

**THE KENOTIC THEORY:
CONSIDERED WITH PARTICULAR
REFERENCE TO ITS ANGLICAN
FORM AND ARGUMENTS**

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by Francis J. Hall

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FRANCIS J. HALL

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THE
KENOTIC THEORY

CONSIDERED WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE
TO ITS ANGLICAN FORMS AND ARGUMENTS

BY THE

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PREFACE

THE writer is much indebted to the Rev. Dr. Bright, Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History in the University of Oxford, for a series of letters containing valuable hints and criticisms. And he wishes to thank him most earnestly for his kind permission to make quotations from these letters. A number of such quotations appear in the foot-notes of this work.

He also desires to thank the Rt. Rev. W. E. McLaren, D.D., D.C.L., Bishop of Chicago; the Rev. Wm. J. Gold, S.T.D., of Chicago; the Venerable Archdeacon Taylor, of Springfield, Illinois, and the Rev. J. R. Broughton, of Taunton, Somerset, for kind encouragement and criticism.

Finally, he wishes to acknowledge kind assistance in proof-reading by the Rev. D. F. Smith, of Evanston, Illinois.

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HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

The kenotic theory defined.

This book written to show that it is modern, inconsistent with the Faith and with Catholic consent, unscriptural, fallacious, and dangerous. Procedure adopted.

I. Patristic opinion adverse.

II. Modern and Lutheran origin of the theory. Rationalistic in origin. Luther's theory of Christ's Person. The Tubingen-Giessen controversy.

Kenoticism was broached by Zinzendorf, and gained currency about 1840. Four types: 1. Metamorphosis or conversion of the Godhead: 2. Abandonment of relative attributes: 3. The Divine attributes reduced to finite forms: 4. Abandonment of certain attributes within the human sphere. Dorner's theory of a progressive Incarnation.

III. Appearance of kenoticism in Anglican literature. Consequent controversy. Gore alleges a real kenosis of certain Divine attributes within the human sphere. The inconsistency of his language.

CHAPTER I

THE INCARNATION

I. Is an entrance upon human conditions and the taking of human nature into a Divine Person.

Its purpose is twofold—revelation and redemption. These purposes require the concurrence of Divine power and knowledge with human limitations in the Person of the Incarnate.

II. The immediate and permanent result of the Incarnation is the Hypostatic Union of two natures, one truly Divine, the other perfectly human, inseparably and unconfusedly united in one Divine Person. Christ is whole in both natures.

III. This involves the *Communicatio idiomatum*, or predication of all the properties and operations of our Lord's two natures to His undivided Person. Luther's perversion of this truth corrected by Scripture and the Fathers. It justifies our attributing Divine and human power and knowledge to the same Christ simultaneously.

IV. Another consequence is the doctrine that our Lord possessed two wills and two operations—two powers and two knowledges—during His humiliation. Not as possessing both in each nature, but as possessing in Himself the distinct power and knowledge of each.

Modern objections to the possibility of this based on unwarranted assumptions as to the nature of Person. The mysteriousness of Person.

CHAPTER II

THE HUMILIATION OF CHRIST

The Incarnation involved a humiliation of the Son, described in Scripture under the figures of self-sacrifice, impoverishment, and kenosis.

I. The Son became incarnate to offer Himself a Sacrifice for sin. This Sacrifice demands a Divine Victim having infinite power and wisdom at the time of the Sacrifice. Also a voluntary submission to death and a resurrection achieved by the Victim Himself. This requires an assumption of our nature, but neither requires nor permits an impoverishment of nature—not self-mutilation, but humiliation and self-surrender.

II. Our Lord's self-impoverishment was an assumption of a nature which was poor that it might be enriched.

III. Phil. ii. 6-8 should be interpreted in the light of the lesson which is illustrated by it—of not being anxious about one's own things, but looking *also* to the things of others. No real kenosis involved.

Subsisting ever in the essence of God, Christ was not anxious about His state of equality with God, but reduced the impressiveness of His Person by clothing Himself with the form of a servant.

The phrase *ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσε* metaphorical, as shown by the context preceding, by the epexegetical construction following, and by St. Paul's use of the verb *κενόω* elsewhere.

CHAPTER III

KENOTIC ARGUMENTS

Kenoticists fall into three groups according to what they conceive our Lord to have abandoned, but all hold a real kenosis of what our Lord possessed before the Incarnation.

I. It is denied that the Fathers are competent witnesses by reason of their failure to face the question and because of their docetic tendency.

II. It is urged that the ethical aspects of the Incarnation require us to disregard the metaphysical immutability of God. The limitations of Christ were Self-imposed and voluntary all along.

III. The Example of Christ said to require a real moral development in His character, and His dependence on the Spirit rather than on His Personal Godhead. The reality of His human freedom and temptation at issue.

IV. Certain kenoticists speak of Divine omnipotence, omniscience and omniscience as relative to creation, and therefore as not of the Divine essence.

V. An alleged incompatibility between certain Divine and human attributes said to require an abandonment of the former to give reality to the latter.

VI. The statements of Scripture are appealed to, and *a priori* methods of interpretation, imputed to Catholic writers, are deprecated.

The above arguments to be dealt with *seriatim*.

Our positive reasons for rejecting all forms of kenoticism are,

1. Its inconsistency with Scripture: 2. Its inconsistency with

ecumenical decisions: 3. Its rejection by Catholic doctors of every age: 4. The fallacies of its arguments: 5. Its conflict with fundamental truths and its Socinian tendency.

CHAPTER IV

THE APPEAL TO CATHOLIC ANTIQUITY

Canon Gore urges, 1. A failure of the Fathers to recognize the reality of our Lord's human limitations: 2. The inadequacy of their exegesis: 3. Their *a priori* assumption as to the effect of the Godhead upon Christ's Manhood.

I. The Fathers are criticised from a monophysite point of view of Lutheran origin. They took both natures into account, so that their assertion of Divine attributes in Christ does not imply a belief that the Manhood received such attributes. A tendency of this kind appears later on, but not in the Nicene Fathers, whose antithetic phrases have been criticised superficially and rationalistically.

II. Patristic exegesis uncritical and sometimes dangerous; but this was due to other causes than theological unsoundness.

III. Patristic methods were *a posteriori*, being governed by the contents of a Faith historically revealed, which required them to maintain the fulness of the Godhead in Christ. It is the kenoticists who are controlled by an *a priori* assumption.

The charge of Docetism is unhistorical. That error was always condemned whenever recognized. The *a priori* assumption of kenoticists has led them to mistake assertions concerning Christ's Divine power and knowledge for denials of His human limitations.

CHAPTER V

THE ETHICAL ARGUMENT

Ottley's statement of it given. Since love is the supreme Divine attribute, metaphysical considerations must give way in the interests of a real display of pity.