even need to be stated. The mere use of the term *form* should be enough to prove that outwardly He appeared to be Another. His exaltation consisted, not in actually being that Other, but in having the visible appearance proper to the Deity.

Furthermore, just as the Philippian passage does not give all the forms in which He appeared after His incarnation, for He was not in the form of a slave on the holy mount, so it does not refer us to all the forms which He took prior to His *kenōsis*. Besides appearing in the form of God He also appeared in the form of a man and as a messenger. In Philippians we are called upon to consider His highest and His lowest manifestations, for these alone are called for by the exhortation. This discussion has been almost paralyzed by the assumption that Christ had one settled pre-incarnate form, and one fixed form on earth, and a single unalterable form in the resurrection. This is contrary to the facts.

Much light is shed on the form of our Lord before His incarnation by the statement that humanity was created in the image and likeness of God. Mankind is not the original, but a copy. This must have reference to externals, for the language is otherwise unnecessarily involved. *In* our Image and *as* our Likeness, suggests, first of all, that the invisible God

has an Image and Likeness from which a copy could be made. Humanity cannot be a replica of God Himself, Who is Spirit and invisible. The race was made in accord with the form taken by Christ as the Image and Likeness of God. Therefore, if we find our Lord in a form like a man, that is not because He has imitated us, but because humanity was patterned after Him.

He it was Who communed with Adam in the garden of Eden. There is no need to debate whether He was in the form of God or that like man when He visited Adam. It was probably both, for the first man was himself clothed in a robe of light and had an aura of glory which we might mistake for divine. Undoubtedly, the Elohim of that early paradise was in the form of God, which is always presented with human characteristics. It is not that God imitates mankind, in order to reveal Himself to humanity, but that man was formed after the divine Image, and is a replica of his Maker. Our Lord, therefore, probably appeared in Eden as a Man of surpassing outward glory, subdued, perhaps, to accommodate Himself to the capacity of His creature.

It is probable that, in His subsequent patriarchal appearances, this glory was further dimmed, or mortal men could not have lived in His presence. Cain was able to endure the sound of His voice. When He came to visit Abraham as one of three men (Gen.18:2), the patriarch is evidently aware of His identity, for he calls Him the Judge of all the earth (Gen.18:25), yet he entertains Him as though He were a man. As He withdrew from familiar intercourse with mankind, His glory was augmented. At Sinai, only Moses dared climb the holy mount. A few of the people saw the God of Israel. Perhaps it is only here and in the awful

theophanies of Ezekiel and Daniel that we have that manifestation which Paul characterizes as the "form of God."

Let us remember that the divine form does not preclude the likeness of humanity. Ezekiel expressly states that upon the likeness of the sapphire throne was a likeness as the appearance of a *man* (*adam*, Ezek.1:26). In the center of a sublime setting for the vision of God, the divine majesty is seen in human form with superhuman glory. Isaiah, in his sixth chapter, is not so specific. Nevertheless, what other than a human shape can be imagined? He sits on a throne. He speaks a human language. All of this seems conclusive that the form of God is like that of a glorified man, because He is both the Image of God and the pattern of humanity.

In the resurrection the Lord could readily assume another form. The powers of a physical frame, such as He then possessed, are quite unknown to us, who are deadened by sin and enslaved by corruption. Before He took a body of flesh, there is no reason why His appearance to human perceptions should not be absolutely under His control. It is largely a question of glory or the diffusion of power. When He was transformed from a slave upon the holy mount His physical frame underwent no change in shape. The difference seemed to consist principally in the effulgence of light. His very clothing became glistening. The Son of God is the Effulgence of the divine glory. This shone through the temporary and abnormal form of a slave on the holy mount.

After all this investigation we came back to the simple, natural, unforced meaning of the words. The form of God was the material, visible representation of the invisible spiritual Deity. No one has ever seen God

(John 1:18), for He is invisible (Col.1:15). In Colossians the Son of God supplies the needed link with creation because He is the Image of God. In Philippians we have the same thought with only a slight variation, to suit the context. Both the Form and the Image appeal to the eye. This is after the manner of Paul. John appeals to the ear, for He calls Him the *Logos*, or Word of God. In each case Christ is the Mediator of God and mankind. Human ears cannot hear God and human eyes cannot see Him, but they can listen to the living Word and perceive the Image and the Form.

