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Cosmos and Kenosis

[In the progress of love] each step is a precarious step into the unknown, in which each triumph contains new potential for tragedy, and each tragedy can be redeemed into a wider triumph.

Love's Endeavour, Love's Expense, p. 63

The theology of kenosis is associated primarily with the work of some Lutheran theologians in Germany and with Charles Gore in England. In a way that has not always been noticed, it posed a radical challenge to the traditional concept of God, which had been developed by a long line of Christian theologians, most notably perhaps Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas.

The traditional concept of God in Christianity is that God is eternal, in the sense of being timeless – that is, without temporal relation to anything in time, and without internal relations of a temporal nature. It follows from this that God is strictly immutable. Whatever happens in the created cosmos makes no difference to God, and does not change God in any way. The cosmos is created by a non-temporal act, and God creates every moment of time, from first to last, in one and the same act of intentional causation.

This in turn entails that the incarnation of the second hypostasis of the Triune being of God is effected by God in the very same non-temporal act by which God also creates and consummates the created order. The incarnation causes no change in God, but lies in a particular relation of the created nature of Jesus to the creator. It is not literally true that 'the Word became flesh' (John 1:14), since the eternal Word cannot become anything. It must always remain timelessly and changelessly what it is. The situation is rather that the human nature of Jesus has a unique relation to the eternal Word, a relation of enosis, unity, by which it expresses in time

the divine person of the Word, but exactly what that assumption consists in remains a mystery of faith. While it can be imagined as a possibility, the human mind cannot gain a clear comprehension of it.

Important points for the traditional account are that the incarnation causes no change in the nature of God, and that it is not a new idea which occurred to God subsequently to his creating the universe. It is part of the one creative divine act, and thus may rightly be said to have been willed from the beginning of creation.

The nineteenth-century Lutheran idea¹ of kenosis radically challenged this traditional account. Basing their theology of incarnation on Philippians 2:7 ('Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God ...emptied himself, taking the form of a servant'), kenotic theologians held that the incarnation brought about a radical change in the eternal Word. The Word, being in the form of God, is properly omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good. When the Word becomes flesh, however, he empties himself of some of these divine attributes. Generally speaking, when the Word takes the form of a man, he gives up omnipotence and omniscience. He actually renounces those divine properties, though he receives them back from the Father after the ascension.

It may seem that Jesus would at least retain the divine property of perfect goodness, and many kenotic theologians held that the Word retains the 'moral attributes' of God. But even that is doubtful. For divine goodness is such that God is incapable of sin, not subject to obligation and not subject to temptation. But even the greatest human goodness is capable of sin, even if it never actually sins. It is subject to obligation and it can be tempted, as Jesus was. In that case, Jesus as the incarnate Word would not even retain the property of divine goodness. He might possess perfect human goodness, but that would be different in kind from the divine goodness, which is not capable of sin or obligation. In the same way, Jesus might possess the greatest possible human power and knowledge, but this would not be divine omnipotence and omniscience, which are outside the reach of human nature.

So it was held that if God is truly to become man, he must set aside or radically curtail his divine properties. Such properties are retained, how-

ever, by the Father and by the Holy Spirit, and can be restored to Christ at the proper time. Such a kenotic view entails that there is change in God, and therefore that there is time, which alone makes change possible, in God. If the Word really became a human being, it also entails that there is suffering in God, so that God is passible, changed by what happens in the created cosmos.

For the traditional view, the divine nature does not suffer, though it can be said that 'God suffers', in the sense that the human nature which is assumed by the Word suffers. For the kenotic view, it is not the case that a human nature is assumed by an eternal Word. The Word really changes and limits himself to become human, and so really suffers and dies as human, before taking up his divine properties again (if, indeed, he can ever really do that so long as he remains in human form).

Why did the Lutheran theologians make this change in the concept of God? Part of the impetus for a kenotic Christology lies in the desire to preserve the sense that God enters fully into the human situation, understands it from the inside, and shares the human condition. Many people have the feeling that if a changeless God simply assumes a human nature to the divine nature, the sense in which God shares in human suffering is purely verbal, and that something of the pathos and depth of the incarnation is lost. Luther's strong sense of the importance of the passion and the cross in Christianity led him to an insistence that the divine nature of the Word must truly share in suffering, and thus enter fully into the human situation.