The Form, however, was not the means of communication, but the evidence of exaltation. When Isaiah saw Yahweh, exalted and uplifted on His glorious throne, with all the accompaniments of Deity, he was overwhelmed by the awful sublimity and magnificent majesty of Him Who sits on the throne. Though he was the great prophet who rebuked the failings of his people, he is utterly humiliated by the sight and cries out in dismay, " 'My eyes have seen the King, Yahweh of hosts! ' " (6:5). The representation he saw was the Image of Yahweh. The Form that He saw was the glory of God. The marvel for us to discern is this: that this glorious One was not disposed to exploit that glory for His Own ends. He had the *heart* of God as well as the form of Deity, and was disposed to vacate it, empty Himself of it, and take the form of a slave in order to further reveal God's most inmost affections.

#### "EQUAL WITH GOD"

There is much confusion in our translations in regard to the equality with God which comes in connection with the form of God. Was this a possession or

a prize which He did not seize? The Authorized rendering, "thought it not robbery to be equal with God," evidently conveys the idea that He *was* equal. The margin in some editions, however, change "robbery" to "a thing to be grasped at," which implies that He was *not* God's equal. This interpretation is followed by the Revisers, who render it, "counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God," and gives us the marginal alternation, "a thing to be grasped." The tendency of modern scholarship is against the idea that Christ was, in any sense, God's equal. This, we are told, is a height to which He did not aspire.

But modern scholars are no more infallible than ancient creeds. Indeed, since we know that the normal tendency is toward apostasy, we should always ask for the evidence. A literal concordant translation of the clause is as follows: "NOT SNATCHING deems THE TO-BE EQUAL TO-GOD." Does *snatching* (*harpagmos*) refer to the *act* or the *thing*? In the original the word occurs in four forms, as follows: *harpazō*, SNATCH, verb; *harpax*, SNATCHER, noun; *harpagē*, SNATCHING, noun; and *harpagmos*, SNATCHING, another form of the noun. The poverty of the English language makes it necessary for us to use —ing for two distinct forms of the noun. The point in our problem lies in distinguishing between them. Why did the inspired writer use the special form *harpagmos* in this passage instead of the usual *harpagē*?

The Authorized Version renders *harpagē*, *extortion* (Matt.23:25), *ravering* (Luke 11:39), and *spoiling* (Heb.10:34). "The *spoiling* of your goods" evidently refers to the *pillage* of their goods. In both of the previous references, men are said to be *full of* extortion or ravering. It is evident that this word does not refer directly to the act, but to its effects. On the

other hand, the ending of *harpagmos* connects it with a group of words which convey the idea of *action*. If one denotes *pillage*, this should be *pillaging*, the committing or carrying out of the act. The same distinction is seen in *baptismos*, baptizing (Mark 7:4; Heb.6:2; 9:10) and *baptisma*, baptism (e.g., Matt.21:25). Hallowing and cleansing are further examples. The pillaging in this passage is an act, not a thing.

Equality with God was not a thing Christ refused to grasp. He acted *as* God's equal and He did not deem the *act* extortion or ravening or spoiling or robbery, to use the renderings of this root given in the Authorized Version. It was not pillaging. The point of the passage lies in the extremes—equality with God and the death of the cross. The apostle is going to the limit in his exaltation of Christ. *To all appearances* the form of God put Him into the place of equality with God. For creatures, seeing Him, saw God, and addressed Him by means of the titles which belong only to God and to His Image and Form.

The principal objection to this interpretation from the standpoint of language is the following disjunctive, "but." It would be fatal were it not for the fact that, in Greek, this disjunctive has a wider range than our English "but" (and includes our "nevertheless" (cf Mark 14:29; Acts 9:6; Rom.6:5; 1 Cor.8:6; 9:2,12; 2 Cor.4:16). He was in the form of God, and deemed equality no pillaging—*nevertheless* He emptied Himself. To show the transcendent humility of His disposition, He must be exalted first. It is no great thing for a subordinate or a sinner to be humble. It is the marvel of the universe that the highest perceptible Being has stooped to its lowest depth. *Equality always denies identity*, and must ever be relative, or it

becomes identity. It is the *Form* which was equal with God.

Too little attention has been paid to the denial that equality with God would amount to pillaging on His part. However we translate the word, all agree that it consists in taking away the possessions of another by violent or unjust methods. This involves two distinct parties, one of whom lacks what another has. Christ lacked equality with God, yet, being in the form of God, He *assumed* it. In doing so He did not deprive God of anything, hence did not deem it pillaging. Indeed, since He appeared to those who beheld Him as God would appear if He were visible, He could take nothing from God without, at the same time, investing Him with it. The glory Isaiah saw was the glory of God, yet He saw it in the form which was Christ.

In this statement we were careful to use the word *assume*, because such key words should be taken only from the divine vocabulary. Among the glorious ascriptions to the Son of God in the opening prelude of the epistle to the Hebrews are the two declarations that the Son is the Effulgence of God's glory and the Emblem of His *assumption*. The usual renderings of this word (*hypostasis*), *confidence*, *person*, *substance*, must yield to the one idea which suits each text, as we have fully explained elsewhere. The assumptions of Deity are made known in the Son, Who likewise assumes the character in which God is presented.

We find then that Christ took all that belonged to God in such a way that there was no wrong involved. As He was the only Mediator through Whom God could come into contact with His creatures, He must assume equality with the Deity or fail to properly present Him. An idol misrepresents God. It would be deceptive to give it divine attributes. The true Image

reveals God and should have all that may be perceived of Deity.

The word "equal" may easily provide material for endless controversy. But this is not at all necessary, for all expressions are used in a relative sense. If all the terms we use were taken in an absolute sense, without reference to the subject, the scope, or the context in which they are employed, there would be an end of all intelligent intercommunication. The subject is the visible, tangible *Form* of God, such as His creatures can perceive. In every particular this Image appeared to be equal to, or the same as, God Himself.

Of one thing we may be sure. He did not only empty Himself of the form of God, but He also left equality behind. When the Jews charged Him with making Himself equal to God (John 5:18), He does not defend the supposed claim. Instead, He points out the inequality between the Son and the Father. This may help us to perceive what constituted the equality. The Son can *do nothing of Himself*. When He was in the form of God no such inequality could be perceived. The fact that the Form of God could lay aside equality is sufficient to show the distinction between the invisible, immutable Deity and His Image. He could not lay aside equality with Himself!

The *kenōsis* of our Lord consisted in vacating His place supreme, in which He had manifested the heights of God's glory, apart from sin, for the place of a slave, in which He reveals the depths of His love, by suffering for sin. Much futile reasoning has been indulged in concerning the *nature* of God. The Form of God has been identified and interpreted as His nature. This word is never used in the Scriptures in connection with this theme. To bring it in only betrays ignorance and creates confusion.

## "THE FORM OF A SLAVE"

We must reiterate the fact that the *kenōsis* did not make Christ a *slave*. He became a *servant* in the *form* of a slave. Though His service is so fully set forth in the Word, there is not a single hint that He was in bondage to either man or God. Though the term slave (*doulos*) is freely used of His disciples and the saints, He never takes it or accepts it as His Own. His service was *not* that of a slave, for He knew His Father's will and what He was doing. But those who saw His form found no indication of His divine commission in His physical circumstances. He appeared to be like other men, sold and subject to forces outside of themselves, entirely apart from their own volition.

## THE INCARNATION

Some may ask, How was the *kenōsis* accomplished? We know that, in the process, He came to be in the likeness of humanity. Nothing of the form of God is carried over. His "self," or personality, vacates the glorious form and takes up its abode in a physical body *adapted* for His mission. Like all mankind, His body came from Adam through His mother, but unlike them, His spirit did not come through the first man and his posterity, but directly from God Himself.

Instead of confining their attention to the *kenōsis*, theologians could far more profitably have concerned themselves with the *katartisis*, the readjustment, or adaptation, of Christ's body. Whatever body He had before incarnation, it is evident that it was not fitted for the great object for which He came. It was not mortal. It could not die. He must have a body, not mortal in the sense of dying, but mortal in the sense of capable of death. He must be the great Antitype of all the sacrifices. Hence we read (Heb.10:5):

Sacrifice and approach present Thou dost not will,  
Yet a body dost Thou adapt to Me.  
In ascent approaches and those concerning sin Thou  
dost not delight.  
Then said I, "Lo! I am arriving—  
In the summary of the scroll it is written  
concerning Me—  
To do Thy will, O God."

The Authorized Version rendering, "prepare," fails to fully convey its significance. The body He took was in the nature of an *equipment*, purposely designed for sacrifice. The human body is especially adapted to this, hence He was found in the likeness of humanity. Such phrases as this and that which describes Him as "being found in *fashion as a human*" (Phil.2:8) confirm the fact that the human element in His constitution was in His body, His flesh, that which has the shape and tangible likeness of humankind.

This process confirms and emphasizes the facts of our findings. Almost all theories of the *kenōsis* demand some definite connection between the form of God and that of a slave, in order that there may be the transference of attributes or power or glory or "nature" or something—no one seems sure just what. But there is no ground for this whatever. The virgin Mary was an entirely new element in His new form. The spirit of God, His Father, is not identified with His previous form. There is an entire break, except in selfhood. This may be illustrated by death and resurrection, though we do not by any means imply that it was either. The body dissolves in death. Other elements will constitute the resurrected frame. Only the personality continues.