Another reason for adopting a kenotic Christology is, to put it in the broadest theological terms, the rejection of a Platonic concept of God. In Platonic philosophy the timeless is superior to the temporal, the changeless to the changing, and the intelligible and universal is superior to the material and particular. The classical Christian concept of God was constructed on Platonic lines, so that God was seen as timeless, changeless, intelligible, and universal (a subsistent Form). In modern times Platonism has been generally rejected as a worldview. Since the rise of the sciences, especially, the material and particular have been seen as the truly 'real', while the universal is an abstraction. So time and change, aspects of the material, become important aspects of reality, not simply illusory or

four dimensions of a multidimensional reality in which time does not 'flow', and timelessness becomes again the ultimate reality, of which the 'arrow of time' is a phenomenal appearance. This remains a highly controversial topic, but it must be noted that these quasi-Platonic speculations do not usually find much use for the notion of God, positing instead a myth of self-existent mathematical structures (quantum fluctuations) without intrinsic value or purpose. It is Platonism without 'the Good', and therefore of little theological help. In the early modern period, however (in Newtonian physics, for example), the existence of particulars in an objectively existing time was widely accepted as characterizing ultimate reality. Partly in accordance with such views, some Protestant, especially Lutheran, theologians developed a much more personalist view of God, which would be free of Platonic influences.

This is associated also with a greater stress, since the Renaissance, on human freedom, creativity, and individuality. Individuals are seen as having an ultimate moral freedom, a uniqueness that cannot be dissolved into some greater cosmic unity, and a genuine creativity that can change the world, either for better or for worse. In the light of such changes in worldview, God is reconceived as the most creative, free, changing, and individual reality, rather than being seen as a timeless pure Form. All these changes worked together to produce a kenotic view of God and of the incarnation, particularly in Lutheran theology. In that tradition, the main views developed. The Tübingen school held that the incarnate Word possesses the divine attributes but does not use them. Such possession without manifestation is sometimes called *krypsis* (hiding). The Giesesen theologians held, more radically, that the logos incarnate emptied himself of the divine attributes – that is, kenosis.

Against the kenotic view, traditional theologians feel that for God, even for the second hypostasis of a Triune God, to lose some essential divine properties, even temporarily, is simply for God to cease to be God, and to change into something else, so that proper worship for the divine Word, which is due to him even in his incarnate state, is undermined. The *krypsis* view is not subject to this criticism, though it is widely rejected on the ground that it involves some form of change in God.

What is at stake in this dispute? I would be hesitant to draw immediate links between such theories and Christian practice. Yet some link might be

Christian practice that seeks the cultivation of an attitude of impassibility and disconnection from temporal things as ideals of human life. And a link might be drawn between the ideal of God as a relational, passionate being and a Christian practice that seeks to be involved creatively in worldly action with others, and that sees change in terms of positive possibility.

In any case I think that kenotic theologians are right in thinking that God truly shares in the human condition, and so feels the suffering of every suffering creature, as well as sharing the joy of every finite happiness. But if that is so, one might well think that the divine sharing in finite experience and action cannot be confined to just one case on the planet earth, the case of Jesus. God must share in all finite experience, wherever in the universe it is. Such sharing does not require incarnation as its necessary condition. What it requires is that God truly feels, by a direct and empathetic apprehension, every experience that creatures have. One may feel such a thing is involved in the possession of true omniscience – not merely a factual registering by God that something is the case, but God's acquaintance with what each experience is like.

For classical notions of divine omniscience, God's knowledge consists of a sort of intellectual knowledge of every true proposition. It is quasi-propositional knowledge, and excludes feeling or passion, which were regarded as defects in a perfect being. Nevertheless, God was said to exist in a state of perfect bliss, and so some analogy to feeling existed in God. It just was not considered to be of cognitive significance, and it was certainly not dependent upon the world in any way.

It may well be thought, however, that no being is truly omniscient if it lacks knowledge of what it feels like to experience suffering or happiness. If I know that the proposition 'You are in pain' is true, but I do not know what it feels for you to be in pain, then there is something I do not know – and that something, you may well think is the most important thing of all. If that is so, then any omniscient being must know what it feels like for creatures to feel as they do. That may be called affective knowledge, a much more involving and intense thing than propositional knowledge.

The classical theist may say that it is just not possible for God to know what pains feel like (at least in the divine nature). God can only have propositional, not affective, knowledge. It is noteworthy that classical theologians do place restrictions on what is possible for God at this point.

the divine nature to know. There is no such thing as logically unqualified omniscience. We all place restrictions on divine possibilities at some point (that will become important when considering divine omnipotence). But are there really good reasons for denying the possibility of divine affective knowledge? I think the main reason offered is that it would be a defect for a maximally valuable being to feel pain, even by empathetic knowledge. But that is precisely what has been strongly questioned in post-nineteenth-century theology.