There is no dual "nature," one a remnant of His previous form and one acquired by generation from Adam. The *kenōsis* denies this rather than supports it.

It is a vain speculation founded upon error. The transference of personality does not create such a monstrosity. It is reasonable, sane, and scriptural. Christ could speak of His place with the Father before the world was without implying that His human body was involved.

Some may marvel that there seems to be no definite statement on this subject in the Scriptures. Rather let them be amazed that no attention is paid to the one there given. It is just where we would expect to find it, at the very opening of Paul's Roman epistle (Rom.1:3,4). The moment he mentions the Son, he halts the flow of the argument to give a lucid, cogent, and satisfactory explanation of the incarnation. The parenthesis reads as follows: "Who comes of the seed of David according to the flesh, Who is designated Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead." His "personality" is divided into two elements, flesh and spirit. His flesh comes from David: His most holy spirit comes from God. His soul was the result of their union.

Only His soul is complex. He does not have a divine body and spirit, and a human body and spirit merged into one. His body was not divine. He had a spirit which was superhuman. The supposed difficulties connected with the fusing of the two diverse elements are mostly imaginary. Once we see that the union is found in His *soul*, which is the seat of consciousness, sensation or experience, all becomes clear. The souls of all humanity are the product of these two elements, flesh and spirit. Our own soul, our own sensation, is the effect of body and breath, just as that of Adam, when he was created (Gen.2:7). The difference between other men and the Son of God is not in the number or name of their components, but in the spirit

He received at His generation. The divine spirit operates as readily with flesh as the human spirit which we have.

The differences between Him and us are all connected with the spirit. Let us note how briefly the apostle deals with His human side. He is of the seed of David according to the flesh. No further explanation is necessary or desired. But when His spirit is in view, we are given intimations of the great distinguishing qualities which emerge. He is designated Son of God *with power*, or, as we are accustomed to put it, He is *powerfully* designated Son of God. The human spirit is weak and is being destroyed by sin and death. Every human born into the world (except our Lord) is so lacking in vitality and is enslaved to sin, that his life is but a lingering death. In contrast with this, the spirit He was given made Him *powerful* and *holy*. The latter quality is emphasized by using the Hebrew idiom—the spirit of holiness—His *holy* spirit.

Man's spirit fails in death. Christ's spirit restores life. There can be no greater proof that He is the Son of God, that His is a powerful and holy spirit, than in counteracting the effects of infirmity and sin, by the resurrection of the dead. A preacher once decided that he would study the funeral sermons of our Lord in order to improve his own. But he could not find any! Until His Own decease, we do not find our Lord in the presence of death except as its conqueror. He shared the intense vitality imparted to Him by God, in recalling the dead to life. The little girl, the widow's son, and Lazarus, all acknowledged the power of His holy spirit, which marked Him off from all mankind. He was the *Son of God* as to His spirit. On this all else is based. It is vital. It is essential.

The more vague, yet graphic language of the

Hebrew seer suggests an illustration of this vital union (Isa.11:1):

A Twig shall fare forth from the set slip of Jesse,  
And a Scion from his roots shall be fruitful.

The Twig is the natural growth from the stock, or set slip, of David's father, just as the flesh of Christ came from him by natural generation. The Scion, or Graft, however, is abnormal. It is not taken from Jesse, but from his root. It does not grow from him but is grafted into him. Yet the scion combines perfectly with its stem. It shares the life of the stock, yet the form and flavor of the fruit flows from the scion, not the stock. Thus does the flesh and spirit unite in Christ, only the spirit dominates the flesh and determines the rich quality of His words and works.

The humanity of Christ is best learned by a comparison with Adam, from whom all humanity flows. This is done by Paul in his first Corinthian letter (15:45). "The first man, Adam, 'became a living soul;' the last Adam a vivifying Spirit." The language is emphatically figurative. Adam was not devoid of a body and a spirit, but these are dominated by his soul. Men today are soulish, ruled by their sensations. In contrast with this, the last Adam was a Spirit. We know that He also had flesh and a soul. He spoke of both. But these were subordinate to His spirit. Hence He is called a Spirit, though He vehemently denied being such in resurrection, when He appeared more like a spirit than before His death. Other men receive no spirit until they breathe at birth. He was generated by the holy spirit of God (Luke 1:35).

Similarly, "The first man was out of the earth, soilish; the second Man is the Lord out of heaven" (1 Cor.15:47). Adam was not entirely soil. God gave him the breath of the living. So with his descendants.

They are soilish, though they breathe the air of heaven. So with the second Man. His body was of soil, as other men. But His personality is not to be traced to the soil as ours is. He was in the heavens and came down. He is a celestial.

All of this, though occurring in a passage on resurrection, has to do with His incarnation, His humanity before He was roused. Then He was the Lord out of heaven and a life-giving Spirit. He was far superior to Adam. They were not on the same plane. Adam imparted death to himself and to his posterity. The last Adam restored life to the dead who met Him during His earthly ministry, and will impart it to all who die in the first Adam.

To conclude: The generation of Christ by the holy spirit of God is the cause of His divinity and the key to His humanity. In mankind spirit and flesh naturally operate to give life and sensation, or soul. So His divine spirit naturally operated with His human body to make Him what He is. To insist on meaningless, unscriptural phrases, such as "a *real* Man," and "*very* God" is only a mask of ignorance. He is *not* the same as other men. He is *not* the same as God. He is their *Mediator*. He has a divine spirit and a human body. His flesh came through Mary and David and Abraham and Adam. His spirit came from God.

#### HIS HUMILIATION

The humiliation of Christ is the second step in His descent from divine equality to unexampled shame. It must not be confused with His *kenōsis*, or self-voiding. That was effected before His humiliation, and led to His coming into a human likeness. It was only after He was found in fashion as a man that He humbled Himself. The same disposition governs both. He

refuses to exalt Himself and seeks the weal of others. But the mere fact of becoming a man is not necessarily humiliating. Apart from sin, mankind, made in the image of God, is a noble race. It is no disgrace to be human.

The theologians of the Reformation, as well as more modern writers, are very insistent on the "true" humanity of Christ. Again and again we are warned that He was a "real" Man. It reminds us of the opposite extreme of those who insist that He is "very" God. Then when they try to combine the "real" Man and the "very" God by means of the two "natures," they find themselves outside the Bible altogether, for no such monstrosity is found within its covers. No one is very sure what "very" and "real" mean in this connection. It is just that, since it seems to be the height of heresy to believe otherwise, most of us keep the peace and save trouble by nodding a dubious affirmation.

If the term "real" implies that He is exactly the same as other men, we deny it absolutely. His spirit came from God, yet differed radically from others. That He was in all things *like* His brethren (Heb.2:17), has reference to His capacity for suffering and consequent sympathy for those in trial. Such expressions must be subject to their contexts and the facts. He is often called a "Man." It would be intolerable pedantry if the Scriptures always reiterated distinctions which have no bearing on the matter in hand. But when the actual subject of His relationship to the race is discussed—as in this passage—the language is most exact. Then we learn that He came to be in the *likeness* of humanity, and was found in *fashion as* a man (Phil.2:7).

Christ is the *Mediator* Who links humanity with its

Creator, so that He is neither man nor God in an absolute sense, yet He is either in a relative one. The combination is not that of two alien "natures" which can never be harmonized, but that of body and spirit, the same elements which unite perfectly to form the souls of all other men. His humanity consists in a body derived from Adam through the virgin Mary, His human mother. His deity consists in a vivifying spirit directly from God. These two fuse freely to make a Man unique and a God unparalleled—the peerless Man and the only begotten God (John 1:18).

That His generation by holy spirit did not affect His physical form in such a way as to publicly differentiate it from other men is evident. Even when the Jews knew that He claimed to be God's Son, many could see nothing to substantiate it, or, at best, they held Him for a prophet. His deity was not evident, for His form was that of a slave. He was so like other men that they took Him for a mere man. How is it that the spirit to which He owed His life did not alter His physical appearance and make Him a superman Whom the world could recognize?

We must remember that, in the beginning of the race, Adam was formed from the soil of the ground before the breath of the living was added to vitalize his frame. When the spirit was added, it did not affect his size or shape. It simply made him *live*. That is the function of spirit. It imparts life. The entrance of sin introduced death. Humanity became a dying race. The spirit remains with its members only a brief span of years. Sin was perpetuated by the transmission of death. Such would not have been the case with Christ if He had been a "real" man, and had had a human father. Instead, the spirit gave Him *life, abundant life*.