The crucial nature of the change is this: in classical theories, God is considered in isolation, as it were, as a being of completely self-contained perfection. Perfection is a state of God, whatever else exists or occurs, and it cannot suffer diminution or change in any way. God is exclusively infinite and perfect. All that is finite or imperfect lies outside of God, and does not affect God in anyway. For post-classical theories (and Hegel is perhaps the major influence here), God is inclusively infinite, and the divine perfection must include relationship to whatever other realities exist. So God relates to finite creatures in ways which make the divine reality different than it would have been had there been no such creatures. For such a more relational or participative view of God, it would be an imperfection not to know affectively what creaturely experiences are like. Any being that co-exists with suffering creatures would be less perfect if it failed to have affective knowledge of what those creatures experience. If one takes that seriously, then one may say that not just the incarnation, but the creation of conscious and rational beings itself is a kenotic act on God's part. For it will involve a giving up of pure divine bliss, and accepting many experiences of pain and suffering. It will involve a giving up of complete control, and accepting the freedom of created beings to make their own decisions, however misdirected. It will involve giving up complete knowledge, and accepting that much about the future must be unknown until it is determined by the actions of creatures. These are real limitations, and this may be thought of as a sort of kenosis, a giving up of some great goods, in order that free creatures may exist in independence, community, and creativity.

This is not, however, kenosis in the sense of giving up divine properties in order just to allow others to possess the values of freedom and community. It is also a way of adding new and distinctive values to the divine being

of delighting in their existence and in the values they bring into being, and of bringing the cosmic process to a final consummation in which all the values it has brought forth in the long course of its existence will be conserved and apprehended in God forever.

In other words, this sort of kenosis is not just self-giving. It is also, and equally importantly, a self-realisation, a way in which God realises possibilities that are eternally present in the divine being, and comes to experience new forms of value that otherwise would never have been actualised. When God gives up pure bliss, he obtains in return many new sorts of values that could only be actualised in a cosmic process from which finite agents emerge. When God gives up total control, he obtains relationship in community with creatures. When God gives up full knowledge of the future, he obtains the possibility of genuinely new creativity, undetermined even by his own previous nature.

By self-limitation, God obtains many new sorts of values that would not otherwise be obtainable. Of course, these values are mixed with many sorts of disvalues. Along with the values finite agents create are all the forms of suffering they endure. Along with the positive cooperation God can experience with finite agents, are the many forms of obstruction to the divine will that such agents realise. Along with new creativity go possibilities for destruction and conflict within the cosmos. Nevertheless, theists are committed to believing that the good will far outweigh the bad, and that the bad can itself in some way be redeemed, both in the experience of God and, ultimately, for the creatures God can unite to the divine experience.

God, on this view, does not just limit the divine being in order that free finite agents might exist. God realises, makes actual, aspects of the divine being that otherwise would have remained potential. Entering into relationship and communion, and cooperating in realizing new forms of finite value, are realisations of great values in and for the divine nature itself. Perhaps some such realisation is essential to the divine nature, so that God necessarily creates other personal agents. If one thinks that 'God is love' (1 John 4: 16), that love is an essential property of the divine nature, and that love can only be properly exercised in relation to others who are free to reciprocate love or not, then the creation of some universe containing free finite agents seems to be an implication of the divine nature. However,

attention to a range of implications that follow from various interpretations of the idea of God.

Some would hold that God could have remained in unchanging bliss, all-determining power, and unrestricted knowledge, but freely chose not to do so in order to create a universe of finite persons. Some would hold that God can realise love adequately in the inner relationships of the persons of the Trinity, but chooses to realise a different form of love in relation to creatures. And some would hold that a truly loving God must create a universe of genuinely other persons in order to realise the essential divine nature. It is hard to know how to decide what is essential to the divine nature. Perhaps we could be content to say that God certainly has the greatest possible power and knowledge that any being could have, and has in fact chosen to realise it in the creation of a universe of free persons which entails certain restrictions on those powers – restrictions that are necessary to enable genuinely free finite persons to exist.