Here is the basic distinction between Christ and

other men. Their vitality is limited. Their life is a process of dying. This is what makes them sinners. Sin is not some subtle, unknown principle which mysteriously passes on from parent to child. It is the by-product of the death process (*cf* Rom.5:12; 1 Cor.15:56). This is what we "inherit." This is what makes sinners of us all. If our Lord had received His spirit by human generation, His life also would have been a process of dying and might have ended in a natural death, and, like ourselves, He would have been caused to sin as a result. But, thanks be to God, the spirit He received gave Him life—abundant life—so that death was not operating in Him, and sin found no "soil" in Him. Sin can thrive only in men who are dying.

Let us adoringly acknowledge then that Christ was made in the *likeness* of humanity. He was not simply spotless and unsullied in His acts. It was not that He succeeded in overcoming the universal tendency to sin which afflicts humanity, but that He had no such tendency to overcome. This was not due to some special miraculous intervention which counteracted the sin He should have supposedly inherited from His mother Mary, but simply and solely to the divine paternity which endued Him with a fresh and sin-repelling vitality, which would have kept Him alive forever if He had not deliberately laid down His life for us, in order that He might take it up again in resurrection.

There is a divine contrast between the words *form* and *fashion* (*schēma*) in this passage. It is usually explained that *fashion* is the *outward* and *accidental*, while *form* is the *inward* and *essential*. We have seen the fallacy of this. Form is the external, and by no means necessarily indicates the inward essence. Christ

was not the form of Himself, but of Another. Such a distinction has no place whatever in this passage. A “fashion” is rather a temporary and special kind of form. This is evident from the single other occurrence: “The fashion of the world is passing by” (1 Cor.7:31). The present form of the world is abnormal and fleeting. So with mankind. Its present “fashion” is degrading, but, like all such fashions, is due to change.

We are now approaching the heart of our subject—the humiliation. *Because He was found in fashion as a man*, He humbled Himself. Being a human being is not in itself a cause for humiliation. The day is coming when it will be the cause for highest exultation. But to be found in the shape in which humanity finds itself now, its present “fashion”—sunk in sin and degradation, at enmity with God—this is the proper reason for the deepest humiliation and self-abhorrence.

Human depravity was the prevailing “fashion” of the race when Christ found Himself a member of it. This is by no means its *natural* state, either internally or externally. We have so corrupted the meaning of the word *nature* that we have lost much light on the problem of sin. Human *nature* (*phusis*; *SPROUTING*) is not at fault. It has not been debased by sin. The real meaning of the word in the Scriptures is *instinct*. The sins which afflict mankind are *against* nature (Rom.1:26). The nations do by nature (or instinct) things contained in the law (Rom.2:14). Nature teaches us correctly (e.g., 1 Cor.11:14) if we only heed it. Nature, or instinct, may, like conscience, be stultified and suppressed by sin, but it is not, in itself, sinful.

The “fashion” of humanity which leads to humiliation is not the result of a sinful “nature.” Nor

does the remedy consist in the impartation of a new "nature." There is no passage of Scripture to prove that the "nature" of Christ was different from other men. The intrusion of this term here is a hindrance to our apprehension of the truth. It is true that *in* their nature, or in the course of natural generation, the Jews became children of indignation just as did the nations (Eph.2:3), but nature here is merely the *channel*, not the cause of sin. Human nature, or instinct, and human conscience remain in spite of sin and as a protest against sin. Why, then, should we ever conceive of them as intrinsically sinful? We should not, for man's sinfulness resides in his *heart* and *disposition* (cf Matt.15:18,19; Rom.8:7). It is not sourced in his nature. And it is due to his mortality, not his created essence. These considerations account for the fact that though God *made* man upright (Ecc.7:29), nonetheless, due to his involuntary *subjection to* mortality and vanity by the hand of God (cf Gen.2:17; Rom.8:20,21), he has become fettered to Sin, in "the slavery of *corruption*."

The humiliation of the divine Man may be graphically figured by exaggerating the lack of life, which is the real support of sin. It was as though He alone were endowed with life and all about Him were putrefying corpses. An intolerable stench and gruesome sights certify to the degradation of mankind. Indeed, the world to which He came was a vast cemetery and a slow funeral procession in which all were marching to a ghastly tomb. We do our best to hide this shame. We deny death and deck it with flowers. We refuse to bow our heads or humble our hearts, even when death ends in actual disintegration and corruption.

But death, the process of dying, the only form of life

we know since Adam's transgression, was quite as offensive to His sensitive soul as the dissolution of the body is to us. All about Him death reigned, and was evident to His perceptions by its vile odor, sin. "I am come that you might have life," He tells them, but their senses are so far gone that they do not even know that they are dying and reeking with the offensive evidence of mortal disintegration. Once we see that His spirit, fresh from God, gave Him life abundant, so that He was mortal only in the sense that He *could* die, not in the sense that He was undergoing the process—as all other men—we hold the key to His unique humanity and need no creeds to supplement the simplicity of the divine oracles.

He was not as other men in this regard, and, if He had shared the disposition of His fellows, it would undoubtedly have been the basis of great pride and boasting. Let us put ourselves in His place. All that we do is right. Almost all that others do is wrong. Could we endure such a test? Instead of humbling us it would make us haughty. All we would care to do would be to condemn. Here is where His disposition shines. Here is a glory, a moral excellence, which could not be revealed by Him when in the form of God. That glorious theophany was not a full-orbed revelation. It needed to be complemented by His course when found in fashion as a man. God, in His lofty excellence, cannot reach our hearts. We must see Him in the midst of misery and woe. Here it is that He wins our affections through the humiliation of His Anointed.

#### "THE DEATH OF THE CROSS"

Death itself is a humiliation, whatever may be its form. It cannot be disassociated from sin in some

shape. Much greater was its shame to Him Who not only had life in Himself, but Who had recalled the dead to life. It is evident that His death was entirely voluntary. Neither the Jews nor the Romans could take His life from Him. Whatever disgrace His death may bring to Him, He brings it on Himself. He needed no one to humble Him. He humbled Himself. His death was due to obedience, not to man, but to God.

But the shame of His death is not to be compared to the degradation of the cross. It is the *manner* of His death that plunged Him into the deepest abyss of abject ignominy and utter despair. Some forms of death have a halo about them, and call forth the applause of men. But the cross was reserved for the vilest and meanest of criminals. From the human aspect the Roman law had no more degrading death than crucifixion. Like hanging at the present day, it was the symbol of the most shameful end which could be devised to put a stop to a detestable career. The pain, the publicity, the appalling ignominy far exceeded the very worst of modern methods of execution.

How far all this is from the mind of Christendom is shown by the present prevalence of this dreadful symbol. To be sure, there is not the slightest ground for supposing that our Lord was hung upon a cross of any kind. It was a mere stake or pole, without any cross-piece. There was nothing ornamental about it. But the figure of the cross has seized the imagination of the masses. If they had any sense at all of its shuddering horror, it would be avoided and banned as accursed, instead of lending its shape to jeweled pendants and ecclesiastic art. All this is a travesty, an insult, to the awful humiliation of which it is supposed to be the sign.

The human side of the crucifixion is a tragedy not altogether beyond the reach of our apprehensions. We have some standards of comparison by which to acquaint ourselves with some aspects of it. If He were a man like other men we could possibly plumb its dreadful depths. But He was not as others. Shame is relative. A callous brute does not feel an insult which would torture a sensitive soul. No mere man could suffer from the taunts, the mockery, the ignominy of the cross, as One Who came from the heights of glory, where the very cherubim veiled their faces in His presence. He alone can realize the stupendous contrast, or feel the fearful horror of being despised by the dregs of Adam's degraded race.

But the manward side of the cross cannot be compared with the Godward aspect of the accursed tree. Men had long been hostile to Him. The cross was but the culmination of a long course of events in which He suffered the ridicule and abuse of His fellows. Not so the curse which fell from heaven when the sun withdrew and the darkness hid the scene from mortal gaze. Through all of His humiliations heretofore He had been upheld by the hand of God. At the very crisis of His ministry, when it became apparent that He was rejected, He could find consolation in fellowship with the Father. "I am acclaiming Thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for Thou hidest these things from the wise and intelligent . . ." (Matt. 11:25).

It must have been in the nature of a grave disgrace for Him to realize that His efforts had not succeeded in their apparent object. Even in these days, notwithstanding our awareness that the apostasy is part of God's plan, it is extremely trying for His servants to find such a feeble response to His truth. Yet He always had recourse to God and never failed to

find solace in His presence. Until He hung upon the tree God's smile was His constant comfort. He never forsook Him. The more men withdrew, the closer God came. In the natural course of events, we would expect all others to flee, but that God would stand by Him in the supreme crisis of the cross.

From this standpoint, we view from afar the starkest tragedy of all creation. Here we are able to glimpse the bottomless abyss of His humiliation. Here He Who knew no sin was made sin. Here He Who alone had kept the law endured the law's anathema, "Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree!" Instead of communion He endured God's curse! Instead of fire coming down from above upon His murderers, it enters His bones. Hitherto sinless, He becomes sin, and, like the sin offering, He is shut out of God's holy presence. In solemn sympathy with the awful darkness that enveloped His soul, the sun, a symbol of God's light and life and love, hides its beams until the work is finished.