Those restrictions are such that some actual and much possible suffering is necessarily entailed in creation. The type and extent of suffering will depend largely on the choices free creatures make, though some element of suffering seems inevitable in any universe in which there is an evolutionary emergence of potentially self-aware and self-directing agents. Having very little knowledge of the inner structure of the physical cosmos, and even less knowledge of the essential nature of God, we are quite unable to say just what those necessities are that cause conflict and suffering to arise in the world. We view them as necessities because it is unacceptable to say that God would positively intend suffering to exist, and yet all suffering must arise from the divine nature as its only ultimate source. We are thus logically compelled to say that while all suffering arises from God, it must do so, not as intended by God, but as necessarily implied in the sort of universe God has created – a universe in which many great goods exist that otherwise could not have existed, and in which all evil will ultimately be overcome by divine goodness, which is what God positively intends.

This picture involves a double reversal of the classical view that God is wholly immutable. God limits the divine properties in order that a cosmos of free finite agents should exist. But God thereby realises new aspects of the divine nature as God enters into real relationship with creatures. God not only suffers new things. God also enjoys and delights in new things.

being as well as a limitation of it, and the two are essentially bound together. So if we can speak of a kenosis in God, a renunciation of his absolute and unmixed perfection, we must also speak of a pleroma, or fulfillment, in God, by which new forms of perfection are added by creatures to the divine being.

This is in accordance with the continuation of the passage in Philippians 2:5-11, which says that, because of Christ's self-emptying, 'God has highly exalted him.' The moment of self-emptying is followed by the moment of divine exaltation, in which the whole of creation is ultimately to be included (Eph. 1:10).

This form of kenosis is not a loss of such essential divine properties as omnipotence and omniscience. Indeed, it is the way in which they are exercised. There is nothing wrong with speaking of 'kenosis', as long as it is understood to mean a self-limitation that makes possible new forms of divine glory. It may seem that God could exist in perfect bliss, but in fact God has affective knowledge of a world in which pain and suffering exist. It may seem that God could control all things unilaterally, but in fact God acts in such a way as to make creaturely freedom possible. It may seem that God could know the future completely and in every detail, but in fact God renounces such knowledge in order to let creaturely creativity exist. There are necessities of the divine nature which mean that God cannot exist in a state of unmixed bliss, of all-determining power and unrestricted knowledge, if there is to be a world of free and creative personal agents.

God wills to realise the divine nature in creation, relationship, and cooperation. Without such a willed self-realisation God would not be the God known to be revealed in Jesus. Whether or not there was a real alternative to some such creation, we have no way of telling. Even if there was not, one can reasonably say that God truly wills creation. For 'willing' does not need to imply some alternative that might have been willed instead. Such willing may itself be, as the classical tradition affirmed, an essential part of the divine nature, which is necessarily what it is. Thus God may will kenosis, not as something that might not have been willed, but as something that truly expresses the divine nature as love.

It may be held that such a view of kenosis, not as divine loss but as divinely willed restraint, is a more accurate reflection of the passage in Philippians. For what that passage says is not that Jesus gave up some of

matter, not primarily of what attributes one has, but of how one exercises them. Jesus could perhaps have claimed instant obedience, and ordered the apostles to serve him. Instead, he washed their feet and gave his life for them. The New Testament scholar James Dunn has proposed an influential interpretation of the Philippians passage which denies that it refers to some decision of a pre-existing Christ, deciding to become incarnate on earth. Rather, he argues, it speaks only of the human Jesus who, like the first Adam, had the form of God by being a perfect image of God. The passage then would be asserting that Jesus did not take advantage of his superiority over virtually all other humans in status and ability. Instead, he showed what the image of God truly is by serving others, by healing, forgiving, and submitting in love to the power of evil.

The lesson of kenosis is a moral one. It does not speak of a renunciation of ontological powers, but of a way of exercising those powers in love rather than in pride. This is how Jesus' human life was lived, and it gives a true picture of the nature of the God who seeks to help humans in love rather than to dominate them. Whether one accepts Dunn's interpretation or the more traditional view that the Philippians passage is about the eternal Word becoming flesh, the important point remains that one is not speaking so much of a literal renunciation of certain divine powers, but of the choice of a way of exercising those powers that empowers creatures to enter into conscious relationship with God. This is a sort of self-limitation, but one that I have suggested might be seen as both divinely willed and as necessarily implicit in the divine nature. If this is a true picture of God, one might say that God does not compel all rational creatures to obey him, but seeks by the persuasion of love to draw them to himself. Kenosis, then, belongs to the creation of rational creatures even before it belongs to incarnation. And because rational creatures are integral parts of the physical universe, that universe must from the first possess an autonomy and openness that will prepare an appropriate environment in which free and rational creatures can emerge. One can thus see a form of kenosis in the creation of the universe, inasmuch as God restrains the divine power to allow an autonomous universe to develop. There is a cosmological self-limitation of infinite divine power, which makes possible the existence of an autonomous cosmos wherein freedom and creativity