"*'Eloi! Eloi! lema sabachthani?'*" that is, 'My God! My God! why didst Thou forsake Me?' " gives us the character and suggests the cause of Christ's deepest humiliation. His persecution by men and desertion by His disciples is a disgrace hardly worthy of mention in comparison with His abandonment by the Deity. It was God Who *desired* to crush Him, and *caused* Him to be wounded (*cf* Isa.53:10). Why? That He may bless all others. That He may be just and the Justifier of those who believe. That God may reconcile all His creatures to Himself. The abandonment of Christ by God is the source of all salvation, the root of all reconciliation. This is the folly that is wiser than man, the weakness that is stronger than all, the display of love which will overwhelm every heart.

We must not miss the vivid contrast presented by the exalted station of Christ as the equal of God and His abandonment on the cross. He begins as close to God as possible. No creature could approach the Deity except through Him. To all intents and purposes, He was God, so far as creation is concerned, and He had the form which is suitable to the Supreme. In the dark hours of the crucifixion He is at the opposite extreme. In the midst of physical degradation and moral ignominy He hears the taunts of those who claimed the closest communion with His God, and the contempt of the lowest of the vicious and the vile. He is as far as possible from the place He once had occupied.

It would be well if all theological theories regarding God and His Christ were examined in the darkness of the cross. Absolute Deity does not address another Deity as "My God." God, the Father, is Supreme. He has no God. If He had, He would not be God. Absolute Deity cannot be abandoned by Another, is not dependent on Another, and certainly would not suffer humiliation if anyone deserted Him. Neither can He die, and commit His spirit to God Who gave it. On the other hand a man like other men might do all these things and affect little except his own soul. Nothing would be accomplished for others. No one but a Mediator, divine in spirit, human in body, with a soul, the fusion of both, will satisfy our reason or fulfill God's revelation.

We have no hesitancy in averring that death is not possible to proper deity. We cannot even force our imagination to conceive of the death of God, for with Him all life would vanish from creation. It is even difficult for us to realize that the Son of God could sink to such a state. He Who gave life to others, even after they had died, could have kept Himself alive under all

conditions. This is both reasonable and scriptural. But it is no less rational and revealed that He had the right to die, if it was God's will. And this is precisely what He claimed. He became *obedient* unto death—even the death of the cross!

#### HIS EXALTATION

“Wherefore, also, God highly exalts Him, and graces Him with the name that is above every name, that, in the name of Jesus, every knee should be bowing, celestial and terrestrial and subterranean, and every tongue should be acclaiming that Jesus Christ is Lord, for the glory of God, the Father” (Phil.2:9-11). It is essential that we see the close connection of this exaltation with His humiliation, as well as its contrast to the glories which were His before He emptied Himself. Both can be summed up in a single word—salvation. It is concentrated in His name. He was Yahweh. Now He is Jesus—Yahweh the *Saviour*.

Before His *kenōsis*, when He was in the form of God, He was such because God had given Him that honor. He did not seize it for Himself. So also is His present and future exaltation. It is God's response to His sufferings and humiliation. To the name that once stood for the highest of God's theophanies, Yahweh, has been added the greatest of God's activities—salvation. As Yahweh, Christ could have coerced the knees of all creation and required the acclaim of every creature, for He had the right to universal homage. But He did not choose to enforce His rights, but rather relinquished all in order to win their hearts by the more potent process of suffering and shame.

If all that He gains in His future exaltation is the forced acknowledgement of His omnipotence by unwilling knees and reluctant tongues, then all His

humiliation has been in vain. As Yahweh, He could have accomplished this, before He descended to the accursed tree. It is as Saviour that He will receive, without compulsion, the acclamation of all creation, the worship of every living intelligence. The glory and the grandeur of His exaltation is embodied in the lowly name which shall become supreme. His salvation shall assure Him universal worship, His deliverance will be the theme of world-wide acclamation.

The goal of all is the glory of God. The *kenōsis* of Christ is the first step in bringing about the Fatherhood of the Deity. It is the only way that He could display the riches of His affection, the resources of His love. God has revealed Himself as a mighty Creator in His works. This does not satisfy His heart or the hearts of His creatures. He desires to be their Father. He must draw them by the cords of love. He must win their affection. This is the vast task which began with Christ's *kenōsis*. This is the glorious consummation to which it leads. In eras yet to come God will be the Father of all His adoring creatures. This achievement will make the name of Jesus esteemed above all others in the eons of the eons and beyond.