The incarnation is not a necessary condition of cosmic kenosis. God can will to cooperate with creatures, share in their experiences, and inspire their new and creative actions, whether, or not there is an incarnation. The Christian belief, however, is that God the Word did become incarnate as man, and that incarnation is an eminently appropriate form of divine self-revelation. The life of Jesus is important because it shows the nature of what God always and everywhere is. It is the revelation of the nature of God in a human person. The life of Jesus is not only the place where God acts in persuasive, self-giving love to draw creatures to the divine. It is the place where God's universal salvific action is disclosed in a paradigmatic way to human beings.

For this to be true, the life of Jesus must be plausibly seen to be completely informed and freely directed by the Spirit of God. There is here a sort of double kenosis – the kenosis of Jesus is that he empties himself of pride and egoism, so that he may be filled with the Spirit of God. The kenosis of God is that the divine being is emptied of perfect bliss and all-determining power, so that the passion of Jesus and the creative action of Jesus can become true expressions of the divine nature in time. Neither form of kenosis is a loss of essential human or divine attributes. In this mutual self-limitation one human life and the divine life are bound together in an ultimate and inexpressible way, so that they may be said to be one: Jesus is the Christ, the eternal Word of God in time.

This is not what has been usually called a kenotic christology, for the Word does not change into a man. In some ways it is more like the traditional christology, for which the Word assumes to itself a human nature. Yet what is different from the traditional view is that the Word is a passionate, related, and therefore temporal hypostasis of the divine being. In the life of Jesus, the Word obtains a clear and full expression within history. The kenosis of Jesus makes possible the manifestation at a particular point of earthly history of that cosmic kenosis of the divine being which makes creation itself possible.

The incarnation is also a specific act of God that accomplishes in a human person the saving destiny God wills for all. In Jesus there may be seen a threefold manifestation of the nature and activity of God in relation to the created universe. The first moment of this divine activity is kenosis, the self-limiting expression of divine power that brings it into relation with a universe containing finite moral agents. In this relation, God does not order all things by divine fiat, but seeks to help and empower moral agents

to formulate and attain their own objectives, insofar as they promise to realise good. This means that God will have affective knowledge of forms of suffering and evil, which constitutes a real renunciation of unmixed divine bliss. It means that God will constitute the divine being in relation to others who may to some extent frustrate the divine will. This is a real form of self-limitation, even though it is a true expression and self-manifestation of the divine nature, not a renunciation of that nature.

Jesus' life of healing the sick, forgiving the guilt-ridden, befriending social outcasts, and undermining hypocrisy, is a very good image of the compassionate and persuasive love of God. Because of this disclosure, God can be worshipped not only as the all-powerful source and sustainer of all beings, but as a Father (or indeed a Mother) who cares for finite persons as his children, and wishes them to become fully conscious of his loving presence. In the moment of kenosis, God relates the divine being to creatures who have a proper autonomy and otherness, which it is the divine will not to infringe.

The second moment of the divine relation to the cosmos is that of enosis, a mysterious but intimate uniting of divine personhood and finite personhood, so that finite lives can become true images of the divine nature and mediators of divine power, so that divine and creaturely persons become one. It is through the activity of the Holy Spirit that God acts on this planet within human persons to transform them into transparent images and effective instruments of the divine being. In this relation, creatures do not remain as beings separate and distinct from their heavenly Father, however closely related to him they are in love and respect. Their lives are interpenetrated by the divine Spirit, so that they may, at their best, say with St Paul, 'Not I live, but Christ lives in me' (Gal. 2:20).

The Spirit that found exemplary fulfillment in Jesus Christ can also be in the lives of his disciples, to the extent that a person may find it almost impossible to distinguish what she does and what the Spirit does in her. The inward unity between divine and human was fully realised in the life of Jesus, but it is part of Christian faith to hope that it will be partly realised, at least, in the lives of all believers. God not only limits divine power to relate to finite persons as if he were a person (so Christians believe that God relates to us in and through the person of the risen Christ). God also actively empowers finite persons, so as to give them a share in the divine reconciling and redeeming activity in the creation. In the moment of enosis, exemplified supremely in the person of Jesus, God

enters into the being of those who freely consent to such mediating action, and acts in and through them to make them living sacraments of the divine presence.

The third moment of the cosmic divine activity is theosis, that unity with or sharing in the divine life (2 Peter 1:4) which is the final purpose of God for creation. As the Spirit unites with human nature to effect the divine purposes in creation, so human nature is ultimately raised to find its final destiny in sharing in the glory of God. The Christian tradition embodies the view that the whole of creation is in some way to be consummated in a 'new creation'. It is not to be merely relegated to a forgotten and transcended past. It is not to be continued in the same entropic way. It is to be taken into the eternal life of God, and there transfigured into a new life. Paul describes that life as like wheat blossoming in the light of the sun, after its birth in the darkness of earth (1 Cor. 15). On that analogy, this cosmos is the soil in which the seeds of eternal life are sown. Its future will be unlike its present, and yet causally related to it – a consummation and not a cancellation of history.

It is extremely difficult for anyone to envisage such ultimate possibilities. But I can think of nothing more important for Christian faith in our day than to recover the truly cosmic sense of redemption that was characteristic both of the biblical writings and of the Church Fathers. Redemption will not be seen as the saving of a few human beings from the destruction of one small planet. It will be seen as a reconstituting of the whole cosmos in the presence of God, in a more glorious form. When Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom (the rule) of God was at hand, present and active in his own person, one way of understanding this is as an attempt to evoke a vision of each present moment as standing before the possibility of its own eternalization in God. For any theist, it is true that God knows each present moment in the most intimate way. But as each finite moment is taken into the divine experience, it is transformed so that its negative qualities are mitigated and its positive qualities enhanced by the wider context of the divine experience. God's experience is of the world seen in the light of eternity, and so God knows things as no other being is able to know.

Belief in theosis is belief that finite agents will be given a share in God's

too much like a purely personal experience. It must be remembered that Christian belief is in the 'resurrection of the body'. It is not some form of disembodied experience of God that finite agents have. The forms of time and space themselves will be reiterated, but in a transformed way, free of decay and suffering. When the whole universe is so transformed that it manifests in an unrestricted way the beauty and goodness of God, and when personal beings, including human beings, are able to give conscious expression to this transformation, then the cosmos may indeed be said to share in the life of God.

For a Christian view, history is important. The resurrection world is not one that could just have been created perfect, without all the struggle and suffering that formed part of cosmic history. The resurrection world is precisely a world formed out of struggle and conflict, a world perfected and not simply a world created perfect.

It may not be the case, as some Indian traditions hold, that the cosmos is the body of God. It is perhaps too autonomous and its conscious agencies too self-willed for that. Yet its destiny is to be the body of God. For those who have lived and died with Christ will be raised in Christ (Col. 2:12). All things will be united in Christ (Eph. 1:10). Thus at that stage God will be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28), and there will no longer be a distinction between the church and the world. There will be no church, and no separated world. The cosmos will be fully integrated into the life of God, as the vehicle of divine action and the manifestation of divine glory. In the moment of theosis, the cosmos is transfigured to become the unrestricted manifestation of God's glory, and all rational creatures become the instruments of his praise.

God in Jesus foreshadows in one human person the divine purpose for all creation. But that purpose is to be gradually worked out in the history of this planet, by the inclusion of many persons within that divine-human unity. The Holy Spirit, forming the new community of the church, works in a new way, a way that is explicitly patterned on the life of Jesus, and incorporates people into 'the body of Christ'. Thus the new way of redemption that God begins in the incarnation is continued through the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. Even though the incarnation was not perhaps necessary for the realisation of God's purpose, it is in fact that

creator, as one who leaves us free, shares in our freedom, and will fulfill that freedom in the conscious loving relationship to the divine. It also gives a powerful moral insight into the way in which creatures should seek to implement the divine purpose in their own lives.

There is a very definite cosmic vision implicit in a Christian view of creation as a kenotic and pleromal process. As the beginning of creation is kenosis, so the end or consummation of creation is theosis. God shares in the pain and permits the wayward freedom of creatures in order that, finally, creatures should share in the bliss and become vehicles of the truly creative freedom of the divine nature. It is that cosmic movement from divine self-emptying to creaturely fulfillment in God which is the sacred history of the cosmos, and, it seems to me, the deepest meaning of the Christian gospel for this planet in the middle of its journey through the mystery of time.